

ATTITUDES OF PARENTS OF LOWER PRIMARY GRADES CHILDREN TOWARDS SCHOOL EXCURSIONS

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(Received: January 2022; in revised form: February 2022)

ABSTRACT

The aim of the research is to determine the attitude of parents of children in the lower grades of primary school towards school excursions. The theoretical part of the article presents the importance of excursions, as well as the role of parents in the entire process of organising excursions, while the second part of the article presents the results of the research. 208 parents participated, 39.9% being fathers and 60.1% being mothers. Data was collected with an instrument created for the purposes of this research and was analysed in detail and presented using a descriptive method. Parents' attitudes are positively oriented towards excursions, noting their pedagogical significance for the development of the child's entire personality. The role of parents in the process of preparation and organisation of the excursion is of great importance, and it is necessary that future research pays more attention to the parental function in all phases and flows of the excursion.

Keywords: excursion, parents, family, school, teacher

INTRODUCTION

School excursions are an integral part of institutional upbringing and education. Excursions represent "a bridge between formal and informal education and an indispensable part of the school teaching process" (Anđelković, 2012, p. 396). An excursion is a special educational segment that students are especially looking forward to, because it means leaving the classroom and relaxing outside the school building:

"An excursion is a form of educational work which contributes to the realization of the plan, program and goals of education and upbringing, and which is realized outside the facilities of educational institutions for one to three days a year, in accordance with age, curriculum and program for excursions" (Stanić-Jovanović, 2015, p. 125).

When organising a school excursion, it is important that in addition to fun and entertainment, children learn and see something new. School excursions must meet the criteria of the pedagogical aspect of expediency. A well-organised school excursion requires teacher preparation, site selection, preparation of students and their parents, harmonisation of travel with the curriculum, as well as student participation regardless of material or physical condition (Behrendt & Franklin, 2014). The authors clearly state the relevant elements needed for a good organisation of excursions. Leaving the classroom and spending time in the natural environment has a positive effect on the learning process in children and must be based on the following principles: apply scientific methods, activate students, use their own experience, integrate knowledge, and encourage and support social learning (Zoldosova & Prokop, 2006).

Excursions enrich children with knowledge about various activities, contribute to the development of autonomy, positive social behaviour, aesthetics, mutual acquaintance, and socialising (Trnavac & Đorđević, 2013). Leaving the classroom and implementing teaching and extracurricular activities outside the school building contributes to a better attitude of children towards the environment and leads to the development of environmental education in children (Patonah et al., 2018). Thus, the excursion has many positive educational effects on children that lead their development to valid psychosocial progress.

While studying excursions, authors consider and present different aspects, so some research focuses on the role of excursions in the subject of geography (Jolldashi, 2017). The results of research show, for instance, that teachers notice the importance of excursions in geography education and that they conduct one to two excursions a year (Munday, 2008). Also, authors point out that the excursion is a method that can be used in various sciences and disciplines (Astalin & Chauhan, 2018). So, excursions are such a method that provides many benefits in learning various subjects. The results of research show that the excursion has a positive effect on the acquisition of knowledge, because the students showed better results on the exam after the excursion than before the excursion (Borić, Jančić & Hus, 2018). Other research considers and presents the diseases and injuries of students on excursions (Shaw, Harding & Leggat, 2014). There are many aspects that authors approach while considering the excursion. However, in this paper we will try to present the attitudes of parents towards school excursions from a pedagogical perspective and contribute to this very important segment.

The role of parents in the process of organising and preparing children for excursions is very important. The key actors in excursions are parents, because due to the age of the children, they mostly participate in the decision-making process (Kotoula et al., 2021). As it is about children in the younger grades of primary school, the parental function is to prepare the child for the trip, introduce the child to the course and manner of engagement with the excursion and frame the child's perception to experience the excursion positively and pleasantly. The parent should give the child guidelines on how to behave, be disciplined and follow the teacher,

not to be separated from the group due to potential risks and not knowing the location they visit, to keep their own things and take care of them, as well as to respect hygienic practices. For many children, the excursion can be the first separation from their parents, which requires additional commitment of parents and preparation of children in the emotional segment. A democratically oriented parent, as the most positive educational style, will try to prepare the child for the excursion and the process of separation with a lot of empathy, understanding and warmth. Also, parents should include children in the stage of preparation, which includes going shopping, packing, and choosing things that the child will bring, and many other activities associated with preparing children for the trip.

