THE INFLUENCE OF LEISURE ACTIVITIES ON THE SOCIO-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS

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Abstract

Based on the fact that students can learn easier and better when they are leisurely acting, leisure activities with their poly-dimensional character of student development, are important factors that stimulate the development of students in all possible aspects, such as social, moral, aesthetic, working, emotional, cognitive, and many other aspects. The objective of our research was oriented towards the level of implementation of leisure classroom activities during the learning process, and its correlation to the socio-emotional progress of the students aged 6-11, respectively the formation of attitudes, the stimulation of positive interdependence of students, creating the need for being part of the group, forming students' skills for recognizing and accepting a different kind of emotions, the ability to sympathize (to be empathic). By defined objectives, survey and interview techniques were applied in the research with N=100 teachers. Results showed that there is a strong correlation between the implementation of leisure classroom activities and the social-emotional progress of students. The obtained results should serve to identify and overcome shortcomings in the implementation of leisure classroom activities that simultaneously have a great impact on the socio-emotional development of students in primary education.

Keywords: Leisure classroom activities, students, teachers, primary education, social development, emotional development

Introduction

Exploring effective and contemporary learning is quite challenging. This conclusion comes from the very fact that it is characterized by a series of features that make it seem complex, and as such, it is difficult to conceptualize and define (Ceka & Murati, 2017). Contemporary learning requires us not to be satisfied with the usual, everyday, the known, but to systematically approach the direction that leads us to what is new, innovative, and unknown, with the intention of researching it. , model it, and give it the form of something reasonable and more necessary for the progress of contemporary education. At no time can we say that we have achieved what our education needs, that we have achieved what our society needs to progress and advance (Havziu-Ismaili, 2019). Our tendency to climb in the constant search for perfection should not be missed! Knowing the fact that teachers are the main subjects in the learning process, and at the same time the planners and leaders of the learning process (Milankovic, 2020), who have direct contact with the students, it is necessary to organize and implement the learning process based on the fulfillment of the conditions and criteria that requires simultaneous teaching (Havziu-Ismaili, Ameti, Iljazi-Hoxha, & Kasami, 2023). The essential point lies in the realization of the same in compliance with the student's interests, respectively to understand the children as active and independent social actors (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998; Prout & James, 1998; Qvortrup, 2004), "as an agent in constructing knowledge and daily experience" (Mayall, 2002) in order for the students not to perceive education as an unnecessary and monotonous obligation, but to perceive it as their positive transformation, as something that grows them, changes them, fulfills in every possible dimension

(Havziu-Ismaili, 2019). Leisure activities have a multidimensional character of student development because they stimulate the development of students in all possible aspects, such as social, moral, aesthetic, working, emotional, cognitive, and many others. Precisely, the research problem of this paper is to analyze what leisure activities are, specifically leisure subjects activities, how much importance is given to the implementation of leisure subject activities in primary schools, how much teachers motivate students through leisure subject activities, how much students are leisure to act in learning in conditions when the same is developed through leisure subject activities, thus making a comparison between how students experience learning when it is developed in traditional conditions, and how it is developed through leisure activities. In the sphere of social development, we will analyze as well how leisure subject activities (especially leisure activities with a collective character) help the social development of students, the strengthening of relationships with peers, the formation of attitudes, the stimulation of positive interdependence of students, the need to be part of the group, maintaining socialization, stimulating prosocial behaviors etc.

1.1 Leisure subject activities - connecting bridge between students and their socio-emotional development

The social and emotional development of the individual present dimensions that are practical manifestations. The socio-emotional dimension differs from physical, intellectual, and moral development. This is related to the special position of the individual - the person that has to do with the need to adapt to different life situations, but it is also related to another important factor: the age of the individual (Havziu, Memedi, & Ameti, 2017). Emotional maturity conditions the behavior of the individual, while social maturity contributes to the stability of the individual, especially in the relationship between the individual and society. Both one and the other contribute and encourage, and motivate the individual to manifest civilized behavior. The social and emotional dimension is the basis of individual human action, the expression of universal values, and communication in complex social developments (Havziu-Ismaili, Ameti, Iljazi-Hoxha, & Kasami, 2023). If the social dimension represents the form of expression in social life (practice) and the emotional dimension is the form of experiencing and expressing inner life, then, these dimensions express the degree of quality of communication with the social environment. And not only that. Socioemotional maturity is a dimension that enables the establishment of a balance between the individual and society. (Murati, 2004)

