

THE ROLE OF EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES IN IMPROVING THE EDUCATIONAL FUNCTION OF PRIMARY SCHOOL²

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Abstract

The paper presents the results of a research that aimed to examine the opinions of teachers and students of the final grade of primary school on the role of extracurricular activities in improving the education function of school. The research was conducted on a sample of 556 participants, 247 of which were teachers and 309 were primary school students in the Republic of Serbia. Descriptive research method was used in this research, as well as a Questionnaire for examining the opinions of teachers and students on the effect of extracurricular activities in achieving the education role of primary school. Frequencies and percentages, mean with corresponding standard deviation were used as statistical procedures. Differences were tested using Student's t-test. The obtained research results show a more detailed picture of extracurricular activities and their benefit to improving the education role of school from the perspective of teachers and students of older school age in primary schools in the Republic of Serbia. As an insufficiently used type of school's educational activity, extracurricular activities require teacher support in terms of greater engagement, accessibility, involvement and affirmation of students in order to provide conditions for improving the education role of school. By taking part in extracurricular activities, students decide to spend part of their free time at school. School should recognize that as a possibility for additional educational activities. Research findings can serve for a deeper analysis of this very important pedagogical issue.

Key words: *extracurricular activities, aspects of educational activities, educational role of school, teacher, student.*

INTRODUCTION

Understanding the education process and creating pedagogical preconditions for educational activities in school is necessary for proper organization of institutionalized education and its improvement. School can achieve its educational function by showing readiness and willingness to respond to students' needs, as well as the needs of parents and teachers. As an educational institution, school is characterized by: purposefulness – there are goals that are to

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be achieved; complexity - consists of elements that can be identified and interconnected with the set of targeted activities; and overview of goals and structure in relation to the environment (Milosavljević Đukić, Bogavac, Radovanović (2020), according to: Dymara, 2009: 42).

The perception of the school environment depends on how students experience the school environment, which is determined by various socio-emotional relations and organizational structure. The branched structure of school activities offers a higher level of satisfaction with school among students and development of favourable relationships with peers and teachers (Milosavljević Đukić, Bogavac, Mikić (2021), according to: Marsh & Kleitman, 2002).

Well-established education activities encompass establishing such relationships in school that would increase students' satisfaction with school. Extracurricular activities encourage the child's potentials and capacities through voluntary participation and develop a sense of belonging to a peer group based on common interests.

The importance of extracurricular activities can be seen in acquiring pragmatic and empirical application of acquired knowledge, development of social relations, as well as in the sports and recreation. As a variety of activities, they have pedagogical foundation and they are interesting to students while at the same time acquiring knowledge of a certain subjects, and enable the overview of the significance of education through increasing the educational achievements of students. What is most remembered in adulthood, and related to extracurricular activities, is getting out of the classroom routine (Pace, Tesi, 2004).

By studying the literature that analyzes school as an educational environment, it can be said that in this segment of educational activities it is insufficiently researched because it requires empirical evidence in the form of perception of teachers and students about the organizational structure of extracurricular activities. However, the perception of the school as an educational environment is a subjective perception of the environment and personal characteristics of the peer group context of student development.

BACKGROUND

School is one of the main factors in adolescents' lives and their perception of school directly affects their overall well-being and satisfaction with life, better academic results, better school behaviour, more adaptable attitudes and beliefs about school (e.g., educational self-efficacy) and better mental and physical health (Milosavljević Đukić, Bogavac, Mikić (2021), according to: Tian, Tian & Huebner, 2016).

As an educational environment, school strives to take responsibility for students' leisure time and to "use" it for "extended" educational activities to encourage personal and social development of students. The organization of extracurricular activities guided by individual interests and free choice, offers the possibility of developing personal potential of students through various activities. By participating in extracurricular activities, students expand their social experience by interacting with peers (Vukic & Zrilic, 2016).

Peer context of development, leisure time and interests are seen as the developmental needs of students, which school should respond to through educational activities using the resources provided by extracurricular activities. Students do not like rigidity, strict boundaries between

extracurricular activities and regular classes and between their certain forms. The potential of extracurricular activities is recognized in diversity, freedom of choice, content creation, various forms of work, which makes school more flexible and sensitive to the differences that exist among students. With their content and style that are in line with the interests, preferences and abilities of students, extracurricular activities are a very important factor in the education of students (Marsh & Kleitman, 2002; Lawhorn, 2008; Lunenburg, 2010; Vidulin & Papak, 2018; Coker, Martinez et al., 2018, Narkabilova, 2021).