The cooperation of teachers and parents is especially important during the preparation, organisation, and implementation of the excursion. Parents should be thoroughly informed about all the details of the excursion through parent meetings or individual conversations (Miljatović, 2016). Teachers should be in contact with the parents and provide them with the necessary information (whether they have arrived at a certain location, whether the child is OK, how they passed on the way, whether there are any problems, or when a return is planned). Thus, a school excursion implies a range of conditions that must be met by the organisation and the preparation for implementation.

METHOD

School excursions have a spectrum of benefits for children's development and make the process of formal education more interesting for children. The subject of this research is directed towards the attitude of parents of younger children towards school excursions.

The *research tasks* are:

- To determine the views of parents on the importance of school excursions for children's development;
- Ask parents if their children are going on excursions;
- Examine whether parents include children in the process of preparation for the excursion;
- Determine if the teachers inform the parents about all the details related to the excursion;
- Determine how parents evaluate their previous experience of school excursions.

Research hypotheses:

- It is assumed that the views of parents on the importance of excursions are positive in terms of child development;
- It is assumed that parents send their children on excursions;

- It is assumed that parents include children in the process of preparation for the excursion;
- It is assumed that the teachers inform the parents about all the details related to the excursion;
- It is assumed that parents positively evaluate the previous experience of school excursions.

A descriptive method was used in the research. Survey techniques and scaling techniques were used. The instrument used was created for the purposes of this research. The obtained data was quantitatively processed by descriptive statistics. Statistical data processing was performed in IBM SPSS Statistics v23. 208 parents of children in the lower grades of primary school (first, second, third and fourth grade) from the central part of the Republic of Serbia participated. Referring to the category of the gender of parents, 39.9% of participants were fathers and 60.1% were mothers. 6.7% of the interviewed parents did not finish primary school, 26.4% of the parents had finished primary school, 41.8% of the parents had completed high school and 25% of the interviewed parents had completed higher education. Of the total number of respondents, 71.2% live in urban areas, while 28.8% live in rural areas.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After the theoretical review and the aspects of the methodological framework, in this part we will present the attitudes of parents about school excursions. The results will be presented in tables and figures.

The impact of school excursions on children's development

As stated in the theoretical part, the school excursion as an integral part of the process of upbringing and education implies many positive aspects for children's development. Children's independence is reflected in the fact that they go on a group trip without the presence of a parent. They are surrounded by their peers and under the supervision of teachers. Excursions are extremely important in building social competencies in children. Also, leaving the classroom and school building, as well as a different way of studying is more interesting, unusual, and creative for children. In this way, one gets out of the usual, everyday activities that children are used to and is given the opportunity to travel, have fun, socialise, and learn something new. A well-planned, organised, and materialised excursion provides children with the opportunity to learn in a group, in a different environment through active participation and fun.

Table 1. Parents' views on the importance of excursions for children's development

Parents' views	M
Excursions contribute to relaxation and rest in children.	4.67
Excursions provide an opportunity for children to socialise with peers.	4.66
Excursions combine teaching and extracurricular activities.	4.57
Excursions contribute to the development of independence in children.	4.52
I think that excursions give children the opportunity to learn new content.	4.47
I think that excursions are important in the process of education and upbringing of children.	4.46

Table 1 shows the agreement of parents with the given statements. On a five-point Likert-type assessment scale, parents presented their degree of agreement on modalities: 1 - I do not agree at all; 2 - I do not agree; 3 - Neither agree nor disagree; 4 - I agree; 5 - I totally agree. Based on the calculated arithmetic mean (M), we notice a very high agreement among the parents. Parents believe that excursions are important in the process of raising and educating children, that they combine teaching and extracurricular activities, give children the opportunity to learn new content, socialise with peers, develop independence, and relax and rest. Thus, parents' views on the impact of school excursions are highly appreciative, which tells us that parents are aware of the positive impact of excursions on child development, which confirms the hypothesis.

Do parents send their children on excursions?

Going on an excursion, as shown in the theoretical part, requires a lot of effort around planning and organisation. Teachers have a great responsibility in how excursions are organised within school activities. They must pay attention to the preparation of both children and their parents. Good preparation and good organisation are extremely important. If the excursion is well organised, then there is no fear that there will be problems during its course. So, teachers prepare both children and parents, while parents must dedicate themselves to preparing their children for the journey.

Excursions can be a significant financial expense for many families, because, in addition to paying for the excursion itself, there are costs related to the preparation of children (clothes, food, drinks, equipment, hygiene items, etc.). In addition to the above, it is necessary for the child to bring money that will be the child's pocket money. In addition to all the parental engagements, we wanted to find out if parents send their children on excursions.

