

THE DIFFERENCES IN THE ATTITUDES OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN IN THE CITIES OF SOUTH-EAST SERBIA BASED ON MODELS OF EXTRACURRICULAR OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

(Research note)

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Abstract

The analysis of existing positive prophylactic effects of spending time outdoors unequivocally imposes the need for organizing certain models of outdoor activities, but also for their further development, with regard to an aim which suits the actual current practical needs. The sample of participants for this study consisted of school children, 151 of them, with a chronological age of 14, from South-East Serbia (Knjaževac, Zaječar and Niš), who completed a questionnaire consisting of 12 items. Statistical procedures were used which suit the requirements of the study: the t-test and an analysis of variance. Differences were determined in the responses in terms of gender, but also in terms of the cities in which the school children reside. By means of analysis and the feedback received on extracurricular outdoor activities, it is possible, on the basis of the obtained results of the survey of their effects, to determine quality and any further need for their organization, to form concrete suggestions and to build models which satisfy the actual needs of elementary school students.

Keywords: *hypokinesia, physical education program, functional abilities, mental abilities, picnics, camping, questionnaire, t-test, analysis of variance*

INTRODUCTION

In the modern ways of life and working conditions, when man is confined in a city environment and production halls, when the occurrence of hypokinesia and stress is more present, the diet in terms of extent and means is often inadequate and in terms of the hygiene unjustified, each attempt to enable man's return to the nature is invaluable and noteworthy. Walking, going for picnics, camping, climbing, hiking, and going on tours as well as other forms of outdoor activities undoubtedly represent man's attempts at reconnecting with the nature. The nature and physical activities carried out outdoors represent the best designers and protectors of our necessary life vitality, and it is up to us to make our way into nature and realize these needs. The program contents of Outdoor Activities courses which are included in elementary school curricula have as their aim to allow schoolchildren, and any other interested parties, to become better acquainted with possibilities and contents which are offered through organized stays in nature with the basic aim of applying the obtained knowledge in practice and connecting it with life and work in general (Savić, Miletić, 2012).

Physical education programs in schools are logically related to the chronological and biological age of the school children, who share common characteristics and skills. Each physical education program needs to contain certain aims and tasks which are solved and realized in practice. At the basis of all these programs we find the proper psychological-physical development of children and the young, the maintenance of the movement apparatus, the formation of proper posture and the creation of basic hygiene habits through certain physical activities (Momčilović, 2006). In today's living and work conditions we are faced more and more with the need for the physical education programs not to be uniform, that is, for them to be adapted to the conditions and needs of schools in certain regions. Program contents such as: cross racing, field trips, expeditions, camping, summer and winter vacations, are all part of extracurricular activities and schools organize them if they are in a position to do so. In practice, today, the situation is quite distressing since these activities are either not organized or are organized infrequently by schools and the faculty involved in sport and physical education. Since the aforementioned activities are long-term activi-

ties of low-to mid-intensity, a positive result can be felt in the entire body of the school children, their functional and mental abilities, regarding the health state and work abilities (Višnjić, Jovanović and Miletić, 2004).

It is a well-known fact that there is a need for activities which would take place outside the school, especially for children whose parents do not have substantial financial means, so that these children could be taken care of. Quite often though, this need overlaps with the need of school children for additional work for the purpose of meeting the school requirements. This work deals with attitudes which connect the effects of social factors and activities of the school children, as well as the opinions of elementary school children regarding the outdoor activities, and represents only one form of the attempt at making a contribution to shedding further light on the aforementioned problem.

The current state in schools in Serbia

Everyone involved in the educational process and daily activities which are part of the realization of the prescribed curricular activities is well acquainted with the state of their working and living environments. It closely resembles most of the schools in Serbia, with minor deviations in a positive or negative sense. As a reminder, compulsory content from the area of outdoor activities, as an integral part of the Physical Education classes include: trips, summer camp (summer vacation), winter camping (winter vacations - If the schools have the necessary preconditions for organizing these activities and if the children show sufficient interest), cross running and public appearances (and similar manifestations).

