

**Original research paper**

**SCHOOL AS AN EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT FROM  
THE PERSPECTIVE OF SENIOR PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS**

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**Abstract.** *Starting from the fact that primary school is a very important factor for the education of young people, we were interested in how senior primary school students see school as an educational environment, which is the goal of our research. The research was conducted on a sample of 309 eighth grade primary school students in ten cities in the Republic of Serbia. In this research, a descriptive method was used, and the Questionnaire for assessing the educational function of school from the perspective of senior primary school students was designed and used as the instrument. Statistical procedures such as frequencies and percentages, mean with corresponding standard deviation were used. Differences were tested with the Student's t-test. The obtained research results show a more complete picture of the educational role of school from the perspective of senior primary school students in the Republic of Serbia. The research findings can be used for a deeper observation of this very important pedagogical problem, in order to work on greater engagement, involvement in creating and maintaining a more positive attitude of students towards the school environment.*

**Key words:** *educational role of school, school as an educational environment, aspects of educational activities, student.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

As an educational environment, school is seen as a multidimensional phenomenon that encompasses various aspects of school organization and school life. The perception of the school environment depends on how students experience the school environment, which is determined by various factors of socio-emotional relations and organizational

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structure. The branched structure of school activities provides a higher level of satisfaction with school among students and the achievement of favorable relationships with peers and teachers (Marsh & Kleitman, 2002).

Starting from this standpoint, we were interested in the students' view of school as an educational environment and their opinion on various aspects of the educational activities in school. The opinions of students about school are formed during their stay at school, and how these opinions develop depends on a number of factors (Zullig, Koopman, Patton, & Ubbes, 2010; Wang & Degol, 2016). Some authors conceptualize most of these factors in terms of school climate, which includes various aspects of educational activities such as material environment, quality and quantity of interaction in school, academic success, support, etc. (Marshall, 2004).

After studying the literature that analyzes school as an educational environment, it can be said that this segment of educational activities is insufficiently researched because it requires empirical evidence in the form of students' perceptions of school climate, security and organizational structure. However, the perception of school as an educational environment is a subjective perception of the environment and personal characteristics that affect the individual outcomes and behavior of students.

## 2. BACKGROUND OF RESEARCH

School climate is often described as “the quality and character of school life”, including the social and physical aspects of school, which can positively promote student behavior, achievement and social and emotional development (Seligman et al., 2009; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Borkar, 2016). School climate is based on the patterns of experiences of participants in the school environment and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices and organizational structure (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009).

The school climate can be perceived as motivation for individual development and ensure constructive behavior and involvement of individuals in school activities or as a demotivating context that causes passivity and resistance (Holtappels & Meier, 2000; Pužić, Baranović, & Doolan, 2011).

An empirically based finding presented in the research by Kutsiuruba (Kutsiuruba et al., 2015) speaks of integrative categories which are connected with the study of school climate. As a result of a detailed review of published empirical evidence, the abovementioned author says that there are three main categories that are in the same axis of categorization of the school environment called "dimensions of the school climate": (a) physical, refers to school facilities, environmental quality and their effect on student academic performance and student behavior; (b) academic, where it is mentioned that personal skills and traits of teachers serve as factors for the development of their students; and (c) social, this specific category suggests that the quality of relationships between members of the school community is fundamental in the configuration of the school climate (Kutsiuruba et al., 2015). In a study of student satisfaction with the school environment, a group of authors (César Tapia-Fonllem et al., 2020) integrated these three dimensions into the variable “school environment”. Its impact on student well-being was also examined in the primary school sample of students, and it was found that the variables school environment and student well-being are positively correlated (César Tapia-Fonllem et al., 2020).

Studies on students' subjective satisfaction with the school environment shows that it is associated with academic success and positive functioning of the school (Bird & Markle, 2012). Thapa's integrative overview of school climate (Thapa et al., 2013) focuses on five dimensions of the school climate: (a) security (e.g. rules and standards, physical security, social and emotional security), (b) relationships (e.g. respect for diversity, connection/engagement in school, social support, leadership and race/ethnicity of students and their perception of school climate), (c) teaching and learning (e.g. social, emotional, ethical and civic learning; service learning; support for academic learning, support for professional relationships, perceptions of teachers and students about the school climate), (d) institutional environment (e.g. physical environment, resources, supplies) and (e) school improvement process (Thapa et al., 2013).

Dymara (2009) states that, as an educational institution, school is characterized by: purposefulness – the existence of adopted goals to be achieved; complexity – consists of elements that can be identified and interconnected with the targeted activities; and differentiating goals and structure in relation to the environment. Purpose is also relevant for the specific needs of each student on the way to the realization of educational goals (Milosavljević Djukić, Bogavac, & Radovanović, 2020, according to: Perkowska-Klejman & Górka-Strzałkowska, 2016, p. 14).

When it comes to students' subjective experience of the school environment, the results of research by Tian et al. (2015) indicate that social support (i.e., teacher support and classroom support) is statistically significantly related to students' subjective well-being at school. School is one of the most important aspects of adolescents' life and their perception of school directly affects their overall subjective well-being and sense of satisfaction, better academic performance, better school behavior, more adaptable attitudes and beliefs about school (e.g., educational self-efficacy) and improved mental and physical health (Tian, Tian, & Huebner, 2016). The factor structure of the research results of students' perception of school environment by a group of authors (Bear et al., 2011) indicate five specific factors within a general ("school climate"): teacher-student relations, student-student relations, established rules, satisfaction with school and school safety.