The results of a research conducted by Kravchenko & Nygård (Kravchenko & Nygård, 2022) on the impact of extracurricular activities on academic achievement and student satisfaction with school as an educational environment show that extracurricular activities are useful for academic results only if young people participate in activities that meet their special needs, and that benefits depend on the quality of activities. Negative rate of student participation in extracurricular activities in school occurs when they are integrated into the formal education structure, and when they do not differ from regular school activities that are based on curriculum, which is very standardized and highly differentiated (Kravchenko & Nygård, 2022).

Student participation in extracurricular activities encourages the development of their skills, inclinations and abilities, allows for expressive actions by giving students the opportunity to explore their personal talents and interests and formulate their identity (Fredericks & Eccles, 2006). Extracurricular activities provide a structure of students' free time, ensure positive interpersonal relationships (Gilman et al., 2004), and the formation of a positive self-image and the development of supportive attitude towards school (Durlak et al., 2010). Involvement of students in extracurricular activities is important in developing strengths and abilities to avoid undesirable behaviour, in reducing juvenile delinquency, school misconduct and negative peer influence leading to alcohol and drug abuse, in improving student achievement, reducing student absenteeism etc.

The quality of extracurricular activities depends on a diverse offer tailored to the different needs and interests of students, as well as on motivating as many students as possible to get involved in extracurricular activities and on achieving continuity in their implementation (Šaljić, 2015). The responsibility for the affirmation of extracurricular activities, as well as the possibility of using interesting learning material belongs to the teacher.

Teachers' content planning and implementation often influence what impact extracurricular activities will have on students. Connecting extracurricular activities with classroom concepts implies that teachers experientially adjust learning activities in order to stimulate interest, motivation and students' desire to research and gain practical experience, which can further improve learning in a formal context. If, with the help of some types of extracurricular activities, classroom instruction is enhanced with pedagogical education strategies, students will better understand learning content, be more actively involved in the learning process, take responsibility, self-learning, etc. (Jurčić, 2015).

In an empirically-based research, Matuszak (Matuszak et al., 2019) presents a teaching model that instructs teachers how to perform extracurricular activities. The efficiency of the model was measured through the following criteria: how familiar teachers are with the content of extracurricular activities, whether there are preconditions to carry out extracurricular activities at school and skills to organize extracurricular activities. As a result of an extensive overview of the published empirical evidence, the abovementioned author mentions the following main

categories in the common axis of categorization of the criteria: (a) the level of knowledge about the content of extracurricular activities; (b) knowledge of the conditions to carry out extracurricular activities in school; (c) skills in choosing forms of extracurricular activities; d) organizational skills; e) skills to write summaries and activity scenarios; and f) planning skills (Matuszak et al., 2019).

The educational aspect of extracurricular activities includes the organizational model of educational activities performed by teachers where active and personally oriented approaches are used, humane style of communication is established, professional and pedagogical activities are organized to create preconditions for students' involvement in various extracurricular activities (Tazhbayeva, 2015).

METHOD

The main goal of the research is to examine the opinions of teachers and students of the eighth grade on the role of extracurricular activities in achieving the educational function of primary school. In accordance with the goal, the following research tasks were set:

1. Identify the opinions of teachers on various aspects of educational activities in primary schools;
2. Identify the opinions of teachers about the organizational structure of extracurricular activities, as well as the extent to which school meets the interests and needs of students in different areas of extracurricular activities;
3. Examine the opinions of eighth grade students on various aspects of organizational structure of extracurricular activities in primary school;
4. Explore the differences in the opinion of eighth grade students about the activities with a dominant educational component, with regard to the independent variable "participation in extracurricular activities".

The main research hypothesis was set as follows: It is assumed that teachers and students have recognized the benefit of extracurricular activities in achieving the educational function of primary school.