Bearing these facts in mind, but also for many more reasons, the relevant authorities designed Physical Education classes at the elementary and high school level by making provisions for and including adequate outdoor activities as part of extracurricular activities. The basic motives for these contents include spending time outside, active participation during the phase which involves spending time outside, with a variety of different movements, learning at the very source of the knowledge, usually as a part of organized groups. In this part of the educational process it is inevitable for the content of several fields of study to be intertwined with various courses, which require a team work, preparation and activities in the field, that is, the outdoors. Depending on the content of various field trips, excursions or summer vacations, we expect concrete cooperation and the design of programs for history courses, geography, biology and similar natural sciences, but primarily for the physical education, followed by music classes, art classes or technical workshop activities. Outdoors, the child and the man behave in accordance with its laws, which is why they should always be observed, studied, and preserved (Savić, Miletić, 2012).

Research to date

With a general analysis of the work and research

carried out to date and the widely accepted opinions in the field of physical education and sport, and especially of segments which refer to educational content, we reached the conclusion that few papers have been written on the same topic. Nevertheless, these studies have all made a contribution to the further development of the aforementioned problems and improvement of the curriculum and its contents. This all speaks in favour of the fact that it is necessary to be involved in more detailed research and into the design of the most optimal contents of certain subjects which are part of the elementary school curriculum.

A certain number of local authors have further dealt with this subject matter in their studies. Jovanović, P. (2001) studied the *“Extracurricular activities and the creativity of school children”*. He determined in his theoretical account that, considering that extracurricular activities are based even more than classes on the free choice and the internal motivation of the school children, it is expected that they can also be used during elementary school education in order to preserve creativity. Primarily because what we are dealing with are younger elementary school children. Since in our elementary school education extracurricular activities have still not found their proper place, their motivational effect on the development of creativity has not fully been realized. Savić (2007) in his paper *“The application and significance of an outdoor activities educational program model applied in the Outdoor School”*, outlines in detail the application of a part of the practical aspects of the Outdoor Activities as part of the Outdoor School for the purpose of acquiring new knowledge and practical skills among the students of the Teacher Training College in Vranje. Miletić, K., Savić, Z., and Miletić, V. (2009) studied *“The current state and projections of some of the extreme sports among high school children in Belgrade”*. Through a detailed theoretical-critical analysis, the authors viewed the current physical education programs for high and elementary schools and emphasized the current situation in practice which is not commendable, since Serbia has the optimal conditions for their development. Savić, et al., (2011) studied *“The evaluations of school children based on certain program contents of outdoor activities”*. The sample included in the study consisted of forty (40) male and female school children, sixth-graders of the *“Stefan Nemanja”* elementary school from Niš. The analysis of the results has indicated that the school children ascribed high values to the quality of the organized practical aspect of outdoor activities, the choice and involvement of the teacher, as well as the child's relationship towards the aforementioned activities. In addition, we can conclude that individuals understand the wider social significance of outdoor activities and their positive influence on the health of people.

Based on the aforementioned results of the studies carried out to date, the authors of the paper focus on the studies into the attitudes of elementary school children throughout South-East Serbia based on the extracurricu-

lar activities involved in the Physical Education courses. The research into this problem is realized in the context of further effective organization, operationalization and the realization of program contents in outdoor activities as part of extracurricular activities and regular Physical Education classes in elementary school education.

The problem, subject matter and aims of the paper

The problem of this research was implied by the current relations in society and the immediate educational practice in the realization of certain models of outdoor activities. The models of outdoor activities take the form of extracurricular activities in school programs. The current plans and programs do not impose any obligations on the schools to organize any models of outdoor activities.

The aim is based on the research into the attitudes and needs of seventh-grade elementary school children, based on certain models of educational outdoor activities in schools, as well as the determination of differences in the attitudes of school children living in the various cities in which the questionnaires were distributed (Knjaževac, Zaječar, Niš), but also the differences in the responses between the surveyed populations (boys and girls).

METHODS

The sample of participants included in this study was selected from a population of male and female seventh-graders, all attending elementary schools in South-East Serbia. This includes the following elementary schools: "Dušan Radović" from Niš, "Đura Jakšić" from Zaječar and "Vuk Karadžić" from Knjaževac. The aforementioned sample was selected randomly from a population of seventh-graders, and was large enough for the defined research. The overall number of participants was 151, of a chronological age of 14 (± 3 months). This number of participants satisfied the precondition for a quantitative analysis, considering the number of variables and the possibility for the generalization of the results.

