

FREE ELECTIVE SUBJECTS AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE TRAINING AND PSYCHO-PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS

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Abstract

Education is a very important and essential factor for the all-round development of a person's personality. This personality will develop especially in cases where the teaching will be qualitative and in accordance with the conditions, psycho-physical abilities of the students, their inclinations, interests, and goals. In addition to compulsory subjects, students in schools also have elective subjects that enable them to develop additional skills and knowledge.

The research subject in this paper is how elective subjects will affect the psycho-physical development of students. To reflect this impact of elective subjects, we will use the method of theoretical analysis, the descriptive method. The instruments and techniques that will enable us to achieve the results are a survey with teachers who implement elective subjects in primary education, including from grade IV to grade IX.

We will present the results achieved in a tabular format to have a clear overview of how teachers have responded regarding elective subjects, how they are selected, how they are implemented, whether they have the conditions to implement such a thing, whether teachers are prepared regarding these, etc.

Keywords: education, elective subjects, teachers, conditions

Introduction

The educational system and teaching itself is a process that incorporates various factors that influence children's development. For their development to be fair and consistent with the needs of the students, it is very important that the plan and curriculum are designed in accordance with the needs, interests and attitudes of the students, otherwise we will have a failed education. In this regard, it is important that the choice of subjects that will be included in the curriculum are suitable with the interests of the students.

The curriculum contains compulsory subjects, elective subjects and other activities offered by the school itself, all distributed according to classes and according to the number of hours per week and per year. The curriculum is the basis for the structuring of educational work at the state level and for its organization in schools (concept proposal for primary education).

I. Theoretical approach of the problem

1. Elective subjects

Each school has the freedom to offer elective subjects that arise from the expressed interests of the students studying in that school and at the same time takes into account the possibilities of the framework, the teaching staff working in the school. In fact, each school compulsorily offers two lists of velectives, one for learning other languages and the other includes four categories of so-

called free electives that are offered by the school depending on the interests of the students and the possibilities of the school.

The list of languages includes so-called second foreign languages (German, French, Italian and Russian), the Albanian language is offered to students attending lessons in Macedonian, Turkish, Serbian and Bosnian.

This list applies only to students from grades VI to IX, the school has the duty to provide conditions so that the language chosen in grade VI can be developed until the end of primary education.

It is recommended that in bilingual and trilingual schools, the learning of other foreign languages is carried out in "mixed" groups of students from different languages of instruction. In this way, the school can offer students to choose from several foreign languages and at the same time, through joint learning, acquire intercultural competences.

2. Categories of elective subjects

Elective subjects in primary education in our country are divided into four categories:

1. Elective subject for expanding/deepening the teaching content of compulsory subjects (mathematical-logical reasoning, programming, painting/drawing, cultural history, sexual education, etc.),
2. Elective subjects to support students' interests that are not part of the teaching subjects (photography, gardening/horticulture, theater workshop, dance, cooking, sculpture, carving, modelling),
3. Elective course to support the personal and social development of students (life skills education, multicultural workshop)
4. Elective subjects with a sports-recreational character (football, basketball, handball, volleyball, table tennis, mountaineering, yoga, pilates, cycling).

Free elective subjects are offered to students from grades IV to IX (from grades I to III the elective subject is realized in the form of free time or free activities). The list of free subjects may change from one period to another in the primary school in order to follow the age changes in the interests of the students and the possibilities of the educational staff involved in classroom and subject teaching. Each school is obliged to offer at least three elective subjects in each of the four categories highlighted in the educational period. The exception is schools with a small number of students, in which the list of optional subjects may be more limited, in agreement with the students, namely their parents (Concept for primary education).

3. Characteristics of elective subjects

3.1 Free elective subjects are included: Elective subjects are for all students, without distinction. The only criterion for the inclusion of students in an elective subject is their interest, regardless of gender, ethnicity, abilities, socio-economic status, health status, success in compulsory subjects. Bearing in mind that during their realization there is an open space for respecting the learning style and speed in learning as well as the progress of each student, free elective courses should be a support for students with special educational needs, as well as students who are talented in different fields.