The research was conducted on a sample of teachers and students that included 556 participants, 247 of which were teachers and 309 were students of the final grade of primary schools in Serbia. As for the teachers, statistical data show that fifty of them (21.7%) declared as males, and 180 declared as females (72.9%), while seventeen teachers did not declare their gender. As for the eighth-grade students, 167 (54.8%) participants were female, and 138 (45.2%) were male, while four participants (1.3%) did not answer the question about gender.

Descriptive research method was used in this research. For the purposes of the research, a questionnaire was designed to examine the opinions of teachers and students on the benefit of extracurricular activities in achieving the educational function of school. The questionnaire consists of three subscales that showed excellent reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.876 - Cronbach's Alpha = 0.921). The first subscale includes teachers' opinions on various aspects of educational activities in primary school, operationalized through categorical issues such as: preconditions for successful implementation of learning objectives and teachers' self-assessment of their educational activities in primary school. The 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) examined the level of agreement with items related to: teachers' opinion on elements of organizational structure of educational activities in

primary school and teachers' assessment on aspect: achievement of educational activities of schools. Another subscale included teachers' opinions on the organizational structure of extracurricular activities and how the school meets the interests and needs of students in different types of extracurricular activities, operationalized through categorical issues such as: teachers' assessments on the aspect - organizational structure of extracurricular activities. In the second subscale, teachers used 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) to express their views on how much the school meets the interests and needs of students in various areas of extracurricular activities. The third subscale was designed for the needs of eighth grade students on various aspects of the organizational structure of extracurricular activities in primary school. The content of the third subscale was operationalized through categorical issues related to the inclusion of students in extracurricular activities in primary school and the reasons why students' chose certain extracurricular activities that are organized in school. On the 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), students expressed the degree of satisfaction with certain activities organized in their school, as well as their view of the extent to which the school meets students' interests and needs in these areas.

Frequencies and percentages, as well as mean with corresponding standard deviation were used in data analysis. Differences were tested by using Student's t-test. IBM SPSS ver. 24 was used to analyse the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In accordance with the goal aimed at examining the opinions of teachers and eighth grade students on the benefits of extracurricular activities in improving the educational function of primary school, we highlight certain opinions of the survey participants, teachers and students separately, where statistical significance in differences was found. In the result interpretation, the results obtained by teacher survey are presented first, followed by the results obtained by the survey of students of the older grades of primary school, within the defined research tasks.

The first research task was to examine the opinions of teachers on various aspects of the educational activities in primary school within the following aspects: elements of the organizational structure of educational activities of school; realization of educational activities in primary school; preconditions for successful realization of learning objectives and self-assessment of teachers about educational activities in primary school.

Teachers' assessments of the above elements of the organizational structure of educational activities of primary school, i.e., the extent to which they provide conditions for the realization of the educational function of school are as follows: teachers firstly emphasized the importance of regular classes for the realization of the educational function of school (4.51 ± 0.84), followed by the role of visits, trips, field trips (4.23 ± 0.95), homeroom classes (4.20 ± 0.91), the role of extracurricular activities (3.82 ± 1.04), supplementary and additional classes (3.67 ± 1.10) and lastly student organization, Student Parliament (3.41 ± 1.31). The results of teachers' assessments show that the educational function of school heavily relies on regular classes, while the significance of extracurricular activities received a lower score.

When we look at the above-mentioned activities, teachers claim that they regularly organize supplementary and additional classes (4.77 ± 0.45), exchange opinions with colleagues (4.60 ± 0.57), organize extracurricular activities (4.52 ± 0.89) and collaborate with professional associates in school (pedagogue, psychologist) (4.46 ± 0.73), and least often cooperate with social factors (3.63 ± 0.88). Teachers firstly single out those activities that are directly related

to teaching activities, followed by other activities related to education: I regularly improve my skills in school and outside of it (4.37 ± 0.96), I cooperate with student family (4.34 ± 0.78) and with social factors (3.63 ± 0.88).

In order to successfully realize learning objectives in school, teachers estimate that the most useful learning material is related to everyday life (34.4%), followed by well-planned learning materials (31.6%) and thematically organized homeroom classes (31.6%). Moreover, teachers claim that, in order for the teaching process to be successful, there have to be diverse extracurricular activities (28.7%), which they claim is more important than the official instruction on how to teach the course content (25.5%) and also than the didactic-methodological instruction for lesson planning and programming (17.0%). Teachers believe that didactic-methodological articulation of the lesson (6.1%) is the least important for the realization of learning objectives, followed by the course methodology (4.9%).