The research findings support that a motivating school environment is very important for students, and it is characterized by meeting main educational needs that eventually result in the positive subjective satisfaction of students with school. It is important that teachers understand how students experience school, because it will help improve students' learning and achievement (Hanaa, Atiat, & Heba, 2018).

Students' subjective experience of school as an educational environment is more than an individual experience: it is a group phenomenon that is greater than the experience of any person; norms, values and expectations that support students to feel socially, emotionally and physically safe (Cohen et al., 2009). There is a strong connection between the school environment and student well-being. Moreover, it was found that the quality of the school climate perceived by students also affects engagement in school activities (Lombardi et al., 2019).

### 3. METHOD

The aim of the research was to investigate how senior primary school students see school as an educational environment. In accordance with the goal, the following research tasks were set:

1. Identify the opinions of eighth grade students on various aspects of the educational activities in primary school;
2. Identify the opinions of eighth grade students on aspects that affect the education and personality development of young people;
3. Investigate eighth grade students' satisfaction with certain aspects of being at school, as well as the relationship between teachers and students;
4. Identify the opinions of eighth grade students on the problems they face in primary school;
5. Investigate the differences in the opinion of eighth grade students regarding the education-related activities, and with regard to independent variables (gender, position within the class community, participation in extracurricular activities, membership in the Student Parliament).

The main research hypothesis was set, which reads as follows: it is assumed that the eighth-grade primary school students recognized the school as an educational environment.

The research was conducted in a sample of 309 eighth grade primary school students. The sample included ten schools from ten cities in the Republic of Serbia. The sample included 169 girls and 140 boys.

The descriptive method was used in this research. For the purposes of the research, a questionnaire was constructed to assess the educational function of school from the perspective of senior primary school students. The questionnaire consists of four subscales that have shown excellent reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = 0,846 – Cronbach's Alpha = 0,915). The first subscale: Opinions of students on various aspects of educational activities of primary school operationalized through categorical questions: student participation in extracurricular activities, student participation in the class activities, student participation in the student parliament, reasons for students' participation in certain extracurricular activities organized in primary school, students' opinions on the most common activities of the class teacher in the class meetings, students' opinions on the student organization Student parliament. On the Likert's five-point scale (ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), the level of agreement with the items related to: students' opinion on the class meeting and opinions on the content of compulsory elective subjects in primary school was examined. In the second subscale, the students assessed the extent to which certain aspects of school activities affect the education and development of young people's personality. In the second subscale, the participants rated the importance of aspects influencing the education and development of young people's personality on an eight-point Likert-type scale (ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 8 = strongly agree), while a five-point Likert-type scale was used (ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) to assess peers' opinions and how much the school pays attention to activities important for the education of students. In the third subscale, students expressed the degree of satisfaction with certain aspects of school, as well as the teacher-student relationship, using the Likert's five-point scale (ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The problems that students encounter in primary school are included with the fourth subscale. It consists of categorical questions that examine the opinions of students about the frequency of certain problems in primary school, who they turn

to when those problems occur and what they are satisfied with in school. The fourth subscale related to the assessment of students on the Likert five-point scale (ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) on the school's success in counteracting negative phenomena in student behavior.

The results were presented using frequencies and percentages for categorical variables, and means and standard deviations for continuous variables. Differences were tested with the Student's *t*-test. The probability level of  $p \leq 0.05$  was considered statistically significant. Statistical analysis was carried out using the IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, ver. 24.0 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA).

#### 4. RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

The first research task was to examine the opinions of eighth grade students on various aspects of the educational activities in primary school including the following: student participation in extracurricular activities; what are the reasons for students' choice for certain extracurricular activities that are organized in primary school; what is the number of students with responsibilities within the class community; students' opinion about the most common activities by the class teacher in class meetings, as well as the opinions of students about the class meetings; as well as, what is the number of students who are members of the Student Parliament and students' opinions about the student organization Student Parliament; as well as the opinions of eighth grade students on the contents of compulsory elective subjects in primary school.

After the survey, out of the total number of respondents ( $N = 309$ ), 200 eighth grade students (or 64.7%) were not involved in any extracurricular activity, while the other 109 (35.3%) students answered that they took part in some extracurricular activities. Statistical analysis of the obtained data regarding the reasons why eighth grade students opt for certain extracurricular activities available in primary school shows the following: the largest number of students 95 (31.3%) believe that extracurricular activities should be chosen by students themselves, 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 be oriented towards research and discovering something new, 38 (12.5%) students are of the opinion that these activities should include different types of cultural, musical, sports and similar activities, the same number of students 38 (12.5%) believe that these activities should include public appearances, and 37 (12.2%) students believe that they should be organized at the suggestion of students and together with them. Only four students (1.3%) believe that such activities should help students acquire the skills needed to socialize with peers.