It is of particular importance that the learning activities within the subjects with free choice are oriented towards students and harmonized with their individual needs, with full respect for the differences between students. This provides an opportunity for each student to recognize and

develop their skills, potential and knowledge to the maximum. At the same time, such an approach contributes to the development of students' self-confidence, but also to believe that their abilities are not given once and for all and that they can develop by working on themselves. Such an attitude towards their abilities helps students to set realistic goals that are consistent with their characteristics and abilities and not to give up easily when faced with difficulties in achieving the set goals.

The organization of free elective subjects encourages the mixing of students of different years within the same educational period. The main benefits of such an approach are that it enables the learning of the "younger" students from the "older" ones through mutual cooperation and the development of social responsibility between the "older" students in relation to the "younger".

3.2 Elective subjects promote gender equality: Many free electives can promote gender equality by excluding explicit gender stereotypes from their content and including content that provides positive role models for both boys and girls and calls for a critical approach to gender inequality. In other words, whenever possible, free electives should be used to point out the negative consequences of rigid adherence to gender norms, expectations, and roles, and that gender/sex should not be the basis for differential evaluation and power.

In addition, among the free elective courses offered there should be those that are at least partially engaged in gaining knowledge that gender norms and roles are not fixed, and that gender stereotypes can lead to serious individual and social consequences, the most problematic of which is the high prevalence of gender-based violence. It is expected that such cases, through the content shown, will enable the construction of a negative attitude towards all types of gender discrimination, including discrimination based on sexual orientation.

3.3 Free elective courses develop students' intercultural competences: The school should use free electives to encourage the development of intercultural competences in students and to promote the multicultural / multiethnic character of our country. One approach in that direction is to offer courses that include multicultural content and thus provide knowledge about the similarities and differences in the cultures of the different ethnic communities living in our country. Another approach is to organize the implementation of free electives (at least half of those offered) in a way that ensures interaction between students learning in different languages of instruction. The third approach is a combination of the two previous ones - the realization of free electives that include multicultural content can be done through interaction between students from different languages of instruction.

3.4 Free elective courses are as important as compulsory courses: School leadership and teachers must be committed to the implementation of free elective subjects with the same commitment as compulsory subjects. Teachers need to strengthen their competences to implement free electives, especially when it comes to those outside their formal education. For all free elective subjects that belong to fields that are not covered by the subjects they teach, teachers must have additional affinities and knowledge for the field to which the subject refers, but also appropriate skills for the realization of classes in these subjects through the application of modern approaches, based on student-oriented activities.

III. Methodological framework

1. Research subject

The subject of this research is the influence of elective subjects on the psycho-physical development of students, the way of realization and their choice.

2. The purpose of the research

Our goal in this research is to prove how much the elective subjects influence the development of the students or are they simply superficial activities, how the selection of the elective subjects is done, the representation of the students in the activities planned within the lessons, etc.

3. Research tasks

In order to investigate the issue of the influence of elective courses on the development of students, several tasks must be carried out:

- Theoretical analysis of elective courses, their implementation, impact on student development
- Conducting a survey with teachers
- Interpretation of research results

4. Methods

- Method of theoretical analysis
- Descriptive method

5. Techniques

The technique that we will use in this research is the survey, and the instrument for its realization is the questionnaire

6. Hypotheses

The main hypothesis in this research is that elective courses have a positive effect on the psycho-physical development of students, while the auxiliary hypotheses are:

H1. The schools have a framework for the implementation of elective courses

H2. Their selection is based on categories

H3. Teachers are committed to the implementation of free elective courses

H4. The teachers are prepared for the implementation of elective courses

7. Variables

The dependent variable in this research is the influence of elective courses on the psycho-physical development of students, while the independent variable is the preparation of teachers for the implementation of elective courses, the consideration of students for the selection of elective courses.