As for the organization of class activities, 147 (65.9%) teachers are of the opinion that learning activities primarily take place during regular classes; 54 (24.2%) teachers believe that homeroom classes are those where learning objectives are met; 16 (7.2%) teachers mentioned field trips and outdoor classes, and only six (2.7%) teachers carry out educational activities in extracurricular lessons.

The results of research related to the examination of teachers' opinions on various aspects of educational activities in primary school have shown that within the elements of the organizational structure of educational activities of school, teachers in their assessments give preference to regular teaching activities over extracurricular activities. They recognize the importance of extracurricular activities for the realization of educational activities in primary school, and single out various aspects of extracurricular activities as preconditions for successful realization of learning objectives, but they do not recognize them as factors in achieving the educational function of primary school. The results of the research are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Teachers' opinions on various aspects of primary school educational activities

N=247	
Elements of the organizational structure of the educational activities of school, M±SD (Min–Max)	
Regular lessons	4.51±0.84 (1 – 5)
visits, field trips, outdoor classes	4.23±0.95 (1 – 5)
Homeroom classes	4.20±0.91 (1 – 5)
extracurricular activities	3.82±1.04 (1 – 5)
supplementary and additional classes	3.67±1.10 (1 – 5)
Student Parliament	3.41±1.31 (1 – 5)
Teachers' opinion on the aspect: realization of educational activities of school, M±SD (Min–Max)	
I regularly teach supplementary and additional classes	4.77±0.45 (1 – 5)
I exchange opinions with colleagues	4.60±0.57 (1 – 5)
I organize extracurricular activities	4.52±0.89 (1 – 5)
I cooperate with professional associates in school (pedagogue, psychologist)	4.46±0.73 (1 – 5)
I regularly improve my skills in and out of school	4.37±0.96 (1 – 5)
I collaborate with student family	4.34±0.78 (1 – 5)
I cooperate with social factors	3.63±0.88 (1 – 5)
Teachers' opinion on the aspect: preconditions for successful realization of learning objectives, n (%)	

learning material is related to everyday life	85 (34.4)
well-planned learning materials	78 (31.6)
thematically organized homeroom classes	78 (31.6)
diverse extracurricular activities	71 (28.7)
official instruction on how to teach the course content	63 (25.5)
didactic-methodological instruction for lesson planning and programming	42 (17.0)
didactic-methodological articulation of the lesson	15 (6.1)
course methodology	12 (4.9)
Teachers' self-assessments of educational activities in primary school, n (%)	
regular classes	147 (65.9)
Homeroom classes	54 (24.2)
Field trips, outdoor classes	16 (7.2)
extracurricular activities	6 (2.7)

Abbreviations: M±SD (Min – Max) = Mean±Std. Deviation (Minimum – Maximum).

The second research task was to examine the opinion of teachers on the aspect of the organizational structure of extracurricular activities for the purpose of educating students and how the school meets the interests and needs of students in different areas of extracurricular activities.

Teachers' assessments of the elements of organizational structure success and the conditions that extracurricular activities should meet are as follows: in order to meet the educational function, extracurricular activities should be based on experimenting in order to enable students to develop their talents, according to most teachers (35.6%). Teachers further stated that extracurricular activities should be diverse in order to meet the interests of students (32.4%) and to help students acquire the social skills needed for effective interaction with peers and cooperative relationships (32.4%). Teachers also claimed that extracurricular activities should be organized at the suggestion of students through different types of cultural, musical, sports and similar activities (31.2%). A small percentage of teachers are of the opinion that it is necessary that the programs and contents of activities are designed based on student needs and together with them (29.1%) and to enable students to be included in the immediate social environment (21.1%). A low percentage of teachers believe that extracurricular activities should be organized by students choose their own activities (9.7%).