For the purpose of this research a questionnaire was designed by the authors, consisting of 12 items. While creating the questionnaire, the following was taken into account: the current state of the Physical Education courses in schools, the age of the children which would be included in the survey, that the questions were not ambiguous and did not intrude toward the privacy of the participants and explored the aforementioned space. Special care was taken in regards to the comprehensibility of the questions for the population for which they were designed, and that the children actually were in possession of the information required by them. The survey represents a pilot study.

To process the data obtained from the questionnaire, the following statistical techniques which are appropriate for this type of research were used. The fol-

lowing were calculated: percentages, frequencies for all the survey results, the t-test for the differences in the responses between the boys and girls, as well as an analysis of variance for the differences in the responses between the school children from Knjaževac, Zaječar and Niš. These techniques fully comply with the requirements of our study and provide adequate insight into the attitudes and needs of the surveyed population of school children.

The survey took place during the beginning of June, 2012. in the aforementioned schools, during their regular Physical Education classes. All of the school children received questionnaires with a previous explanation on how to fill them in, without any direct influence on the possible responses.

In accordance with the problems and aims of the research, the following hypotheses were proposed:

- H0 -There are statistically significant differences between the responses provided by the boys and girls.
- H1-There are statistically significant differences in the responses provided by school children from Knjaževac, Zaječar and Niš.
- H2-The school children have a positive opinion of outdoor activities and the related classes and gave an affirmative account of their influence on the proper development of one's personality.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was based on the research into the attitudes and needs of elementary school children, based on the models of Outdoor Activities courses as part of extracurricular activities. By studying the attitudes, the understanding of the given situation by the school children was evaluated, as was their perception, value judgments and reactions.

The structure of the study was in the form of a 12-item questionnaire – or a questionnaire consisting of 12 claims..

Table 1. Distribution based on gender

Cities	Fr.	%
Knjaževac	50	33.1
Zaječar	51	33.8
Niš	50	33.1
Overall	151	100.0

Table 2. Distribution based on place of residence

Gender	Fr.	%
Male	73	48.3
Female	78	51.7
Overall	151	100.0

In order to determine any statistically signifi-

cant differences between the male and female participants, based on the provided answers, the t-test was used.

By means of a general insight into the results presented in Table 3. (the results of the t-test for both genders), we can determine that the participants differed in their responses based on gender, which was expected and understandable based on the difference in gender and the personal needs and interests of the participants. This has officially confirmed the first hypothesis which speaks in favor of the fact that all of the responses differ from each other.

In order to determine the statistically significant differences between the three sub-groups of participants from Knjaževac, Zaječar and Niš in terms of the responses provided for some of the questions in the survey, an analysis of variance was used.

A general overview of the results presented in the tables indicates significant differences between the responses provided by school children from the cities included in the survey. This difference is most evident in the responses to questions number 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10. The determined facts speak in favour the conclusion that school children from Niš spend more time at school per day than their peers from Knjaževac and Zaječar. In addition, the school children from Zaječar spend more time studying their coursework than their peers from Niš

and Knjaževac. Statistically significant differences were determined between all the groups of young participants in the case of the number of physical education classes per week. The school children from Knjaževac had a greater number of different physical education classes than their peers from Niš and then Zaječar. The school children from Knjaževac have a greater need for walking that those from Zaječar and Niš.

A review of the data shown in Tables 3. and 4. indicates that the school children from Knjaževac and Niš to a greater extent require extracurricular outdoor activities to be held at their schools, in comparison to the school children from Zaječar, and this difference is statistically significant at the Sig.= .001 level. The school children from Knjaževac have positive attitudes in regard to whether the aforementioned extracurricular activities have an influence on the proper growth and development of the body, all in comparison to the attitudes of school children from Niš and Zaječar. The obtained difference is statistically significant at the Sig.= .015 level. A similar situation can be found in comparing the attitudes regarding whether the aforementioned extracurricular activities develop the spirit of the community, as well as whether they affect the development of discipline and responsibility among the participants, and thus the school children from Knjaževac have more positive

