

# Forms of Cooperation between Preschools and Families from Socially Disadvantaged and Ethnic Minority Backgrounds: A Systematic Review

**Ivana Pirohová**

Faculty of Education, University of Prešov, Slovakia  
[ivana.pirohova@unipo.sk](mailto:ivana.pirohova@unipo.sk)  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0784-1473>  
<https://ror.org/02ndfsn03>

**Erika Novotná**

Faculty of Education, University of Prešov, Slovakia  
[erika.novotna@unipo.sk](mailto:erika.novotna@unipo.sk)  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7184-0283>  
<https://ror.org/02ndfsn03>

**Janka Ferencová**

Faculty of Education, University of Prešov, Slovakia  
[janka.ferencova@unipo.sk](mailto:janka.ferencova@unipo.sk)  
<https://orcid.org/0009-0008-0795-4620>  
<https://ror.org/02ndfsn03>

**Monika Miňová**

Faculty of Education, University of Prešov, Slovakia  
[monika.minova@unipo.sk](mailto:monika.minova@unipo.sk)  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4741-2275>  
<https://ror.org/02ndfsn03>

**Abstract.** This qualitative systematic review provides an empirically grounded synthesis of the forms, facilitating factors, challenges, and effects of cooperation between preschools/kindergartens and families from socially disadvantaged and ethnic minority backgrounds. The review is based on the analysis of ten empirical studies published between 2020 and 2024 and identified through the Scopus, Web of Science, and EBSCO databases. Drawing on Epstein's partnership framework, the study identifies key mechanisms of cooperation, including transitional educational programmes supporting children and parents during entry into kindergarten and transitions to primary school, as well as approaches grounded in collaboration between schools, families, and communities.

The identified forms of cooperation are analysed with regard to their transferability and potential applicability to different contexts of social disadvantage and cultural diversity. In particular, the findings are interpreted in relation to Roma communities in Slovakia, which serve as a key reference context for discussing the relevance of international evidence. The review highlights the importance of trust-building strategies, parental engagement, home-based support, and the involvement of community mediators as critical components of effective cooperation supporting children's development and educational inclusion.

**Keywords:** preschool–family cooperation, early childhood education and care, socially disadvantaged families, ethnic minority backgrounds, parental engagement, children from Roma communities.

## Ikimokyklinio ugdymo įstaigų ir socialiai pažeidžiamų bei etninių mažumų šeimų bendradarbiavimo formos: sisteminė apžvalga

**Santrauka.** Ši kokybinė sisteminė apžvalga pateikia empirinę analizę apie ikimokyklinio ugdymo įstaigų ir šeimų, priklausančių socialiai remtinoms grupėms ir etninėms mažumoms, bendradarbiavimo formas, bendradarbiavimą skatinančius veiksnius, iššūkius ir poveikį. Apžvalgoje analizuojama 10 empirinių tyrimų, paskelbtų 2020–2024 m.

**Received:** 11/08/2025. **Accepted:** 10/03/2026

Copyright © Ivana Pirohová, Janka Ferencová, Erika Novotná, Monika Miňová, 2026. Published by Vilnius University Press. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution Licence](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) (CC BY), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

„Scopus“, „Web of Science“ ir „EBSCO“ duomenų bazėse. Tyrime pasitelkiamas Epsteino partnerystės modelis ir nustatomi pagrindiniai bendradarbiavimo būdai – lankyti darželį pradedantiems ir į pradinę mokyklą pereinantiems vaikams ir jų tėvams skirtos pereinamojo laikotarpio švietimo programos, taip pat mokyklų, šeimų ir bendruomenių bendradarbiavimu grindžiamos priemonės.

Išskirtos bendradarbiavimo formos analizuojamos pagal tai, kiek jas galima perkelti ir pritaikyti įvairiuose socialinės nelygybės ir kultūrinės įvairovės kontekstuose. Tyrimo rezultatai interpretuojami visų pirma atsižvelgiant į Slovakijos romų bendruomenes, kurios pasitelkiamos kaip svarbus atskaitos kontekstas aptariant tarptautinių tyrimų aktualumą. Apžvalgoje pabrėžiamos pasitikėjimo stiprinimo strategijos, tėvų įsitraukimas, paramos namuose ir bendruomenės tarpininkų įtraukimas kaip esminiai vaikų vystymąsi ir įtrauktį į švietimą remiančio veiksmingo bendradarbiavimo komponentai.

**Pagrindiniai žodžiai:** ikimokyklinio ugdymo įstaigų ir šeimos bendradarbiavimas, ankstyvasis vaikų ugdymas ir priežiūra, socialiai remtinės šeimos, kilmė iš etninių mažumų, tėvų įsitraukimas, vaikai iš romų bendruomenių.

## Introduction

*Early Childhood Education and Care* (ECEC) plays a crucial role in reducing educational inequalities and supporting the development and school readiness of children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. A substantial body of research has demonstrated that participation in high-quality pre-primary education can positively influence children's cognitive, social, and emotional development, particularly among children growing up in poverty and social exclusion (Ansari et al., 2017; Bitler et al., 2014; Merritt & Klein, 2015; Votruba-Drzal et al., 2015). One of the key factors contributing to the effectiveness of ECEC is cooperation between families and educational institutions, which has been shown to strengthen children's learning outcomes, behaviour, and their overall well-being (Beasley et al., 2017; Epstein, 2018; Mendez & Westerberg, 2012).