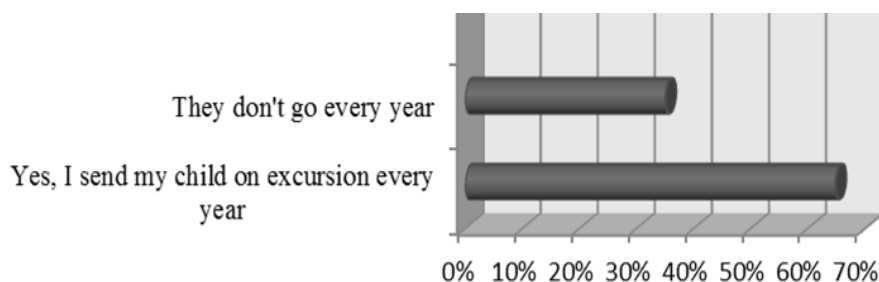


Fig. 1. Parents' responses regarding the question about sending their children on excursions

The data in Figure 1 shows that most parents send their children on an excursion every year, while another group of parents answered that the child does not go on an excursion every year, which partially validates the hypothesis. There were no negative answers. Then, using the question in the instrument, we offered parents statements aimed at potential weaknesses of excursions. Many parents agree with the statement that excursions are expensive ($M = 4.53$); parents believe that families with low socio-economic status cannot afford to have children go on excursions ($M = 4.63$); during excursions, children are more focused on fun and entertainment than learning and learning something new ($M = 4.32$).

Therefore, for the excursion to be educationally effective, it is extremely important that all students are involved. A potential obstacle occurs in families with low financial income, especially if there are several school-age children in the family for whom it is necessary to allocate funds for the excursion and its preparation. When organising an excursion, examples of good practice show that in these cases, joint fundraising is organised so that all students can participate equally. In this way, cooperation, empathy, and understanding are nurtured among school actors, as well as among children and parents.

Parents involving children in the process of preparation for the excursion

Due to the many benefits that school excursions include, it is very important that every child goes on a trip and has an extremely beautiful experience. Especially if they go on an excursion for the first time, children can be significantly scared of the new and unknown that awaits them. That is why the parental role in preparing children for an excursion is crucial. If the parent shows and expresses fear, nervousness and panic around the children, there will be negative emotions in the children themselves. Parents must not transmit negative emotions to their children, especially if it is the first separation or the first excursion of the child. The parent should involve

the child in the entire process of preparation, purchase, selection, and packaging of things. Also, the parent will display a pleasant attitude accompanied by empathy and warmth when referring to going on an excursion and framing the activity as a beautiful experience that the child will remember. Positive experiences of the parent's own field trips can be helpful in preparing children. In this way, children will listen to their parents and through example can imagine what awaits them and reduce the fear (if any) of going on a trip. The next research task was to examine whether parents include children in the process of preparation for the excursion.

Table 2. Parents' answers about involving children in the process of preparing for the excursion

Parents' answers	M
I involve the child in the process of packing for the excursion.	4.67
I agree with the child about what we will pack for the excursion	4.57
I advise the child on how to behave on excursions.	4.51
Together with the child, I go shopping before the excursion.	4.40

Table 2 shows the mean value of parents' responses to claims aimed at involving children in the process of preparation for the excursion. The average value of the answers is very high and positive. Therefore, we notice that the parents agree with the children about what they will pack for the excursion. They go shopping together with the child before the excursion, they include the child in the process of packing for the excursion, advise the child on how to behave on the excursion. The parents' answers indicate the commitment and involvement of the children in the process of preparation for the excursion, the hypothesis being thus considered confirmed.

Familiarisation of parents by the teacher with the details related to the excursion

The teacher is an important role in the entire process of teaching and extracurricular activities of the modern age. The process of planning an excursion requires a lot of work from the teacher regarding the preparation of the plan, preparation of the programme, preparation of all actors, as well as the evaluation itself (Gognjavec, 2022). Therefore, when it comes to excursions, the role of the teacher requires great commitment from the preparation phase, through the excursion phase and the evaluation phase (Kačavenda-Radić, 2013). For the next research task, we tried to determine whether the teachers acquaint the parents with all the necessary details regarding the excursion.