In order to modernize the program structure of educational activities outside of regular classes, teachers are expected to be able to achieve the set learning goals and objectives in this aspect of school activities. Teachers are of the opinion that the school mostly meets the interests of students in sports activities (4.48 ± 0.69), followed by literary (4.23 ± 0.68), humanitarian (4.18 ± 0.89) and music activities (4.04 ± 0.84). At a slightly lower score, there are art activities (3.97 ± 0.93), technical activities (3.95 ± 0.87), social activities (3.82 ± 0.93), while the school is least successful in meeting students' needs in regards to scientific and research activities (3.44 ± 0.99). Also, teachers' opinions indicate that activities that enable students to express personal preferences and abilities are under-represented (3.76 ± 0.91).

The results of the research show that teachers recognized the importance of a diverse offer of extracurricular activities in the organizational structure of primary school, which includes respecting age differences of students, their needs, abilities, knowledge, skills, interests, degree of independence. Teachers recognize the need to improve the quality of extracurricular activities to meet the interests and needs of students. In order to meet the educational function, extracurricular activities should be based on research and discovery in order to enable students

to develop their talents. Teachers are of the opinion that school mostly meets the interests of students in sports activities, and the least in activities that enable students to express personal preferences and abilities. The results of the research are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Teachers' opinions on the aspect of the organizational structure of extracurricular activities and the extent to which school meets the interests and needs of students in different areas of extracurricular activities

N=247	
Teachers' assessments on the aspect: organizational structure of extracurricular activities, n (%)	
They should be based on research and discovery to enable students to develop their talents	88 (35.6)
They should be diverse in order to meet the interests of students	80 (32.4)
They should help students acquire the social skills needed to interact effectively with peers and cooperate	80 (32.4)
They should be organized at the suggestion of students through different types of cultural, musical, sports and similar activities	77 (31.2)
Programs and content of the activities should be designed based on the needs of students and together with them	72 (29.1)
They should enable students to be included in the immediate social environment	52 (21.1)
They should be organized so that students are in a position to choose extracurricular activities	24 (9.7)
Teachers' assessments on the aspect: the extent to which school meets the interests and needs of students in different areas of extracurricular activities, M ± SD (Min – Max)	
sports activities	4.48±0.69 (1 – 5)
literary activities	4.23±0.68 (1 – 5)
humanitarian activities	4.18±0.89 (1 – 5)
musical activities	4.04±0.84 (1 – 5)
art activities	3.97±0.93 (1 – 5)
technical activities	3.95±0.87 (1 – 5)
social activities	3.82±0.93 (1 – 5)
personal preferences and abilities	3.76±0.91 (1 – 5)
scientific and research activities	3.44±0.99 (1 – 5)

Abbreviations: M±SD (Min – Max) = Mean±Std. Deviation (Minimum – Maximum).

The third research task was to examine the opinions of eighth-grade students on various aspects of educational aspect of extracurricular activities within the improvement of the educational function of primary school within the following: student participation in extracurricular activities; students' assessments of satisfaction with certain extracurricular activities that are organized in their school; students' opinion about the extent to which their school meets the interests and needs of students in these areas of extracurricular activities and what are the reasons why students choose certain extracurricular activities that are organized in primary school.

After the survey, out of the total number of participants (N = 309), 200 (64.7%) eighth-grade students did not enrol any extracurricular activities, while the other 109 (35.3%) students answered that they took part in some extracurricular activities.

The results of the assessment of satisfaction of eighth-grade students with the organization of certain activities in school show that students are most satisfied with activities related to the organization of visits, trips and field trip (4.26 ± 1.22), homeroom classes (4.20 ± 0.87) and regular classes (4.01 ± 0.99), followed by supplementary (3.66 ± 1.14) and additional (3.62 ±

1.35) classes, and they showed the least satisfaction in relation to the organization of extracurricular activities (3.52 ± 1.31) and the Student Parliament (3.16 ± 1.41).

Statistical data related to students' opinions on the extent to which the school meets the interests and needs of students in the field of extracurricular activities show the following: students are of the opinion that their school mostly meets the interests and needs of students in sports (4.33 ± 0.77). According to the students, the research findings related to other types of extracurricular activities are very similar and range in the following order: social (3.67 ± 1.39), humanitarian (3.66 ± 1.35), music (3.63 ± 1.36), art (3.42 ± 1.38), technical (3.41 ± 1.27), literary (3.37 ± 1.28) and scientific activities (3.37 ± 1.28). Students are of the opinion that the school least meets the needs of students in the field of personal skills and abilities (3.15 ± 1.26).