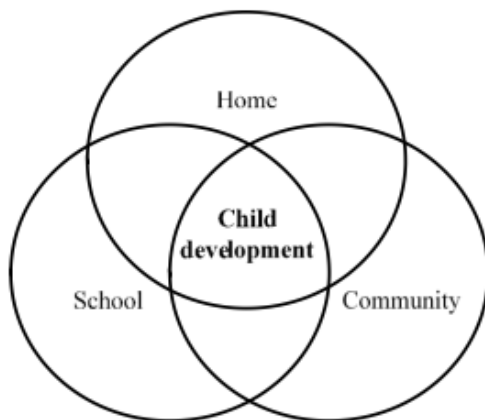
Cooperation between institutions providing early childhood education and care (ECEC) and families is particularly important in contexts characterised by social disadvantage, cultural diversity, and low levels of parental education. Research consistently points to a strong association between parents' socio-economic status and their involvement in their children's education as well as their cooperation with schools (Calzada et al., 2015; Liu et al., 2020; Turney & Kao, 2009). At the same time, collaboration with parents from ethnic minority backgrounds is often perceived by teachers as challenging due to a combination of structural, cultural, and communication barriers, including low levels of trust, language differences, and prior experiences of exclusion or discrimination.

In Slovakia, these challenges are particularly evident in the context of cooperation between kindergartens and families from marginalised Roma communities. Roma children represent one of the most disadvantaged groups in the country, with many growing up in conditions of poverty, social exclusion, and limited access to early childhood education and care services. A substantial proportion of Roma children face barriers related to poverty, low parental educational attainment, and restricted access to supportive learning environments, which may hinder their development and complicate cooperation between families and educational institutions. These barriers to cooperation have been empirically documented (Rigová et al., 2020; Škvarenina & Martiňák, 2023; Šprocha, 2024).

In Slovakia, several initiatives have been implemented to strengthen cooperation between ECEC institutions and families from marginalised Roma communities. These include national projects supporting inclusive education in kindergartens, as well as community-based interventions such as the *Omama* programme, which promotes child development through home-based activities delivered by trained Roma women. Evaluations of the *Omama* programme indicate positive effects on parenting practices, children's language development, and early neurodevelopmental outcomes (Fernandes et al., 2024; Pour et al., 2024). However, many of these initiatives are implemented as time-limited projects, raising concerns regarding their long-term sustainability and broader applicability.

The conceptual framework of this study draws on Epstein's theory of partnership (Epstein, 1995; Epstein et al., 2002; Epstein, 2018), which aims to connect the contexts – primarily microsystems – in which children learn and develop. This is achieved through the overlapping spheres of influence of the school, family, and community (see Figure 1), thereby promoting shared responsibility for children's learning and development (Epstein, 1995; Epstein, 2018; Simon & Epstein, 2001).

Based on the interaction of multiple influences on the child, Epstein et al. (2002) identified a framework of six types of involvement that support children's learning: parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaboration with the community. These forms of involvement constitute a useful analytical tool for examining cooperation between ECEC institutions and families from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and ethnic minority groups, including parents of children from marginalised Roma communities.



**Figure 1.** Visualisation of Epstein's 'overlapping spheres of Influence' (Leith, 2016, p. 7)

Given the limited availability of empirical studies explicitly focused on Roma families, the present study draws on international empirical research examining cooperation between early childhood education and care (ECEC) institutions and families from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and ethnic minority groups. The aim of this review

study is to extend the current knowledge on cooperation between ECEC institutions and families from socially disadvantaged and ethnic minority backgrounds, with a particular emphasis on forms of cooperation that are relevant for Roma families. The analysis focuses on cooperation with parents of children aged between two and six years.

## 2. Aim and research questions

The aim of the study was to identify, synthesise, and interpret forms of cooperation, facilitating factors, challenges, and outcomes of cooperation between kindergartens and families from ethnic minority backgrounds living in socially disadvantaged conditions. The identified forms of cooperation are interpreted in the study in terms of their potential applicability within the context of Roma communities in Slovakia.

We formulated the following research questions:

- RQ1: *What are the forms of cooperation between preschools/kindergartens and the families of ethnic minority children from a socially disadvantaged background?*
- RQ2: *What factors facilitate cooperation between preschools/kindergartens and the families of ethnic minority children from a socially disadvantaged background?*
- RQ3: *What are the problems of cooperation between preschools/kindergartens and the families of ethnic minority children from a socially disadvantaged background?*
- RQ4: *What are the effects of cooperation between preschools/kindergartens and the families of ethnic minority children from a socially disadvantaged background?*

## 3. Methodological Procedure

The search, selection, and analysis of literature were conducted between January and April 2025 by using the *Web of Science* (WoS), *Scopus*, and *EBSCO* databases. The search strategy employed the following keywords: (Preschool centre OR Kindergarten OR Nursery school) AND (Family Cooperation OR Parental Engagement OR School-Family Partnership OR Parental Involvement OR Family Collaboration) AND (At-Risk OR Disadvantaged OR Low Socioeconomic Background OR Low-income families OR Underprivileged Background OR Roma Family OR Poor Family OR National Minority OR Ethnic Minority OR Migrant Families OR Refugee Families).