Positive views of parents are also present in this research task, the hypothesis being confirmed. From the presented answers, we notice that in this group of claims there is a slightly lower agreement than other claims, regarding the claim that teachers are willing to give answers to parents to all questions concerning all segments of the excursion. Teachers must be aware

of the seriousness of their role in the process of organising and running the excursion and give answers to parents or direct them to other school actors (principal, professional associates, main organiser) who can help them and give certain information. Thus, the understanding of parents by teachers in every educational segment, including excursions, is a very important factor in building good mutual relations. Therefore, the parents state that they receive all the necessary information from the teachers regarding the planning, organisation, and realisation of the excursion.

Table 3. Parents' familiarity with the details of the excursion based on information provided by the teacher

Parents' familiarity with the details of the excursion	M
Teachers inform parents on how to pay for an excursion.	4.73
The teachers introduce us to the excursion plan.	4.56
Teachers give us information about the places and institutions that will be visited on the excursion.	4.52
Teachers cooperate with parents during the organisation and implementation of the excursion.	4.42
Teachers are willing to give parents answers to all questions about the excursion.	4.16

How do parents evaluate their experiences of excursions so far?

Previous experiences of parents largely determine their views, attitudes and opinions about the excursion as an important form of educational work. If parents have had a negative experience in organising, planning and implementing excursions, they can contribute to their negative view of excursions. Reasons for bad experiences can be as diverse as: poor cooperation and poor communication with the teacher and/or other actors involved in organising the excursion; poor preparation and poor organisation of the excursion; dissatisfaction with the way the excursion is managed and many others. Negative experiences of parents about the excursion can lead to the parents not agreeing to send their child on an excursion again. That is why it is very important during the entire process of the excursion, including all its phases, that all actors act together and in unison, agreeing and respecting opinions and suggestions. Through joint work, exchange of opinions and active participation, a good and well-designed, organised, and accomplished excursion can be expected.

That is why our last research task was to determine how parents evaluate their previous experience of school excursions. Therefore, we wanted to determine the satisfaction of parents with the current way of planning, organising and concluding excursions in the schools that their children attended. Parents were offered the following answers: unsatisfactory, satisfactory, and exceptional/excellent.

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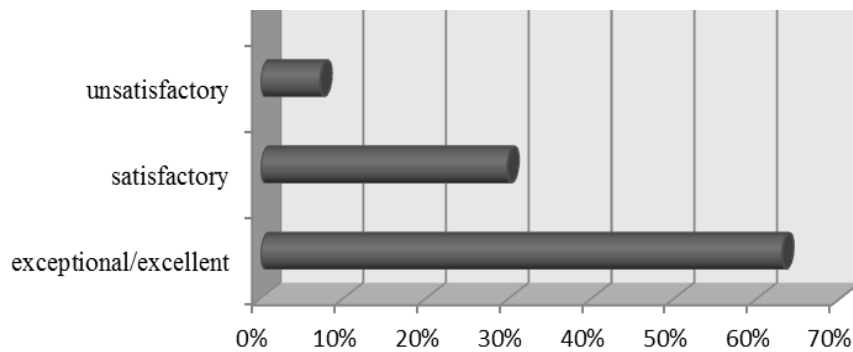


Fig. 2. Parents' satisfaction with school excursions so far

The distribution of answers is graphically shown and demonstrates that parents evaluate the previous experience with excursions as follows: 63% of parents evaluate the previous experience as excellent, 29.8% of parents evaluate the previous experience as satisfactory and 7.2% of parents evaluate the previous experience as unsatisfactory. The hypothesis has been partially confirmed. Based on the calculated one-factor new test, it was shown that there are no statistically significant differences between the parents' previous experience of excursions and variables of gender, environment, and parents' level of education.

CONCLUSIONS

Nowadays way of formal upbringing and education directs attention towards learning and acquiring knowledge outside the school walls, where excursions are an extremely favourable form of work. Modern concepts draw attention to the fact that working in nature is a very important aspect of the overall development of children. In order for the excursions to be pedagogically effective for the child, it is necessary to approach their planning, organisation and accomplishment thoroughly. When considering the problem of excursions, the literature deals with various aspects, such as the impact of excursions on students' learning outcomes, the application of excursions in teaching and the teachers' roles. The focus is mainly on the school environment and the learning and teaching process.

With this article, we attempted to showcase the attitude of parents of children in the lower grades of primary school towards excursions. Interpreted results indicate very positive attitudes of parents towards all segments of the excursion. Subsequent research could focus in more detail on involving parents in the planning, organisation, and implementation of excursions. Also, future research can draw attention to the positive aspects of excursions, and the difficulties that arise when planning and organising excursions according to teachers and parents. Considering the attitudes and suggestions of children about excursions is another idea for further research.

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