The number of students engaged within the organizational activities of the class community was noteworthy. A total of 218 students (72.9%) stated that they were not involved in the class community at all, while 81 (27.1%) students answered that they have certain responsibilities in the class community. Eighth grade students are of the opinion that in the class meeting they usually discuss the obligations and duties of students in school ( $4.15 \pm 0.99$ ), disciplinary measures ( $4.00 \pm 1.09$ ), rules of conduct in school ( $3.82 \pm 1.14$ ), and the least about the Code of Children's Rights ( $3.24 \pm 1.36$ ) and praising and rewarding students ( $3.15 \pm 1.23$ ). The opinions of eighth grade students on the most common activities of the class teacher in the class meeting are as follows: 132 (42.7%) students answered that in class meeting the class teacher solves peer problems in

the class, and 112 (36.2%) students believe that in these class meetings, the class teacher sorts out student absenteeism and completes other administrative tasks, but they did not specify what they were exactly. A smaller percentage of students (37 (12.4%)) answered that the class teacher has conversations with only certain students, and 17 (5.7%) students state that the class teacher covers the topic he/she prepared in advance.

A total of 46 (14.9%) students stated they were members of the student organization Student Parliament, and 263 (85.1%) students answered that they were not members of this student organization. Statistics related to the opinions of eighth grade students on the student organization Student Parliament show that 79 (26.2%) students believe that the Student Parliament enables students' involvement in the school decision-making process, 69 (22.3%) students believe that students develop freedom of opinion, 51 students (16.5%) believe that Student Parliament actively involves students in school activities, 43 (13.9%) believe that it allows students to develop independence and responsibility, 42 (13.6%) students believe that the Student Parliament develops students' feeling that they have rights and obligations. Lower scores were observed for these items: that students present themselves through various activities, which is stated by 7 (2.3%) students, and only two (0.6%) students believe that the Student Parliament organizes activities and actions that enable peer education of students.

According to students, the compulsory elective subjects Civic Education and Religious Education allow the students to learn how to communicate with other people properly ( $4.00 \pm 1.38$ ), to love and respect themselves and others ( $3.89 \pm 1.41$ ), and are there to educate students ( $3.83 \pm 1.25$ ), moreover, that these subjects allow students to improve their personality in the moral and spiritual sense ( $3.60 \pm 1.38$ ), and students at least acquire skills to peacefully solve conflicts and issues ( $3.53 \pm 1.34$ ). Some students also believe that they do not benefit from attending a compulsory elective course ( $2.80 \pm 1.59$ ). These answers given by eighth grade students are shown in Table 1.

The second research task was to examine the opinions of eighth grade primary school students on aspects that affect the education and development of young people's personalities, peer values and how much the school pays attention to activities important for educating students.

The opinions of eighth grade students on the aspects that affect the education and development of young people's personality is as follows: the education and development of young people's personality is most influenced by family ( $7.56 \pm 1.07$ ), followed by class teacher ( $5.88 \pm 1.56$ ), school ( $5.77 \pm 1.78$ ) and teachers ( $5.55 \pm 1.89$ ). There are also peers ( $5.19 \pm 2.01$ ), as well as social media (Internet) ( $4.49 \pm 2.59$ ), social groups ( $3.62 \pm 2.21$ ), while the media have the least influence ( $3.16 \pm 2.14$ ).

The statistical analysis of the obtained data related to the assessment of students on the values of the generation to which they belong is the following: in their peers, students value the most socializing and helping others ( $3.69 \pm 1.30$ ), followed by attitude towards the elderly, teachers ( $3.62 \pm 1.31$ ), then the respect for the rights of others and religious tolerance ( $3.57 \pm 1.22$ ), development of positive moral qualities ( $3.55 \pm 1.08$ ), engagement in the class community ( $3.47 \pm 1.33$ ), attitude towards learning and school obligations ( $3.42 \pm 0.95$ ) and creativity and imagination ( $3.33 \pm 1.08$ ). The lowest score within the stated values is related to observing, experiencing and expressing aesthetic values ( $3.28 \pm 1.03$ ) and respecting the rules of conduct (discipline) ( $3.28 \pm 1.39$ ).

**Table 1** Opinions of eighth grade students on various aspects of the educational activities in primary school

Participation of students in extracurricular activities	n (%)
yes	109 (35.3%)
no	200 (64.7%)
Reasons why students choose certain extracurricular activities organized in primary school	n (%)
that students themselves choose extracurricular activities	95 (31.3%)
that these are diverse and meet the interests of students	49 (16.1%)
that they are focused on research and discovering something new	43 (14.1%)
that they include different types of cultural, musical, sports and similar activities	38 (12.5%)
they enable students to make public appearances	38 (12.5%)
that they are organized at the suggestion of students and together with them	37 (12.2%)
that they are there help students acquire the skills needed to socialize with peers	4 (1.3%)
Percentage of students with responsibilities within the class, n (%)	
yes	81 (26.2%)
no	218 (70.6%)
Opinions of students on the most common activities by the class teacher in the class meetings	n (%)
solves peer problems in the department	132 (44.3%)
the class teacher sorts out absenteeism with students and performs other administrative tasks	112 (37.6%)
the class teacher conducts individual conversations with individual students	37 (12.4%)
the class teacher realizes the topic he prepared in advance	17 (5.7%)
Students' opinion about the class meeting	M ± SD (Min – Max)
about the obligations and duties of students in school	4.15 ± 0.99 (1 – 5)
about disciplinary measures	4.00 ± 1.09 (1 – 5)
on the rules of conduct prescribed by the House Rules of the school	3.82 ± 1.14 (1 – 5)
on the Code of Children's Rights	3.24 ± 1.36 (1 – 5)
on rewarding students	3.15 ± 1.23 (1 – 5)
Number of students who are members of the Student Parliament	n (%)
yes	46 (14.9%)
no	263 (85.1%)
Students' opinions on the student organization Student Parliament	n (%)
it involves students in the school decision-making process	79 (26.6%)
it develops students' freedom of opinion	69 (23.2%)
actively involves students in school activities	51 (17.2%)
it develops students' independence and responsibility	43 (14.5%)
it nurtures and encourages students' feeling that they have rights and obligations in school	42 (14.1%)
that students present themselves through various activities	7 (2.4%)
it organizes activities and actions that enable peer education of students.	2 (0.7%)
Opinions of eighth grade students on the compulsory elective subjects in primary school	M ± SD (Min – Max)
they allow the students to learn how to communicate with other people properly to love and respect themselves and others	4.00 ± 1.38 (1 – 5)
they are there to educate students	3.89 ± 1.41 (1 – 5)
these subjects allow students to improve their personality in the moral and spiritual sense	3.83 ± 1.25 (1 – 5)
allow students to acquire skills to peacefully solve conflicts and issues	3.60 ± 1.38 (1 – 5)
no benefit from attending a compulsory elective course	3.53 ± 1.34 (1 – 5)
no benefit from attending a compulsory elective course	2.80 ± 1.59 (1 – 5)