The use of a broad range of keywords was a deliberate methodological decision. International empirical research rarely conceptualises Roma families as a distinct analytical category; their experiences are typically embedded within broader groups such as ethnic minorities or socially disadvantaged populations. Employing broader search terms therefore enabled the identification of empirical studies that, while not focusing explicitly on Roma families, examine comparable contexts characterised by social disadvantage, linguistic and cultural barriers, and low parental participation in pre-primary

education. This approach allowed for the identification of transferable forms and mechanisms of cooperation relevant to the Roma context.

The literature identified through keyword searches was subsequently filtered and analysed according to the following inclusion criteria: 1. empirical studies published in peer-reviewed journals; 2. publications between 2020 and 2024; 3. open-access availability; and 4. a focus on forms, facilitating factors, challenges, and effects of cooperation between preschools/kindergartens and families from socially disadvantaged and ethnic minority backgrounds.

Limiting the review to studies published between 2020 and 2024 enabled a focus on recent empirical evidence reflecting contemporary developments in inclusive education, parental engagement, and community-based approaches. This temporal scope supports the identification of practices that are more likely to be applicable to current educational contexts, including cooperation with families from marginalised Roma communities in Slovakia.

## 4. Results

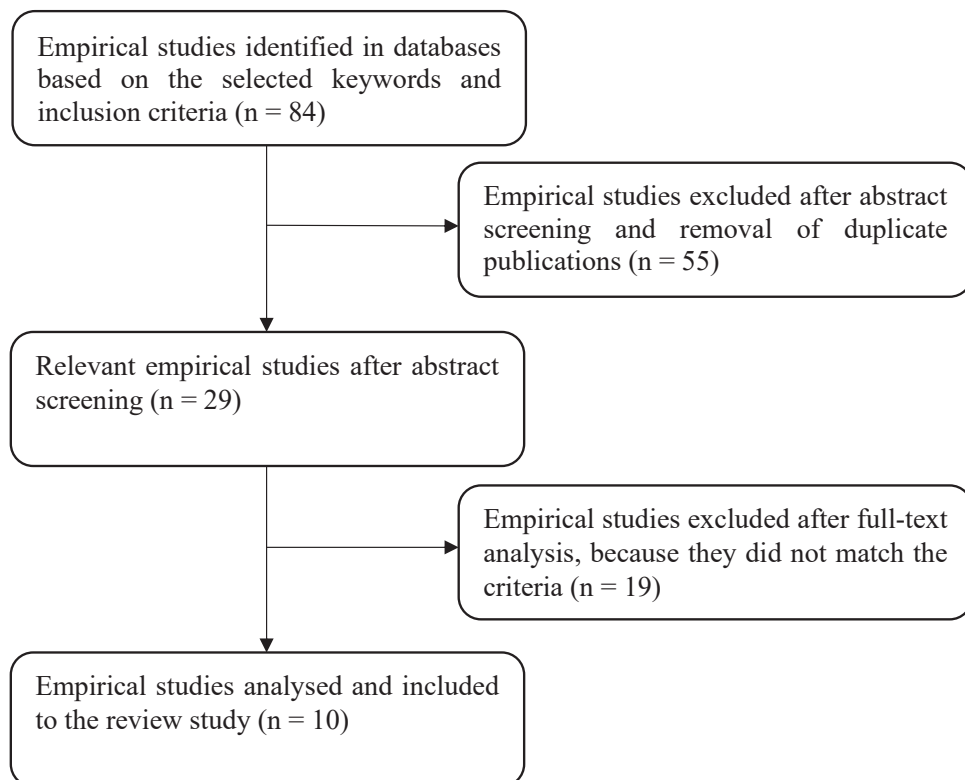
Based on the keyword searches and predefined inclusion criteria, we identified 84 publications in the *Web of Science* (WoS), *Scopus*, and *EBSCO* databases. Following abstract screening, we selected 29 empirical studies for further analysis (see Figure 2). We analysed the empirical studies, treating each document (i.e., each empirical study) as a unit of analysis. The documents were reviewed by four independent assessors. We identified, classified, and summarised the empirical findings on cooperation between preschools, kindergartens, and the parents of children from ethnic minorities living in socially disadvantaged conditions. The analysis was guided by Epstein's model of overlapping spheres of influence (Epstein et al., 2002) and was conducted in alignment with the aim and research questions of the systematic review. The final number of studies included in the review was ten (see Figure 2).

Of the ten studies, three were quantitative: a longitudinal experimental study – a randomised controlled trial (Bierman, Heinrichs, Welsh, & Nix, 2021), a randomised controlled trial (Purtell et al., 2022), and a cluster-randomised trial (Gago et al., 2023). One study employed a mixed-methods design (Aleksić, Bebić-Crestany, & Kirsch, 2024), and six were qualitative studies (Eliyahu-Levi, 2023; Merideth et al., 2022; Khalfaoui, García-Carrión, & Villardón-Gallego, 2020; Kirch & Bergeron-Morin, 2023; Smith & Johnson, 2022; Qiao, Chen, & Deng, 2024).