III. Analysis and interpretation of the results

Based on the research conducted on the topic, teachers' responses vary from one another. This study included 70 teachers from urban and rural primary schools in our country. The teaching experience of participants in this research was diverse: 25% had less than 5 years of experience, 27% had 5–10 years, 22% had 11–20 years, and 25% had over 20 years of experience. Elective

subjects in primary school begin from grade IV up to grade IX; however, the number of respondents in this research, specifically the dominant responses, came from teachers teaching in grades IV and V, respectively 50%.

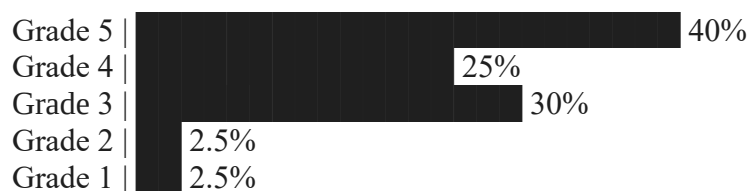
To the question of how well schools are equipped with conditions for implementing elective subjects, 35% of respondents stated that schools are very well equipped, 55% said they are poorly equipped, and 10% declared that they are not equipped at all.



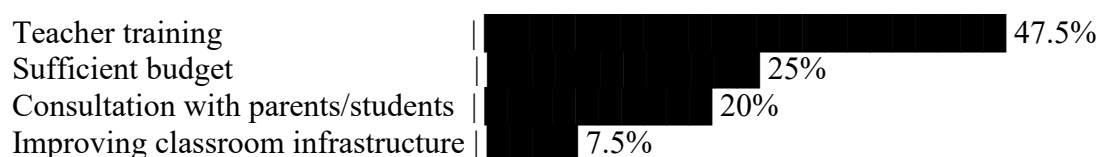
For elective subjects to be effective and aligned with students' interests and development, the opinions of both students and parents should be included in the selection process. However, teachers' responses to the question *"To what extent are students' and teachers' opinions included in the selection of elective subjects?"* were as follows: **Completely 20%, partially 60%, and not at all 20%.** This response, in a way, provides an overview indicating that the effectiveness of elective subjects would be greater if students' opinions were taken more into consideration, as this reflects their interest in specific subjects and their willingness to engage with them appropriately.



In response to the question of whether elective subjects influence students' skills, creativity, and psycho-physical development, teachers provided ratings on a scale from 1 to 5, as follows:



Based on these data, we understand that elective subjects have an impact on students' development. Therefore, it is both reasonable and necessary that the elective subjects offered in our schools align with students' needs and preferences, in order to have the most effective possible influence on them. Regarding the question of how supported teachers feel by the school administration in implementing elective subjects, 55% of teachers stated that they do receive support from the school administration. For elective subjects to be implemented properly and effectively by teachers, it is important to take several measures, such as providing teacher training for the delivery of elective subjects. Teachers' responses regarding necessary measures were as follows:



Conclusions and recommendations

Electives have an important role in the psycho-physical development of students as they give them the opportunity to follow their individual interests, talents and abilities. Through these subjects, students better develop mental, creative and social skills, increase self-confidence and motivation to learn, and improve emotional well-being. The inclusion and appropriate choice of elective subjects contributes significantly to the formation of a healthy student prepared for the challenges of the future. From the results obtained from the teacher survey, we conclude that:

- Schools should offer more elective courses so that students can choose according to their interests and abilities,
- Teachers should encourage the active participation of students in elective subjects and use creative teaching methods,
- Parents must cooperate with the school to guide students in choosing subjects that contribute to their overall development,
- To increase cooperation between the school and other institutions to enrich the content of elective subjects,
- Provide additional learning resources (books, digital tools) to increase the quality of teaching,
- To create a supportive and safe school environment that encourages creativity, active participation and the development of individual student skills.

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