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

The research also includes the opinions of eighth grade students, in regards to how much the school pays attention to the activities important for the education of students. Students estimate that the school pays the most attention to sports activities ( $4.26 \pm 1.08$ ). It is followed by learning about behavior ( $3.96 \pm 1.01$ ), then, acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills for further education ( $3.95 \pm 0.91$ ). Lower scores are occupied by the following items: developing the skills to socialize with peers ( $3.76 \pm 1.12$ ), respecting the elderly ( $3.76 \pm 1.22$ ), developing environmental culture ( $3.74 \pm 1.04$ ), fighting addiction ( $3.58 \pm 1.51$ ), developing creativity and imagination ( $3.56 \pm 1.16$ ). Students believe that the school pays the least attention to learning about beauty and aesthetic values ( $3.28 \pm 1.17$ ). The results of the research are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2** Eighth grade students' opinions of aspects that affect the education and development of young people's personalities

Students' opinions of aspects that affect the education and development of young people's personalities	M $\pm$ SD (Min – Max)
family	7.56 $\pm$ 1.07 (1 -8)
class teacher	5.88 $\pm$ 1.56 (1 -8)
school	5.77 $\pm$ 1.78 (1 -8)
teachers	5.55 $\pm$ 1.89 (1 -8)
peers	5.19 $\pm$ 2.01 (1 -8)
social media (internet)	4.49 $\pm$ 2.59 (1 -8)
social groups (sports clubs...)	3.62 $\pm$ 2.21 (1 -8)
media (TV, print press...)	3.16 $\pm$ 2.14 (1 -8)
<b>Student opinion about peer values</b>	
socializing, helping others	3.69 $\pm$ 1.30 (1 – 5)
attitude towards elders, teachers	3.62 $\pm$ 1.31 (1 – 5)
respect for the rights of others, religious tolerance	3.57 $\pm$ 1.22 (1 – 5)
development of positive moral values	3.55 $\pm$ 1.08 (1 – 5)
being active within the class community	3.47 $\pm$ 1.33 (1 – 5)
attitude towards learning and school obligations	3.42 $\pm$ 0.95 (1 – 5)
creativity	3.33 $\pm$ 1.08 (1 – 5)
observing, experiencing and expressing aesthetic values	3.28 $\pm$ 1.03 (1 – 5)
discipline, respect for the rules of conduct	3.28 $\pm$ 1.39 (1 – 5)
<b>Students' opinion of how much the school pays attention to activities important for educating students</b>	
sports activity	4.26 $\pm$ 1.08 (1 – 5)
learning about proper behavior	3.96 $\pm$ 1.01 (1 – 5)
acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills for further education	3.95 $\pm$ 0.91 (1 – 5)
developing the skills to socialize with peers	3.76 $\pm$ 1.12 (1 – 5)
developing respect for the elderly	3.76 $\pm$ 1.22 (1 – 5)
developing an environmental culture for nature conservation	3.74 $\pm$ 1.04 (1 – 5)
fight against addiction: smoking, alcoholism, drug addiction, internet	3.58 $\pm$ 1.51 (1 – 5)
developing creativity and imagination	3.56 $\pm$ 1.16 (1 – 5)
learning about beauty and aesthetic values	3.28 $\pm$ 1.17 (1 – 5)

*Abbreviations:* M $\pm$ SD (Min – Max) = Mean $\pm$ Std. Deviation (Minimum – Maximum).

Within the third research task, the students attending the eighth grade of primary school had the opportunity to express their satisfaction with certain aspects of school activity, as well as the teacher-student relationship.