### ***4.1 Forms of Cooperation Preschools/Kindergartens and Parents from Socially Disadvantaged Backgrounds, and Facilitating Factors***

The analysis of the identified programmes indicates that, despite differing geographical, cultural, and institutional contexts, several shared mechanisms of cooperation between early childhood education and care (ECEC) institutions and families from socially disadvantaged backgrounds can be identified. At the same time, the programmes vary in

the intensity of parental engagement, modes of communication, and the degree to which support is provided in families' home environments. Therefore, this subsection moves beyond a purely descriptive overview of individual interventions and focuses on their comparison and interpretation, particularly with regard to their potential applicability in the Slovak context and cooperation with Roma families.



**Figure 2.** Procedure of choosing relevant publications, as elaborated by Mareš (2013)

Within the empirical studies included in the systematic review, five programmes implemented within the framework of the U.S. *Head Start* system were identified (Bierman et al., 2021; Gago et al., 2023; Meredith et al., 2022; Purtell et al., 2022; Smith & Johnson, 2022). *Head Start* provides comprehensive support to families living in poverty by combining educational provision with health, nutrition, parenting education, and community-based services, thereby creating favourable conditions for sustained cooperation between families and ECEC institutions.

Bierman et al. (2021) analysed the *Research-based Enrichment for Developmentally Informed – Parent* (REDI-P) programme, which targeted parents and children from low-income families. REDI-P represents an intensive model of cooperation centred on regular home visits by trained community workers, aimed at strengthening parenting competences, parent–child relationships, and home-based learning. This form of coop-

eration appears particularly relevant for families who experience limited trust in formal educational institutions, a situation frequently reported in marginalised Roma communities in Slovakia.

Smith and Johnson (2022) focused on the Migrant & Seasonal Head Start (MSHS) programme, designed for the children of parents employed as seasonal migrant workers. Although the MSHS programme is less directly transferable to the Slovak context, it highlights the importance of flexible organisational arrangements, culturally sensitive communication, and linguistic accessibility, all of which are critical factors in cooperation with Roma parents.

A further group of interventions focused on supporting transitions into kindergarten. Meredith et al. (2022) analysed the Families First programme, which enabled parents and children to participate jointly in kindergarten routines prior to enrolment. This approach proved effective in reducing parental anxiety, strengthening trust in educational institutions, and increasing parental engagement, highlighting the importance of transition-focused support in contexts where parents' previous negative school experiences hinder cooperation.

Purtell et al. (2022) present empirical findings from a 15-month intervention programme, Kindergarten Transition Practices (KTP), designed to support the transition of children and their parents into kindergarten. The programme was implemented in three formats: KTP–Classroom, focusing exclusively on school-based activities; KTP–Condition, combining school-based activities with home visits by teachers; and a Business-as-Usual control group. The combined KTP–Condition model yielded the most positive outcomes, underscoring the value of integrating school-based activities with home visits. This approach is particularly relevant for cooperation with Roma families in Slovakia and shows clear parallels with the *Omama* programme, which similarly relies on systematic engagement with families in their home environments.

Gago et al. (2023) analysed the Childhood Healthy Lifestyle (CHL) programme, which focused on strengthening parental competences related to children's health, nutrition, and overall well-being. Together with REDI-P and KTP, this programme highlights the importance of involving community workers and mediators in cooperation with families from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. This approach closely aligns with the *Omama* programme in Slovakia, which employs trained women from Roma communities as key agents of intervention. At the same time, these community-based models require sustained professional support and institutional embedding to ensure long-term effectiveness.

Overall, the comparison of the analysed programmes suggests that effective cooperation between preschools/kindergartens and families from socially disadvantaged backgrounds depends on a combination of trust-building strategies, active parental engagement, community mediation, and the integration of school and home environments. These findings have important implications for the further development of cooperation with Roma families in Slovakia, including the strengthening and institutionalisation of initiatives such as the *Omama* programme.

## **4.2 Problems of Cooperation between Preschools/Kindergartens and Families of Ethnic Minority Children from Socially Disadvantaged Backgrounds**

The most frequently reported problem in cooperation between preschool teachers, researchers, and parents from low-income families was low parental participation in parenting programmes and limited parental involvement in joint family–school activities. Bierman et al. (2021) identified this issue particularly among at-risk parent groups, including parents with low levels of education, those experiencing depression, and single parents. Low parental participation was seen as a challenge during the implementation and evaluation of the *REDI-P* programme (Bierman et al., 2021), the *Kindergarten Transition Practices* (KTP) intervention (Purtell et al., 2022), the multilingual early literacy development programme at the *Earth* Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) centre in Luxembourg (Kirsch et al., 2023), and the *Air* centre (Aleksić et al., 2024). Similar concerns were found in the obesity prevention programme for parents of children aged three to five years (Gago et al., 2023). Various causes of low parental participation were identified, including parents' work overload (Purtell et al., 2022) and a lack of parental interest or motivation (Qiao et al., 2024).