1.2 Leisure collective subject activities and social-emotional development of students

Socialization is the process of adopting norms, rules, and conventions, namely adaptation to the social context. Peer relationships are of great importance for the child's social development and psychological adjustment. In interaction with peers, the child fulfills two social needs, namely the need to belong and the need for intimacy. Students of primary school have a great need for companionship and the first real social relationships in children are visible around the third year of life, while at school age they are ready to cooperate.

It is precisely this tendency of students to cooperate with their peers that should push teachers to direct their activities in favor of the social development of students and to promote the improvement of the social relations of students in the classroom, which is very well documented on the research of Zerengok, Gurbuz and Ozbey (2018), respectively the impact that leisre activities during class have had on social adoption of international students. Leisure activities can promote peer-to-peer, peer-to adult connection (Caldwell & Witt, 2011), especially leisure activities with a collective character, knowing that they will ensure the closeness between students and stimulate the need for cooperation and interaction (Havziu, Memedi, & Ameti, 2017).

Emotional development is an important area of physical and cognitive function and development. The different literature on emotional development is quite different on several key domains including emotion understanding, emotion recognition and competence, and strategies to regulate emotions. The ability to

interpret or explain one's own or another's emotional response is a fundamental skill for interpersonal relationships. According to Erickson (Erickson, 1985), "as children reveal their problems and basic natures in their play, wise teachers can assess and use this information in remedation. In early development children become aware of the six basic emotions: anger, upset, afraid, love, and surprise, and in emotional development, there is a transition in children's abilities to identify and define their own and others' emotions. others. In the research of Tu, (2020), where the main goal of the research was to explore the effects of active leisure participation on poor children's psychological capital, results showed that active leisure participation improved psychological capital and peer support in economically disadvantaged students, which emphasizes the importance of leisure activities in the emotional wellbeing of children.

1.2.1 Leisure activities and empathy

The emotional development of children, respectively students, includes the stimulation of the abilities not only to understand the inner spiritual world of the students but also the awareness to recognize also the emotionality of others around, forming the students' conviction that *I am good if others are good*. The word empathy means someone's emotional state that relates to their experiences. In psychology and in the education process, it is presented as an emotional state, thinking, and behavior toward the other person. Empathy is a psychic process, a feeling through which people form communication contacts".

Empathy or sympathy is the process of "putting yourself in someone else's shoes", and this represents a process of transcending oneself, trying to understand and feel what the other person understands or feels. (Lutfiu-Kadriu, 2016)

Regarding how the implementation of leisure subject activities causes empathy in students, we stated that the leisure subject activities enable the socialization of the students, increased the need to cooperate, then the empathic attitude of the students towards each other is automatically expressed. Peers are characterized by a very strong affection among themselves, and the level of understanding and empathy between them will increase intensively depending on the conditions offered by the teacher. So, if the teacher is open to the formation of a cooperative atmosphere in the classroom in the student-student relationship, and makes it possible for the students to experience cooperation between them as something necessary for the collective well-being, then the students will understand how important and how beautiful it is to operate in an environment that never creates monotony and the need to surrender.

1.2.2 Leisure activities and self-regulation

Self-regulation is the ability to manage emotions and behaviors in accordance with the demands of the situation. Self-regulation involves the ability to resist highly emotional reactions to any distressing stimuli, enabling the avoidance of emotional outbursts. In many cases when learning takes place in traditional conditions, it happens that students are not only not very focused on learning, but also make mistakes when solving tasks, especially if they are asked to do the solution in front of the whole class. Teachers' negative reactions to students' mistakes are also present in our school practice in North Macedonia (Havziu, Memedi, & Ameti, 2017), and this leads students to experience a powerful emotional outburst, which manifests itself in self-isolation, passivity, fear, uncertainty, and even crying. In a meta-analysis research conducted by Wood et al. (2020), regarding self-regulation in preschool-aged children with physical activities, they noticed that in the vast of the research only attention was improved by physical activities, while no clear relationship was found between working memory and inhibition and physical activity. Therefore, we say that the implementation of leisure subject activities in learning increases the self-control and self-management skills of students, and this is actually a new path towards the formation of a positive culture of acting in learning, society, and life!