The obtained results of the research related to the satisfaction of eighth grade students with certain aspects of school activity indicate that students are most satisfied with the attitude of classmates ( $4.37 \pm 0.93$ ) and the commitment of the class teacher ( $4.00 \pm 1.22$ ), and they are the least satisfied with the organization of students' leisure time (cultural and entertainment school activities) ( $3.02 \pm 1.39$ ) and the orderliness and hygiene of schools ( $2.79 \pm 1.22$ ). The following aspects are in descending order according to the expressed satisfaction of students: participation of parents in school activities ( $3.79 \pm 1.19$ ), success in learning ( $3.79 \pm 1.19$ ), activities of the class community ( $3.76 \pm 1.09$ ), cooperation with pedagogue and psychologist ( $3.67 \pm 1.29$ ), organization of school events ( $3.66 \pm 1.34$ ), climate within the class ( $3.60 \pm 1.19$ ), attitude of the majority of teachers ( $3.56 \pm 1.17$ ), various projects ( $3.54 \pm 1.09$ ), the way students are praised and rewarded ( $3.40 \pm 1.12$ ), helping students with professional orientation ( $3.34 \pm 1.19$ ) and school equipment ( $3.14 \pm 1.04$ ).

As part of the research, eighth grade students expressed their satisfaction with the teacher-student relationship. Students' satisfaction with teachers' attitudes towards them is as follows: first of all, students notice that teachers demand responsibility and work discipline in students ( $3.95 \pm 0.99$ ) and strive to develop students' proper worldview ( $3.66 \pm 1.04$ ), respect different opinions of students and provide good communication ( $3.63 \pm 1.05$ ), respect the personality of students - respect their opinion, do not underestimate and do not insult students ( $3.56 \pm 1.32$ ), pay more attention to knowledge rather than the behavior of students ( $3.53 \pm 1.04$ ), teach the material professionally and with interest ( $3.51 \pm 1.00$ ), allow the discussion about issues not related to the learning material ( $3.46 \pm 1.16$ ), dedicate special attention to gifted students ( $3.42 \pm 1.42$ ), they say one thing but behave quite differently in real life ( $3.40 \pm 1.44$ ), successfully overcome conflict situations with students ( $3.38 \pm 1.10$ ), can serve as a role model to their students ( $3.31 \pm 1.19$ ), but they are mostly dissatisfied with the fact that teachers have their "class pets" and pay less attention to other students ( $3.19 \pm 1.63$ ). The results are shown in Table 3.

The next research task examined the opinions of eighth grade students on problems in primary school, who students turn to when they have a problem, as well as students' opinion on schools' ability to address negative student behavior, followed by student satisfaction with the school environment.

The research was focused on learning about the opinions of students about the problems that occur in primary school. Statistical data show that the problems faced by eighth grade students in school are as follows: 71 (23.0%) students think that discipline is poor in some classes, 63 (20.4%) students think that there are bad relations in the class, 50 (16.2%) students believe that the biggest problem is learning and understanding the learning material, 46 (14.9%) students said that there is disrespect for students by teachers, 29 (9.4%) students believe that discipline is sometimes too strict, 23 (7.4%) students believe that their personal problems prevent them from meeting their obligations to the school, 13 (4.2%) students believe that the biggest problem in school is the safety and security of students, and 12 (3.9%) students think that the biggest problem in school is the inability to show their knowledge and express their opinion.

**Table 3** Satisfaction of eighth grade students with certain aspects of school and the teacher-student relationship

Satisfaction of students with certain aspects of school	M±SD (Min – Max)
peer to peer relationship	4.37 ± 0.93 (1 – 5)
commitment of the class teacher	4.00 ± 1.22 (1 – 5)
parents' participation in school activities	3.79 ± 1.19 (1 – 5)
students' academic achievement	3.79 ± 1.19 (1 – 5)
activities of the class community	3.76 ± 1.09 (1 – 5)
cooperation with pedagogue and psychologist	3.67 ± 1.29 (1 – 5)
organization of school events	3.66 ± 1.34 (1 – 5)
climate within the class	3.60 ± 1.19 (1 – 5)
attitude of the majority of teachers towards students	3.56 ± 1.17 (1 – 5)
various projects	3.54 ± 1.09 (1 – 5)
the way students are praised and rewarded	3.40 ± 1.12 (1 – 5)
helping students with professional orientation	3.34 ± 1.19 (1 – 5)
school equipment	3.14 ± 1.04 (1 – 5)
cultural and entertainment school activities	3.02 ± 1.39 (1 – 5)
orderliness and hygiene of schools	2.79 ± 1.22 (1 – 5)
<b>Student satisfaction with the teacher-student relationship</b>	
teachers demand responsibility and work discipline in students	3.95 ± 0.99 (1 – 5)
strive to develop students' proper worldview	3.66 ± 1.04 (1 – 5)
respect different opinions of students and provide good communication	3.63 ± 1.05 (1 – 5)
respect the personality of students - respect their opinion, do not underestimate and do not insult students	3.56 ± 1.32 (1 – 5)
pay more attention to knowledge rather than the behavior of students	3.53 ± 1.04 (1 – 5)
teach the material professionally and with interest	3.51 ± 1.00 (1 – 5)
allow the discussion about issues not related to the learning material	3.46 ± 1.16 (1 – 5)
dedicate special attention to gifted students	3.42 ± 1.42 (1 – 5)
they say one thing but behave quite differently in real life	3.40 ± 1.44 (1 – 5)
they successfully overcome conflict situations with students	3.38 ± 1.10 (1 – 5)
they can serve as a role model to their students	3.31 ± 1.19 (1 – 5)
teachers have their "class pets" and pay less attention to other students	3.19 ± 1.63 (1 – 5)

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

Students who have some kind of problem at school most often turn to the class teacher, more precisely 236 (76.4%) of them; 64 (20.7%) students turn for help to the teacher they trust the most, and the same number of students 64 (20.7%) would turn to any teacher, 53 (17.2%) students would choose pedagogue and psychologist, 39 (12.6%) students would turn to the attendant teacher, and 21 (6.8%) would entrust the problem to the school principal.