From the perspective of African asylum-seeking parents in Israel, one issue was that early childhood education was provided solely for the children of asylum seekers, leading to a lack of contact with the majority population. Parents perceived such segregated pre-primary education as a barrier to understanding and accepting cultural differences in child-rearing. They also expressed a tension between the desire to participate in their children's education and the harsh realities of poverty and continuous work demands (Eliyahu-Levi, 2023). In the *Migrant and Seasonal Head Start* (MSHS) programme in the United States, Mexican-origin parents voiced concerns about the potential loss of their children's cultural identity after attending preschool education in English. They also expressed dissatisfaction with certain aspects of preschool education that conflicted with their cultural values (e.g., greater respect for elders) and noted language barriers in communication with early education teachers (Smith & Johnson, 2022). Similar communication challenges were reported by African asylum-seeking parents in their interactions with preschool teachers (Eliyahu-Levi, 2023).

Barriers to collaboration were also identified on the part of preschool teachers, including an ethnocentric approach to child-rearing and prejudices towards the culture and parenting practices of African asylum-seeking families (Eliyahu-Levi, 2023).

## **4.3 Effects of Collaboration between Preschools/Kindergartens and Parents of Children from Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Backgrounds**

Empirical findings on the effects of specific forms of cooperation between early childhood education and care (ECEC) institutions and parents from low-income families are reported in three quantitative studies (Bierman et al., 2021; Purtell et al., 2022; Gago et al., 2023).

The aim of the quantitative longitudinal experimental randomised controlled trial by Bierman et al. (2021) was to assess the long-term effects of the *Research-based Enrich-*

*ment for Developmentally Informed – Parent* (REDI-P) programme in the fifth grade of elementary school, six years after the intervention. When early childhood education settings and families collaborated through REDI-P, children demonstrated better outcomes not only during preschool but also six years later, in the fifth grade. Specifically, academic performance improved: children in the REDI-P group made greater gains in reading compared with the control group, showed higher learning motivation and task engagement, and demonstrated more stable academic performance. Parents who participated in REDI-P had higher expectations for their children (e.g., believing their child would attend college), experienced less parental stress, and were calmer and more confident in their parenting. The parent–child relationship was stronger and more positive (Bierman et al., 2021).

The quantitative randomised controlled trial by Purtell et al. (2022) presents findings from the first of two planned cohorts of children aged four to five and their families who participated in a 15-month intervention programme focused on the transition to kindergarten. The intervention spanned the period from preschool through to the winter of the kindergarten year. These preliminary analyses were conducted using data from the preschool year to examine the extent to which the intervention influenced mechanisms considered central to the overarching theory of change. The aim of this study was to explore the initial implementation of the *Kindergarten Transition Practices* (KTP) intervention, its effects on parental engagement, and how these effects varied by family ethnicity, maternal education level, and child behaviour problems. Results showed that the classroom-based intervention (*KTP-Classroom*) led to significantly higher levels of parental engagement. For Hispanic families, the combined classroom- and home-visiting intervention (*KTP-Condition*) resulted in more positive teacher perceptions of parental involvement, stronger parent–teacher relationships, and greater alignment with parental values (Purtell et al., 2022). These empirical findings suggest that individualised approaches, such as home visits, can help overcome barriers to cooperation and enhance parental engagement in school.

A cluster randomised controlled trial, specifically employing a stepped-wedge design—in which all participating early childhood education centres within *Head Start* received the intervention but at different times—focused on evaluating the effectiveness of the *Communities for Healthy Living* (CHL) programme and its component, the group-based intervention *PConnect* (*Parents Connect for Healthy Living*) (Gago et al., 2023). The study found that the CHL programme was effective in increasing parental empowerment, defined as a sense of competence and control. The most significant effects were observed among parents who participated in *PConnect*: they reported feeling more confident, more in control of their family’s health, and better prepared to utilise available resources. Among parents who did not participate in the CHL programme, there were no statistically significant effects on empowerment or parenting practices.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

The results of the analysis confirm the central role of parental involvement (Epstein et al., 2002) in the focus, practices, and forms of cooperation identified across most of the examined programmes. Parental involvement refers to supporting families in creating home environments that promote children's learning (Epstein et al., 2002), which is particularly important in contexts characterised by low parental education, cultural diversity, and limited socio-economic resources. Across the analysed studies, parental involvement was operationalised through transition support programmes, home-based learning activities, and parenting support interventions, including programmes facilitating children's entry into kindergarten and transitions to primary school (Bierman et al., 2021; Gago et al., 2023; Meredith et al., 2022; Purtell et al., 2022; Qiao et al., 2024).

Empirical evidence consistently shows that programmes grounded in parental involvement are associated with higher parental confidence, reduced parental stress, stronger parent-child relationships, and increased parental engagement in children's learning (Bierman et al., 2021; Gago et al., 2023; Purtell et al., 2022).

Parental involvement was effectively fostered through joint parent-child participation in kindergarten activities, such as preparatory visits prior to enrolment (Meredith et al., 2022), as well as through shared literacy activities implemented in early childhood education settings in Luxembourg and China (Aleksić et al., 2024; Kirsch & Bergeron-Morin, 2023; Qiao et al., 2024).