1.3 Leisure activities and activation of the positive learning experience

What is meant by experience in learning? By this, we understand the expression of the intellectual and emotional satisfaction of the student which is created by its content and form, the processes of creating and experiencing values during the process of their transfer. This manifestation of experience in learning can be individual and collective, external and internal, intellectual and emotional, deeply experienced and superficial. The learning experience is expressed as joy, satisfaction, enthusiasm, relaxation, good behavior, active, careful, focused, etc. Does every lesson create an experience? Or, what makes learning experienced? The emotional experience of learning by the student is a specific and subjective matter. It depends on several factors, such as the emotional features of the student, the willingness to convey the lesson with feelings, the student's attitude towards the learning content, and the values that the learning content offers, a teacher who makes the learning possible to experience, deep or superficial (descriptive, indicative, narrative skills of the event) (Havziu & Ramadani Rasimi, 2015). A necessary condition for students to experience learning positively, to arouse in their emotions, feelings, and of course positive thoughts, and the desire to be attentive and active, of course, is the implementation of leisure subject activities. Oftentimes, the leisure subject activities implemented by the teacher not only make it possible to experience the learning positively but also enable the students to experience everything as a game.

Methods and means

Based on the literature review and cultural context of North Macedonia, the level of leisure activities implemented in the primary schools, the purpose of the research was to investigate the level of implementation of leisure activities of teachers during the teaching process, and its correlation to the motivation of students in the learning process and their socio-emotional stability. ***Based on our main goal, we raised only one main hypothesis: The implementation of leisure subject activities by teachers in the lower cycle of primary education, affects the socio-emotional progress of students***". The nature of the research imposed the use of inductive, deductive methods, comparative and descriptive methods, through which the description, explanation, comparison, and generalization of the phenomena of the research subject were conducted. In accordance with the defined objective, a survey, and interview were applied. For both techniques, two instruments were used, for the survey, it was used self-constructed questionnaire, and for the interview a semistructured protocol the interview.

In this research, taking into account the cultural context of the population, we included participants, teachers only from two cities, Tetovo and Kicevo, North Macedonia, respectively N=100 responded to the questionnaire and 15 students participated in the interview. So, in total, **the sample** of this research was 115.

Results

Before gathering the data from the respondents, we were careful on the first phase, respectively the questionnaire was constructed so it includes the necessary information regarding the implementation of leisure subjects activities, the level of motivation of students, and their social-emotional stability. The results chapter starts with descriptive statistics of the participants and their work experience and continues with the main hypothesis. So, based on table 1 it is evident that the vast majority of respondents have long working experience in education, while the rest have less working experience, a data that has helped us to compare how teachers have changed attitudes regarding the realization of leisure subject activities in the educational process. In addition, table 2 presents the distribution of participants based on the school they work,

Table 1: Descriptive statistics on the work experience of teachers

Work experience		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not even a year yet	2	2.0	2.0	2.0
	One year	5	5.0	5.0	7.0
	2-4 years	13	13.0	13.0	20.0
	5-10 years	13	13.0	13.0	33.0
	Over 10 years	67	67.0	67.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Table 2: Descriptive statistics on the place of work of teachers

School as a workplace		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
V	Sabedin Bajrami	19	19.0	19.0
a	Progress	4	4.0	23.0
l				
i	Leisuredom	8	8.0	31.0
d	Cyril and Methodius	9	9.0	40.0
	Naim Frashëri	18	18.0	58.0
	Istikbal	12	12.0	70.0
	Dervish Cara	11	11.0	81.0
	Sande Shterjoski	11	11.0	92.0
	Migjeni	8	8.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	

Table 3. Descriptive data of variable of school where the teachers work.