Statistical analysis of the obtained data, which refers to the reasons why eighth-grade students opt for certain extracurricular activities organized in primary school, showed that the largest number of students - 95 (31.3%) believe that extracurricular activities should be chosen by students themselves. Furthermore, students estimate that the reasons for opting for a particular extracurricular activity are as follows: 49 (16.1%) students believe that activities should be diverse and meet the interests of students, 43 (14.1%) students believe that extracurricular activities should rely on research and discovering something new, 38 (12.5%) students think that these activities should include different types of cultural, musical, sports and similar activities, 37 (12.2%) students believe that they should be organized at the suggestion of students and together with them, and the same number of students 37 (12.2%) are of the opinion that extracurricular activities should enable public appearances. Only four students (1.3%) are of the opinion that such activities should help students acquire the skills needed to socialize with peers. The results of the above answers given by eighth-grade students are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 *Opinions of eighth-grade students on various aspects of the organizational structure of extracurricular activities in primary school*

N=309	
Number of students who take part in extracurricular activities in school, n (%)	
No	200 (64.7)
Yes	109 (35.3)
Students' level of satisfaction with certain activities that are organized in school, M \pm SD (Min - Max)	
visits, field trips	4.26 \pm 1.22 (1 - 5)
Homeroom classes	4.20 \pm 0.87 (1 - 5)
regular classes	4.01 \pm 0.99 (1 - 5)
supplementary classes	3.66 \pm 1.14 (1 - 5)
Additional classes	3.62 \pm 1.35 (1 - 5)
extracurricular activities	3.52 \pm 1.31 (1 - 5)
Student Parliament	3.16 \pm 1.41 (1 - 5)
Students' opinion on the extent to which the school meets the interests and needs of students in these types of extracurricular activities, M \pm SD (Min-Max)	
sports	4.33 \pm 0.77 (1 - 5)
social	3.67 \pm 1.39 (1 - 5)
humanitarian	3.66 \pm 1.35 (1 - 5)
musical	3.63 \pm 1.36 (1 - 5)
fine arts	3.42 \pm 1.38 (1 - 5)
technical	3.41 \pm 1.27 (1 - 5)
literary	3.37 \pm 1.28 (1 - 5)

scientific	3.37±1.28 (1 – 5)
personal preferences and abilities	3.15±1.26 (1 – 5)
Reasons why students choose certain extracurricular activities organized in primary school, n (%)	
students choose extracurricular activities themselves	95 (31.3)
They should be diverse and meet the interests of students	49 (16.1)
They should be based on researching and discovering something new	43 (14.1)
That they include different types of cultural, musical, sports and similar activities	38 (12.5)
They should be organized at the suggestion of students and together with them	37 (12.2)
They should enable students to make public appearances	37 (12.2)
They should help students acquire the skills needed to socialize with peers	4 (1.3)

Abbreviations: M±SD (Min – Max) = Mean±Std. Deviation (Minimum – Maximum).

The fourth research task was to examine the opinion of eighth-grade students on various aspects of the educational role of extracurricular activities on the independent variable "participation in extracurricular activities" within the items related to the perception of how much school gives importance to certain activities important for educating students. After a descriptive analysis of the data, it was established that students of the eighth grade of primary school differ statistically significantly from the aspect of certain activities with the dominant educational component, and with regard to the independent variable: participation in extracurricular activities. T - test for large independent samples examined whether there is a statistically significant difference between eighth-grade students who attend and do not attend certain extracurricular activities. There is a statistically significant difference in the following items: development of ecological culture for nature conservation ($t = -3.28$, $p = 0.001$) and fight against addiction ($t = -2.35$, $p = 0.019$). Students who participate in some extracurricular activities are more of the opinion that school is engaged in developing an environmental culture for nature conservation, as well as the fight against addiction. As for the items: physical activity, learning about behaviour, learning about beauty and aesthetic values, acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills for future education, developing creativity, developing skills for socializing with peers, developing skills of respect for the elderly, no statistical significance of differences was observed. The results of the research on the statistical significance of differences in the independent variable "participation in extracurricular activities" are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Eighth-grade students' opinion about school activities depending on their "participation in extracurricular activities" and the level to which school pays attention to these activities important for the education of students