Home visits by educators emerged as a particularly effective mechanism for strengthening cooperation and supporting learning in the home environment (Epstein et al., 2002). Evidence from REDI-P and the Kindergarten Transition Practices (KTP) intervention demonstrates that combining school-based activities with systematic home visits leads to more sustained parental engagement and stronger parent-teacher relationships (Bierman et al., 2021; Purtell et al., 2022). Community-based educators and volunteers played a crucial role in mediating cooperation between families, schools, and communities, thereby facilitating children's holistic development.

The fact that only one of the analysed studies focused on Roma children points to a substantial gap in the international empirical literature. This absence underscores the need to interpret the identified forms of cooperation as inspirational models that require careful cultural and contextual adaptation to the specific conditions of Roma communities in Slovakia.

Communication, defined as effective school-to-home and home-to-school exchange of information (Epstein et al., 2002), was identified as another key facilitating factor across the analysed programmes. Culturally sensitive communication strategies, the use of minority languages, and the involvement of interpreters or community mediators were shown to reduce barriers and strengthen trust between educators and parents (Aleksić et al., 2024; Bierman et al., 2021; Eliyahu-Levi, 2023; Kirsch & Bergeron-Morin, 2023; Meredith et al., 2022).

European qualitative research further confirms that cooperation grounded in mutual trust, respect, and shared educational goals can transform relationships with parents

traditionally perceived as ‘hard to reach’ (Khalfaoui et al., 2020). Such findings are particularly relevant for the Slovak context, where building trust between kindergartens and families from marginalised Roma communities remains a key challenge.

The identified barriers to cooperation between preschools/kindergartens and families from low-income and minority backgrounds are largely comparable across international and Slovak contexts. The findings of this review are consistent with reports by international organisations, which emphasise the crucial role of early childhood education and family engagement in reducing educational inequalities (OECD, 2017; UNICEF, 2019). In relation to Roma children, reports by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2017; 2022) consistently document low participation in early childhood education, limited parental engagement, and persistent mistrust of formal educational institutions, linked to discrimination, language barriers, and socio-economic constraints.

From this perspective, the forms of cooperation identified in the analysed programmes—particularly home-based support, community mediation, and the integration of educational activities into families’ everyday environments – are closely aligned with international policy recommendations. The *Omama* programme in Slovakia represents a concrete example of such an approach, as it combines home visits with culturally responsive support delivered by trained women from Roma communities. The convergence between international recommendations and empirical evidence supports the relevance of these forms of cooperation for improving engagement with Roma families in Slovakia.

In conclusion, strengthening cooperation between preschools/kindergartens and families from socially disadvantaged and ethnic minority backgrounds requires institutionally supported, trust-based, and culturally sensitive approaches. Local actors in Slovakia – including community centres, civic associations, kindergartens, schools, and universities – play a crucial role in designing and sustaining effective cooperation and transition programmes. Embedding successful initiatives such as *Omama* into mainstream early childhood education policy and practice may contribute to more equitable educational outcomes for children from marginalised Roma communities.

## Limitations

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, although the review was completed in 2025, the analysed studies cover the period from 2020 to 2024; therefore, additional relevant empirical studies may have been published after the completion of the review. Second, the review was limited to empirical studies indexed in the *Web of Science*, *Scopus*, and *EBSCO* databases, which may have resulted in the exclusion of relevant research published elsewhere. Finally, not all elements of early education and parenting support programmes developed in foreign ECEC systems can be directly transferred to the Slovak context, as their applicability depends on local institutional, cultural, and socio-economic conditions. Earlier studies were not included, as the review intentionally prioritised recent empirical evidence relevant to current early childhood education policy and practice.

## Author contributions

**Ivana Pirohová:** conceptualization, methodology, classification and analysis of empirical studies in the Scopus database, processing and interpretation of analysis results, writing – original draft, writing – revision and editing, visualization.

**Janka Ferencová:** methodology, classification and analysis of empirical studies in the WoS database, processing and interpretation of analysis results, writing – original draft, writing – revision and editing.

**Erika Novotná:** classification and analysis of empirical studies in the EBSCO database, processing and interpretation of analysis results.

**Monika Miňová:** processing and interpretation of analysis results.

## Acknowledgement

*The study was published with the support of VEGA project No. 1/0164/24 Forms of cooperation between kindergarten and family of a child from a marginalized community from the perspective of pedagogical staff and parents.*