The chapter continues with basic statistical procedure, as is Pearson correlation, and we used it to evaluate the strength of correlation for the main hypothesis, respectively correlation between the level of implementation of leisure subjects activities and the socio-emotional progress of the students. In table 3, we can see that the value of Sig. (2-tailed) is $p=0.025$ ($p<0.05$), which means that there is a statistically significant correlation between the implementation of leisure activities in class and the socio-emotional progress of students, which means if teachers apply more leisure subject activities, the social-emotional stability of the students will arouse. Based on the data obtained from the correlation we can conclude that hypothesis H1 is accepted

Table 3. Statistical data of Pearson's correlation between the variable implementation of leisure activities and socio-emotional progress.

		Implementation of leisure activities	Socio-emotional progress
			Correlations
Implementation of leisure activities	Pearson Correlation	1	.224[*]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.025
	N	100	100
Socio-emotional progress	Pearson Correlation	.224[*]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.025	
	N	100	100

To support subjectively the above statistical result, an interview was conducted with students of primary school. The interview was constructed toward the perceptions of students regarding their desire for cooperation and socialization with their peers during leisure subject activities. Results from the interview show that most of the students declare that **leisure subject activities are a factor in promoting cooperation and socializing with others in the class**, compared to one of the interviewees who disagrees with the majority. One of the interviewees asserts that leisure subject activities do not affect the development of the feeling of cooperation with others so much. From the data obtained during the interview, we notice that the realization of leisure subject activities increases the desire for cooperation between them and at the same time encourages the students to experience more of the learning process. To follow up on the results, we elicited some citations from the students:

"These activities positively affect the socialization among us students"

"100% is positive because when we divide the work, the task is solved faster"

"Yes, these activities make me hang out with both boys and girls"

"Yes, they make me socialize with the students with whom I don't have much communication"

"A lot, because if someone doesn't know something I can help them and that's how we cooperate'

Conclusion and recommendations

This paper aimed to explore how much our teachers are committed to the implementation of contemporary learning, the implementation of creative and attractive learning for students, respectively how much our teachers' work is oriented and directed in terms of the inclusion of leisure subject activities in the classroom, activities with multidimensional benefits for students, and not only. Precisely in order to clarify these controversies, the data collected were analyzed and brought us to the conclusion that teachers generally show interest in including leisure subject activities during their teaching courses in North Macedonia, which is significantly related to socio-emotional development of the students.

The teachers have clearly informed us that these activities have a place in their teaching plan, they are given importance, and the student's interest in participating in them is relatively large, as in the research of Sivan and Chan (2012) where the students illustrated how leisure time in their schools enhanced their knowledge, developed their skills, changed their attitudes and consequently affected the way they went about their leisure. We say relatively large because even though most students are interested in participating in leisure subject activities, which we can be supported by the research of Lehto and Eskelinen (2020) where is underlined that for children the most meaningful features were found to be time to play freely with friends and taking part in designing activities. However, the data collected directly from teachers, and indirectly from students, tells us that not every student has the readiness to framing in concrete learning situations realized with leisure subject activities if they are not encouraged by the teachers, which leads to a sense of inferiority. This is considered quite natural considering the diversity of students and their different personalities, who do not necessarily show the same attitudes and interests towards situations, in this case towards different subject activities and participation in them, such as in the research of Altin (2021) where the factors that decreased the effects of the activities, have been mostly student-originated. Generally speaking, it has been proven that leisure subject activities are the key to success for students, teachers, and the school, because they make it possible to avoid monotony in the classroom, turning the classroom into an environment where students find what you lack; the need to be a participant, the need to be heard, to express oneself, and above all the need to be present today in the classroom, and tomorrow in life! Considering introverted students, antisocial students, and marginalized students, for whom research shows that they choose leisure activities unrelated to school activities (Pomohaci

& Catana, 2015), teachers should allocate time for individual conversations with these students and with their parents, making them aware of the fact that these activities will make the students in the classroom stronger, more united, and that participating in these activities will make it possible for each of them to bring out the magic and strength that is inside each one, so that this strength is fed with positivity, and enables the orientation of each of them in every dimension of life!

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