	Do you take part in an extracurricular activity in school?	N	M	SD	t	p
physical activity	No	195	4.3077	1.21320	.890	.374
	Yes	109	4.1927	.78737		
Learning about behaviour	No	195	3.9641	1.01216	.082	.935
	Yes	109	3.9541	1.02185		
learning about beauty and aesthetic values	No	195	3.2615	1.27559	-.422	.674
	Yes	109	3.3211	.98958		
acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills for further education	No	195	3.8923	.82092	-1.657	.099
	Yes	109	4.0734	1.06028		

developing creativity	No	195	3.6000	1.15500	.620	.535
	Yes	109	3.5138	1.17548		
developing the skills of socializing with peers	No	186	3.6290	1.14231	-2.754	.006
	Yes	109	4.0000	1.07152		
developing respect for the elderly	No	195	3.6821	1.18471	-1.544	.124
	Yes	109	3.9083	1.29487		
developing an ecological culture for nature conservation	No	195	3.5949	1.06247	-3.286	.001
	Yes	109	4.0000	.97183		
fight against addiction: smoking, alcoholism, drug addiction, gambling, internet	No	195	3.4359	1.62447	-2.354	.019
	Yes	108	3.8611	1.26386		

Note: Student's t-test was performed; Mean±Std. Deviation are showed in table.

CONCLUSION

The presented research examined the opinions of eighth-grade teachers and students on the role of extracurricular activities in achieving the educational function of primary school. The results of the research related to the examination of teachers' opinions on various aspects of the educational role of primary school have shown that from the aspect of the elements of the organizational structure of educational role of school, regular classes have an advantage over extracurricular activities. In order to achieve educational role of primary school, teachers recognize the importance of extracurricular activities and highlight various elements of extracurricular activities as preconditions for successful implementation of learning objectives, but do not recognize them as factors to achieve the educational function of primary school. Namely, the results of the research show that teachers recognized the elements of the organizational structure of educational activities of primary school, highlighting the importance of regular lessons (4.51 ± 0.84) in the first place, while extracurricular activities (3.82 ± 1.04) were underutilized potential of the educational activities in schools. Teachers firstly single out those activities that are directly related to teaching activities, such as: additional classes (4.77 ± 0.45), exchange of opinions with colleagues (4.60 ± 0.57), organization of extracurricular activities (4.52 ± 0.89) and cooperation with professional associates in school (pedagogue, psychologist) (4.46 ± 0.73). The results of teachers' opinions about the realization of educational activities in primary school indicate that, in addition to regular classes, teachers try to organize other activities in the interest of students in terms of meeting their needs. For the successful realization of educational tasks in school, teachers estimate that they benefit most from the learning contents related to everyday life (34.4%), followed by well-planned lessons (31.6%) and thematically designed homeroom classes (31.6%). Furthermore, teachers recognize the potential of diverse extracurricular activities (28.7%) because they contribute to the achievement of educational goals in different areas, with different learning materials and through different forms of activity. The largest percentage of teachers 147 (65.9%) are of the opinion that learning activities primarily take place during regular classes, and only six (2.7%) teachers carry out educational activities in extracurricular lessons. These results indicate the rigidity of the education system, which is often not "tailored" to students and the lack of flexibility of teachers when it comes to the learning requirements set before students, related to independence in choosing activities, examining their own needs, opportunities, interests. Extracurricular activities, as a form of working with students, include the ability of teachers to carefully plan their own activities and design student activities that create conditions for students to participate as much as possible in creating extracurricular activities and their realization. The role of teachers is less visible, but complex, which implies

the need for teacher training in the field of lesson planning outside of regular classes in this segment of work.