## References

- Aleksić, G., Bebić-Crestany, Dž., & Kirsch, C. (2024). Factors influencing communication between parents and early childhood educators in multilingual Luxembourg. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 124, Article 102309. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2023.102309>
- Ansari, A., López, M., Manfra, L., Bleiker, C., Dinehart, L. H., Hatrman, S. C., & Winsler, A. (2017). Differential third-grade outcomes associated with attending publicly funded preschool programs for low-income Latino children. *Child Development*, 88(5), 1743–1756. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12663>
- Beasley, L. O., Silikovsky, J. F., Espeleta, H. C., Robinson, L. R., Hartwing, S. A., Morris, A., & Esparza, I. (2017). A qualitative study of cultural congruency of Legacy for Children™ for Spanish-speaking mothers. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 79, 299–308. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.06.022>
- Bierman, K. L., Heinrichs, B. S., Welsh, J. A., & Nix, R. L. (2021). Sustained benefits of a preschool home visiting program: Child outcomes in fifth grade. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 56(3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter), 260–271. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2021.03.017>
- Bitler, M. P., Hoynes, H. W., & Domina, T. (2014). Experimental Evidence on Distributional Effects of Head Start. (NBER Working Paper No. 20434). NBER National Bureau of Economic Research. <http://www.nber.org/papers/w20434>
- Calzada, E. J., Huang, K.-Y., Hernandez, M., Soriano, E., Acra, C. F., Dawson-McClure, S., Kamboukos, D., & Brotman, L. (2015). Family and Teacher Characteristics as Predictors of Parent Involvement in Education During Early Childhood Among Afro-Caribbean and Latino Immigrant Families. *Urban Education*, 50(7), 870–896. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085914534862>
- Eliyahu-Levi, D. (2023). Kindergarten teachers promote the participation experience of African Asylum-Seeker families. *International Migration*, 61(3), 237–253. <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.13037>
- Epstein, J. L. (1995). School/Family/Community partnerships: Caring for the children we share. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 76(9), 701–712. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20405436>
- Epstein, J. L., Sanders, M. G., Simon, B. S., Salinas, K. C., Jansorn, N. R., van Voorhls, F. L. (2002). *School, Family and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action* (2nd edition). US: Corwin Press, Inc.
- Epstein, J. L. (2018). School, family, and community partnerships in teachers' professional work. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 44(3), 397–406. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2018.1465669>

- European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. (2018). *A persisting concern: anti-Gypsyism as a barrier to Roma inclusion*. Publications Office. <https://doi.org/10.2811/752870>
- European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. (2022). *Fundamental rights report 2022*. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://doi.org/10.2811/288731>
- Fernandes, M., Matuskova, O., Babelova, R., Santosa, W. B., Shaw, O., & Hrica, P. (2024). A community-based intervention (the Omama Project) improves neurodevelopment in impoverished 2-year-old Roma children: a quasi-experimental observational study. *European Journal of Pediatrics*, 184, Article 133. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00431-024-05967-9>
- Gago, C., Aftosmes-Tobia, A., Beckerman-Hsu, J. P., Oddleifson, C., Garcia, E. A., Lansburg, K., Figueora, R., Yu, X., Kitos, N., Torrico, M., Leonard, J., Jurkowski, J. K., Mattei, J., Kenney, E. L., Haneuse, S., & Davison, K. K. (2023). Evaluation of a cluster-randomized controlled trial: Communities for Healthy Living, family-centered obesity prevention program for Head Start parents and children. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 20, Article 4. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12966-022-01400-2>
- Goodall, J., Montgomery, C. (2014). Parental involvement to parental engagement: A continuum. *Education Review*, 4(66), 399–410. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2013.781576>
- Head Start Act, 42 U.S.C. § 9801 et seq. (2016). <https://headstart.gov/policy/45-cfr-chap-xiii>
- Khalfaoui, A., García-Carrión, R., & Villardón-Gallego, L. (2020). Bridging the gap: engaging Roma and migrant families in early childhood education through trust-based relationships. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 28(5), 701–711. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2020.1817241>
- Kiraz, A., & Aztac, P. (2020). Practices Supporting Family Involvement in Preschool: Family Education through Science Activities. *Pamukkale University Journal of Education*, 50, 226–246. <https://doi.org/10.9779/pauefd.561702>
- Kirsch, C., & Bergeron-Morin, L. (2023). Educators, parents and children engaging in literacy activities in multiple languages: an exploratory study. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 20(4), 1386–1403. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2023.2195658>
- Leith, G. C. (2016). ‘Overlapping spheres’: Factors related to Children’s home learning and school experience [Doctoral dissertation, University of Sussex]. Sussex Research Online. <https://hdl.handle.net/10779/uos.23430344>
- Liu, T., Zhang, X., & Jiang, Y. (2020). Family Socioeconomic Status and the Cognitive Competence of Very Young Children from Migrant and non-Migrant Chinese Families: The Mediating Role of Parenting Self-Efficacy and Parental Involvement. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 51(2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter), 229–241. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2019.12.004>
- Mareš, J. (2013). Přehledové studie: jejich typologie, funkce a způsob vytváření. *Pedagogická orientace*, 23(4), 427–454. <https://doi.org/10.5817/PedOr2013-4-427>
- Mendez, J. L., & Westerberg, D. (2012). Implementation of a culturally adapted treatment to reduce barriers for Latino parents. *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 18(4), 363–372. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0029436>
- Merideth, C., Cavanaugh, B., Romas, S., Ralston, N., Arias, E., Tarasawa, B., & Waggoner, J. (2022). Family Perceptions of Participating in a Structured Summer Kindergarten Transition Program. *Early Childhood Educational Journal*, 50, 1383–1394. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-021-01268-0>
- Merritt, D. H., & Klein, S. (2015). Do early care and education services improve language development for maltreated children? Evidence from a national child welfare sample. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 39, 185–196. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2014.10.011>
- Norheim, H., & Moser, T. (2020). Barriers and facilitators for partnerships between parents with immigrant backgrounds and professionals in ECEC: a review based on empirical research. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 28(6), 789–805. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2020.1836582>
- Norheim, H., Moser, T., & Broekhuizen, M. (2022). Partnerships in multicultural ECEC settings in Norway: Perspectives from parents and professionals. *Nordic Early Childhood Educational Research*, 19(1), 40–60. <https://doi.org/10.23865/nbf.v19.228>