The students of the eighth grade of primary school spoke about the extent to which the school successfully addresses negative student perceptions and behavior. According to the eighth-grade students, the school most successfully addresses endangering the rights of others (3.76 ± 1.25), indiscipline (3.72 ± 1.26), disrespect for authority (3.67 ± 1.24), aggressive behavior (3.59 ± 1.15), skipping classes (3.56 ± 1.40), and it is the least successful in suppressing student smoking (2.96 ± 1.58). The following items show less success in addressing negative phenomena: irresponsible attitude towards learning and school obligations (3.34 ± 1.28), drug addiction (3.24 ± 1.73), internet addiction (3.10 ± 1.48) and alcoholism (3.0 ± 1.62).

In order to improve the school environment and make it favorable for educational activities and for students to be happy in school, eighth grade primary school students suggested the following: reduce school obligations 165 (53.4%) students, 154 (49.8%) students believe it is necessary to organize free time for students, 98 (31.7%) students think that students should be allowed to realize their interests, 72 (23.3%) students think that students should be allowed to exercise their rights and obligations, 61 (19.7%) students think that undisciplined students should be sanctioned and thus the position of students would be improved, 51 (16.5%) students think that teamwork should be improved, 48 (15.5%) students believe that teachers' work and their attitude towards students should be monitored, 23 (7.4%) students believe that extracurricular activities should be modernized. The results of the research are shown in Table 4.

**Table 4** Opinions of eighth grade students on the problems they face in primary school

Students' opinions on problems in primary school	n (%)
poor discipline in some classes	71 (23.0%)
bad relations in the class	63 (20.4%)
problems in learning and understanding the material	50 (16.2%)
disrespect of students by teachers	46 (14.9%)
too strict discipline in some classes	29 (9.4%)
personal problems that prevent students from committing to school obligations (family problems, health problems, etc.)	23 (7.4%)
safety and security at school	13 (4.2%)
inability to show your knowledge and express your opinion	12 (3.9%)
When faced with a problem in school, students most often turn to	n (%)
the class teacher	236 (76.4%)
any teacher	64 (20.7%)
teacher they trust most	64 (20.7%)
pedagogue and / or psychologist	53 (17.2%)
attendant teacher	39 (12.6%)
school principal	21 (6.8%)
The extent to which the school successfully addresses negative student behavior	M±SD (Min–Max)
endangering the rights of others	3.76±1.25 (1 – 5)
indiscipline	3.72±1.26 (1 – 5)
disrespect for authority (teachers, parents, adults)	3.67±1.24 (1 – 5)
aggressiveness	3.59±1.15 (1 – 5)
skipping lessons	3.56±1.40 (1 – 5)
irresponsible attitude towards learning and school obligations	3.34±1.28 (1 – 5)
drug addiction	3.24±1.73 (1 – 5)
internet addiction	3.10±1.48 (1 – 5)
alcoholism	3.02±1.62 (1 – 5)
smoking	2.96±1.58 (1 – 5)
Student satisfaction with the school environment	n (%)
reduce school obligations	165 (53.4%)
organize free time for students	154 (49.8%)
students should be allowed to realize their interests	98 (31.7%)
students should be allowed to exercise their rights and obligations	72 (23.3%)
undisciplined students should be sanctioned	61 (19.7%)
teamwork should be improved	51 (16.5%)
teachers' work and their attitude towards students should be monitored	48 (15.5%)
increase student discipline	37 (12.0%)
extracurricular activities should be modernized	23 (7.4%)

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

After the descriptive analysis of the data, it was found that eighth grade primary school students differ statistically significantly in regards to individual activities with a dominant educational component, and with regard to independent variables (gender, roles in the class community, participation in extracurricular activities, membership in student parliament), which was the next task within this research.

We have listed several activities related to student behavior in order to find out what attitude students have towards these activities: sports activity, learning about behavior, acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills for further education, developing peer skills, developing respect for older people, developing environmental culture for nature conservation, learning about beauty and aesthetic values, developing creativity, fighting addiction (smoking, alcoholism, drug addiction, internet).