The second research task was to examine the opinion of teachers on the aspect of the organizational structure of extracurricular activities for the purpose of educating students and how the school meets the interests and needs of students in different areas of extracurricular activities. Diversity, freedom of choice and the ability of students to influence the creation for choosing extracurricular activities are key elements in organizing this type of lesson in order to meet its educational role. Teachers are of the opinion in order to meet the educational function, extracurricular activities should be based on experimenting in order to enable students to develop their talents, according to most teachers (35.6%), teachers further stated that extracurricular activities should be diverse in order to meet the interests of students (32.4%) and to help students acquire the social skills needed for effective interaction with peers and cooperative relationships (32.4%), and they should be organized at the suggestion of students through different types of cultural, musical, sports and similar activities (31.2%). A low percentage of teachers believe that extracurricular activities should be organized by students choose their own activities (9.7%), which is justified because if there is pressure on students to engage in extracurricular activities they are not interested in, or are realized in a similar way to regular lessons, their meaning and purpose are endangered. Teachers recognize the need to improve the quality of extracurricular activities to meet the interests and needs of students. Extracurricular activities can be realized in areas where there are student interests. Teachers are of the opinion that the school mostly meets the interests of students in sports activities (4.48 ± 0.69), followed by literary (4.23 ± 0.68), humanitarian (4.18 ± 0.89) and music activities (4.04 ± 0.84). To the least extent, the school meets the interests and needs of students in scientific research activities (3.44 ± 0.99). Moreover, teachers believe that activities that enable students to express personal preferences and abilities are represented at a low score (3.76 ± 0.91). When organizing extracurricular activities, it is necessary to take into account the differences that exist among students of different ages, their needs, opportunities, knowledge, skills, interests, degree of independence When organizing extracurricular activities, with younger students, the focus is on socialization, psychomotor development of students, getting to know their own thoughts and feelings and their expression, and with older students the focus is on intellectual, emotional, moral, physical and social development of students, especially through peer companionship and friendship.

The results of the research within the third research task show that the eighth-grade students recognized various aspects of the educational role of extracurricular activities within the improvement of the educational function of primary school. The largest number of surveyed eighth-grade students (64.7%) participate in extracurricular activities, and the most common reason for students to opt for certain extracurricular activities organized in primary school is that students can choose them themselves (31.3%). Students are most satisfied with the activities related to visits and field trips (4.26 ± 1.22), homeroom classes (4.20 ± 0.87) and regular classes (4.01 ± 0.99). Students are of the opinion that the school mostly meets the interests and needs of students in the field of sports (4.33 ± 0.77). The main feature of extracurricular activities, viewed from the perspective of students, and which is reflected in their purpose, is the option to choose them themselves. Having in mind the requirements that are placed before the students within the educational system of primary school, it is necessary to encourage them to make their own choices by examining their own needs, opportunities, interests. By involving as many students as possible in the activities they can choose, create, the system becomes more flexible and sensitive to the differences that naturally exist among students.

The obtained research results within the fourth research task were related to examining the opinion of eighth-grade students on various aspects of the educational role of extracurricular activities on the independent variable "participation in extracurricular activities" within the items related to the perception of how much school gives importance to certain activities important for educating students. The obtained research results show that eighth-grade students have a positive attitude about extracurricular activities that are organized in school. After a descriptive analysis of data, it was found that students differ statistically significantly from the aspect of certain activities with the dominant educational component, and with regard to the independent variable: participation in extracurricular activities. Students involved in extracurricular activities believe that the school is engaged in developing the environmental culture of its students (4.00 ± 0.97), $p = 0.001$. The school's activities in the fight against addiction were also rated higher by those students who have membership in extracurricular activities (3.86 ± 1.26) compared to eighth grade students who are not involved in these activities (3.43 ± 1.62), $p=0.019$. Strengthening the educational role of school by improving extracurricular activities does not mean that education does not take place through regular classes, but that extracurricular activities, which are not new to our educational system, gain an important role as underutilized potential of primary school educational activities.

From the perspective of teachers and students of the eighth grade of primary school, the main hypothesis of this research is set: It is assumed that teachers and students recognized the benefit of extracurricular activities in achieving the educational function of primary school, and the hypothesis is partially confirmed.

The obtained research results offer a more detailed picture of the educational role of extracurricular activities from the perspective of teachers and students of older school age in primary schools in the Republic of Serbia. The research findings can serve for a deeper observation of this very important pedagogical problem, in order to work on greater engagement, greater involvement in creating and maintaining a more positive attitude of students and teachers towards extracurricular activities in order to improve the educational role of school. By engaging in extracurricular activities, students decide to spend part of their free time at school. The school should recognize that as a possibility for additional educational activities.

Note. This paper is part of the project no. 179020 "Concepts and strategies for ensuring the quality of basic education", financed by the Ministry of Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

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