- OECD. (2017). *Starting strong 2017: Key OECD indicators on early childhood education and care*. Paris: OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264276116-en>
- Pianta, R. C., & Kraft-Sayre, M. (2003). *Successful kindergarten transition: Your guide to connecting children, families, & schools*. US: PH Brookes.
- Pour, M., Netík, J., Hudáčková, K., Havrdová, E., Kafková, P., Nemčoková, S., Chovan, S., Jahanpour, N., Sejková, A. P., & Slobodníková, S. (2024). *Hodnocení dopadu programu Omama: Analytická zpráva o dopadu programu Omama v roce 2024*. Schola Empirica; Cesta von. [https://cestavon.sk/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/omama\\_evaluacni\\_zprava\\_22\\_11\\_24.pdf](https://cestavon.sk/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/omama_evaluacni_zprava_22_11_24.pdf)
- Pratt, M. E., Lipscomb, S. T., & McClelland, M. M. (2015). Caregiver Responsiveness During Preschool Supports Cooperation in Kindergarten: Moderation by Children's Early Compliance. *Early Education and Development*, 27(4), 421–439. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2016.1090767>
- Purtell, K. M., Jiang, H., Justice, L. M., Sayers, R., Dore, R., & Pelfrey, L. (2022). Teacher Perceptions of Preschool Parent Engagement: Causal Effects of a Connection-Focused Intervention. *Child & Youth Care Forum*, 51, 937–966. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10566-021-09661-x>
- Pushor, D. (2012). Tracing My Research on Parent Engagement: Working to Interrupt the Story of School as Protectorate. *Action in Teacher Education*, 34(5–6), 464–479. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01626620.2012.729474>
- Qiao, P., Chen, S., & Deng, L. (2024). Empowering rural early childhood education through shared book reading and school-family-community partnerships. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2024.2403423>
- Rigová, E., Kováčová, L., & Šedovič, M. (2020). *Predprimárne vzdelávanie detí zo znevýhodneného prostredia: Problémy zavedenia povinnej škôlky očami samospráv* (Policy brief). Inštitút pre dobre spravovanú spoločnosť SGI. [https://www.governance.sk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Policy\\_Brief\\_PPV.pdf](https://www.governance.sk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Policy_Brief_PPV.pdf)
- Simon, B. S., & Epstein, J. L. (2001). School, Family, and Community Partnerships. In D. B. Hiatt-Michael (Ed.), *Promising Practices for Family Involvement in Schools*. (pp. 1–84). Emerald Publishing Limited. <https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-60752-544-8>
- Smith, J., & Johnson, D. J. (2022). Parental Perspectives on Education: Mexican and Mexican-American Farmworker Families with Young Children Enrolled in Migrant and Seasonal Head Start. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 21(4), 388–403. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348431.2019.1666010>
- Škvareninová, O., & Martiňák, D. (2023, April). *Nezaškolení. Důvody nízké účasti dětí na predprimárnom vzdelávaní* (Komentár 4/2023). Inštitút vzdelávacej politiky, Ministerstvo školstva, vedy, výskumu a športu SR. Bratislava: MŠVVaŠ SR. [https://analyzy.gov.sk/files/archiv/1/39210\\_material\\_hlasovanie.pdf](https://analyzy.gov.sk/files/archiv/1/39210_material_hlasovanie.pdf)
- Šprocha, B. (2024). Vzdelanie, ekonomická aktivita a zdravotný stav osôb v marginalizovaných rómskych komunitách na Slovensku podľa výsledkov zisťovania EU-SILC MRK 2020 [Education, Economic Activity and Health Status of Persons in Marginalized Roma Communities in Slovakia According to the Results of the EU-SILC MRC 2020 Survey]. *Slovenská štatistika a demografia [Slovak statistics and demography]*, 34(4), 3–20. [In Slovak].
- Turney, K., & Kao, G. (2009). Barriers to school involvement: Are immigrant parents disadvantaged? *The Journal of Educational Research*, 102(4), 257–271. <https://doi.org/10.3200/JOER.102.4.257-271>
- United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). (2019). *A world ready to learn: Advocacy brief on quality early childhood development*. UNICEF. <https://www.unicef.org/media/57931/file/A-world-ready-to-learn-advocacy-brief-2019.pdf>
- Votruba-Drzal, E., Coley, R. L., Collins, M., & Miller, P. (2015). Center-Based Preschool and School Readiness Skills of Children From Immigrant Families. *Early Education and Development*, 26(4), 549–573. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2015.1000220>