**Table 5** Opinions of eighth grade students about school activities

	Gender			Involvement in the class community		
	Male	Female	p	Yes	No	p
	N=138	N=167		N=80	N=214	
A1	4.51 ± 0.78	4.04 ± 1.24	0.001	4.53 ± 0.50	4.13 ± 1.22	0.004
A2	3.84 ± 1.05	4.03 ± 0.97	0.116	3.68 ± 1.27	4.06 ± 0.90	0.006
A3	3.19 ± 1.09	3.34 ± 1.25	0.275	3.21 ± 0.96	3.36 ± 1.24	0.326
A4	4.02 ± 0.70	3.89 ± 1.06	0.214	4.07 ± 0.92	3.91 ± 0.93	0.180
A5	3.69 ± 1.11	3.48 ± 1.20	0.122	3.88 ± 1.15	3.51 ± 1.12	0.083
A6	3.76 ± 1.01	3.73 ± 1.22	0.826	3.73 ± 1.05	3.80 ± 1.17	0.632
A7	3.93 ± 1.12	3.61 ± 1.30	0.026	3.77 ± 1.14	3.74 ± 1.28	0.868
A8	3.66 ± 1.00	3.76 ± 1.07	0.414	3.87 ± 0.91	3.67 ± 1.10	0.147
A9	3.67 ± 1.42	3.48 ± 1.58	0.276	3.47 ± 1.55	3.56 ± 1.51	0.658
	Involvement in extracurricular activities			Membership in the Student Parliament		
	Yes	No	P	Yes	No	P
	N=109	N=195		N=46	N=263	
A1	4.19 ± 0.78	4.30 ± 1.21	0.374	4.33 ± 0.47	4.26 ± 1.16	0.685
A2	3.95 ± 1.02	3.96 ± 1.01	0.935	4.02 ± 0.99	3.61 ± 1.08	0.010
A3	3.32 ± 0.98	3.26 ± 1.27	0.674	3.24 ± 0.67	3.29 ± 1.25	0.785
A4	4.07 ± 1.06	3.89 ± 0.82	0.099	4.02 ± 0.91	3.61 ± 0.91	0.005
A5	3.51 ± 1.17	3.60 ± 1.15	0.535	3.39 ± 0.74	3.60 ± 1.22	0.260
A6	4.00 ± 1.07	3.62 ± 1.14	0.066	3.80 ± 1.07	3.76 ± 1.14	0.803
A7	3.90 ± 1.29	3.68 ± 1.18	0.124	3.46 ± 1.19	3.82 ± 1.23	0.066
A8	4.00 ± 0.97	3.59 ± 1.06	0.001	3.52 ± 0.78	3.78 ± 1.08	0.125
A9	3.86 ± 1.26	3.43 ± 1.62	0.019	3.70 ± 1.23	3.57 ± 1.57	0.600

*Abbreviations:* A1 = sports activity, A2 = learning about behavior, A3 = learning about beauty and aesthetic values, A4 = acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills for further education, A5 = developing creativity, A6 = developing skills of socializing with peers, A7 = developing skills for respect for the elderly, A8 = developing an environmental culture for nature conservation, A9 = fighting addiction: (smoking, alcoholism, drug addiction, internet).

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

Unlike girls, boys mostly believe that school actively organizes sports activities for students (4.51 ± 0.78 vs. 4.04 ± 1.24,  $p < 0.001$ ), and that it also works on developing skills to respect the elderly (3.93 ± 1.12 vs. 3.61 ± 1.30,  $p = 0.026$ ). Students who have responsibilities in the class community believe that the school implements activities that contain an educational component by organizing sports activities for students (4.53 ± 0.50),  $p = 0.004$ , while participants who do not have special responsibilities within the class community to a

greater extent than others believe that the school pays attention to learning about behavior ( $4.06 \pm 0.90$ ),  $p = 0.006$ .

Students involved in extracurricular activities believe that the school is engaged in developing the environmental culture of its students ( $4.00 \pm 0.97$ ),  $p = 0.001$ . The school's activities in the fight against addiction were also rated higher by those students who are involved in extracurricular activities ( $3.86 \pm 1.26$ ) compared to eighth grade students who are not involved in these activities ( $3.43 \pm 1.62$ ),  $p = 0.019$ .

Students who are members of the Student Parliament are of the opinion that good behavior is taught in school ( $4.02 \pm 0.99$ ),  $p = 0.010$ , as well as that the necessary knowledge and skills for further education are acquired there too ( $4.02 \pm 0.91$ ),  $p = 0.005$ .

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The paper examined the opinions of senior primary school students on the educational function of school in order to obtain data on how the educational role of school is seen by those for whom it is intended, as well as to determine whether aspects of educational work implemented in schools meet the needs students.

The results of the research show that the eighth-grade students recognized different aspects of the educational activities in primary school. The largest number of surveyed eighth grade students (64.7%) are involved 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%). The involvement of students (27.1%) in the class community activities is rather low, and in addition, eighth grade students are of the opinion that the obligations and duties of students in school in are most often discussed in the class meeting ( $4.15 \pm 0.99$ ) followed by disciplinary measures and sanctioning of students ( $4.00 \pm 1.09$ ). A high percentage of students (42.7%) states that in class meetings, the class teacher addresses peer problems within the class, and there is also a high percentage of students (36.2%) who believe that in these classes the class teacher discusses absenteeism and completes other administrative tasks. Students gain different experiences, communication skills, leadership and teamwork, get acquainted with the opportunities, strengths and weaknesses through activities in the student organization - Student Parliament (14.9%). According to students, the Student Parliament allows students to be involved in the decision-making process at school (26.2%) and to the development of students' freedom of opinion (22.3%). In regards to compulsory elective courses, eighth grade students point out that they like the most that they learn how to communicate properly with other people ( $4.00 \pm 1.38$ ), to love and respect themselves and others ( $3.89 \pm 1.41$ ), that the course content contribute to the education of students ( $3.83 \pm 1.25$ ) and that they have the opportunity to enrich their personality in the moral and spiritual sense ( $3.60 \pm 1.38$ ).