Table 3. T-test results for both genders

No	Claim	Sex	Mean	Sd.	Sig.
1	On average how much time do you spend at school on a work day?	M	2.12	.551	.592
		F	2.17	.439	
2	How much time do you spend studying every day?	M	1.52	.729	.015
		F	1.85	.884	
3	How many times a week do you have physical education classes?	M	1.88	.725	.434
		F	1.96	.591	
4	Does your school have a gym?	M	1.01	.117	.347
		F	1.04	.194	
5	Do you think that you should spend more time outside each week?	M	1.62	.738	.000
		F	1.21	.466	
6	Do you feel a need to go for a walk during the day?	M	1.71	.790	.046
		F	1.49	.575	
7	Would you like it if certain outdoor activities were organized in your school (summer vacation, winter vacation, camping, walking, field trips, cross running)?	M	1.45	.668	.063
		F	1.27	.527	
8	Do outdoor activities influence the proper growth and development of the body?	M	1.40	.661	.239
		F	1.28	.532	
9	Do outdoor activities develop the collective spirit?	M	1.47	.625	.031
		F	1.27	.475	
10	Do outdoor activities influence the development of discipline and a sense of responsibility among the participants?	M	1.59	.742	.011
		F	1.32	.522	
11	Do outdoor activities decrease violence among school children?	M	1.86	.732	.222
		F	1.72	.719	
12	Do the aforementioned outdoor activities offer new insight into and are they applicable?	M	1.44	.601	.001
		F	1.15	.429	

Table 4. The analysis of variance – the significance of the differences between the school children from Knjaževac, Zaječar and Niš

Claim	Fr.	Sig.
1. On average how much time do you spend at school on a work day?	21.737	.000
2. How much time do you spend studying every day?	5.893	.003
3. How many times a week do you have physical education classes?	48.990	.000
4. Does your school have a gym?	1.831	.164
5. Do you think that you should spend more time outside each week?	2.592	.078
6. Do you feel a need to go for a walk during the day?	3.139	.046
7. Would you like it if certain outdoor activities were organized in your school (summer vacation, winter vacation, camping, walking, field trips and cross running)?	7.642	.001
8. Do outdoor activities influence the proper growth and development of the body?	4.344	.015
9. Do outdoor activities develop the collective spirit?	10.202	.000
10. Do outdoor activities influence the development of discipline and a sense of responsibility among the participants?	7.442	.001
11. Do outdoor activities decrease the violence among school children?	2.556	.081
12. Do the aforementioned outdoor activities offer new insight into and are they applicable?	3.015	.052

attitudes in comparison to the school children from Niš and Zaječar. The obtained differences are statistically significant at the Sig.<.001 level. This officially confirms the second hypothesis.

CONCLUSION

A sample of 151 participants, male and female elementary school students from South-East Serbia (Niš, Zaječar, Knjaževac), of a chronological age of 14 (± 3 months), completed a questionnaire in June, 2013. consisting of 12 items (claims), which was designed to evaluate the attitudes and needs of school children, based on certain models of the Outdoor Activities courses in schools, offered in the form of extracurricular activities. The obtained data were processed using statistical procedures appropriate for this type of research (the t-test and the analysis of variance).

Even though there are differences in the reactions of the studied school children to certain claims, they still predominantly share the same opinion in terms of the key evaluations of the possibilities and requirements for the realization of certain models of education, outdoor activities. The results of the research indicate that the participants confirmed or disregarded the suggested claims in the questionnaire, based on groups (variables) in an objective manner. This is an indication that the set goals have been reached. The school children mostly had positive attitudes as far as the needs for organized forms of outdoor activities are concerned, and their sig-

nificance, which thus confirmed the third hypothesis. These types of studies enable us to make decisions more easily in practice, in terms of models preferred by school children, and to implement them in schools. The necessity for this type of research is manifested in the modernization and implementation in the educational programs at schools, with the final effect of achieving more positive prophylactic effects. Today's way of life and work impose upon us the need to spend as much more time outdoors as possible. This is why the intention of this author was all the more significant, if it gained an approval in a wider audience and all those interested in all forms and models of outdoor activities.

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