The statistical data in this research, which refer to the opinions of eighth grade primary school students on aspects that affect the education and personality development of young people, peer values and how much the school pays attention to activities important for educating students, show that students highlight the following things from the aspect of school context and the developmental needs of adolescents: the factor that primarily influences the education and development of young people in the opinion of eighth grade students is family ( $7.56 \pm 1.07$ ), students value socializing and helping others the

most in their peers ( $3.69 \pm 1.30$ ), attitude towards the elderly, teachers ( $3.62 \pm 1.31$ ), followed by respect for the rights of others and religious tolerance ( $3.57 \pm 1.22$ ). Students are of the opinion that school pays most attention to sports activities ( $4.26 \pm 1.08$ ), followed by learning about behavior ( $3.96 \pm 1.01$ ), and to acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills for further education ( $3.95 \pm 0.91$ ).

The results of the research have shown that eighth grade students have a positive opinion about satisfaction with certain aspects of school life. The results show us that, when it comes to school environment, students are most satisfied with the attitude of classmates ( $4.37 \pm 0.93$ ) and the work and commitment of the class teacher ( $4.00 \pm 1.22$ ). How students experience school largely depends on what kind of relationship teachers and students have built. Students notice that teachers primarily demand responsibility and work discipline from students ( $3.95 \pm 0.99$ ) and try to develop a proper view of the world in students ( $3.66 \pm 1.04$ ), which speaks in favor of students' satisfaction with the teacher-student relationship. Teacher's professionalism, way of working and communication with students have a positive effect on their attitude towards school.

Students' perception of the problems they face in school pose a risk for functioning well with peers and being successful in school academically. The problems that eighth grade students face in school are poor discipline in some classes (23.0%) and bad relations in the class (20.4%). Students who have some kind of problem at school most often turn to the class teacher (76.4%), which opens up space for improving relationships in the school. Also, in the opinion of students, the school most successfully addressed endangering the rights of others ( $3.76 \pm 1.25$ ), indiscipline ( $3.72 \pm 1.26$ ), disrespect for authority ( $3.67 \pm 1.24$ ), aggressive behavior ( $3.59 \pm 1.15$ ) and skipping classes ( $3.56 \pm 1.40$ ), which is encouraging and points to the possible conclusion that students perceive school as an educational environment. In order to feel more satisfied in the school environment, eighth grade primary school students suggest reducing school obligations (53.4%) and organizing free time for students (49.8%).

The obtained research results show that eighth grade students have a positive attitude towards school. After descriptive data analysis, it was found that students differ statistically significantly in regards to individual activities with a dominant educational component, and with regard to independent variables (gender, roles in the class community, participation in extracurricular activities, membership in student parliament).

Unlike girls, boys mostly believe that school actively organizes sports activities for students ( $4.51 \pm 0.78$  vs.  $4.04 \pm 1.24$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and that it also works on developing skills to respect the elderly ( $3.93 \pm 1.12$  vs.  $3.61 \pm 1.30$ ,  $p = 0.026$ ). Students who have responsibilities in the class community believe that the school implements activities that contain an educational component by organizing sports activities for students ( $4.53 \pm 0.50$ ),  $p = 0.004$ , while participants who do not have special responsibilities within the class community to a greater extent than others believe that the school pays attention to learning about behavior ( $4.06 \pm 0.90$ ),  $p = 0.006$ .

Students involved in extracurricular activities believe that the school is engaged in developing the environmental culture of its students ( $4.00 \pm 0.97$ ),  $p = 0.001$ . The school's activities in the fight against addiction were also rated higher by those students who are involved in extracurricular activities ( $3.86 \pm 1.26$ ) compared to eighth grade students who are not involved in these activities ( $3.43 \pm 1.62$ ),  $p = 0.019$ . Students who are members of the Student Parliament are of the opinion that good behavior is taught in

school ( $4.02 \pm 0.99$ ),  $p = 0.010$ , as well as that the necessary knowledge and skills for further education are acquired there too ( $4.02 \pm 0.91$ ),  $p = 0.005$ .

From the perspective of eighth grade students, the hypothesis of this research was set, which reads: it is assumed that eighth grade primary school students recognized school as an educational environment, and this hypothesis has been proven.

The obtained research results offer a clearer picture of the educational role of school from the perspective of senior primary school students in the Republic of Serbia. The research findings can be used for a deeper observation of this very important pedagogical problem, in order to work on greater engagement, involvement in creating and maintaining a more positive attitude of students towards the school environment.

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## ŠKOLA KAO VASPITNA SREDINA IZ PERSPEKTIVE UČENIKA STARIJEG ŠKOLSKOG UZRASTA

*Polazeći od toga da osnovna škola predstavlja veoma bitan činitelj za vaspitanje i obrazovanje mladih, zanimalo nas je kako učenici starijeg školskog uzrasta vide školu kao vaspitnu sredinu, što je i cilj našeg istraživanja. Istraživanje je realizovano na uzorku od 309 učenika osmog razreda osnovne škole u deset gradova republike Srbije. U ovom istraživanju primenjena je deskriptivna metoda, a od instrumenata konstruisan je Upitnik za procenu vaspitne funkcije škole iz perspektive učenika starijeg školskog uzrasta. Od statističkih postupaka korišćeni su frekvencije i procenti, aritmetička sredina sa pripadajućom standardnom devijacijom. Razlike su testirane Studentovim t-test. Dobijeni rezultati istraživanja doprinose potpunijoj slici vaspitne uloge škole iz perspektive učenika starijeg školskog uzrasta u osnovnoj školi u Republici Srbiji. Nalazi istraživanja mogu poslužiti za dublju opservaciju ovog veoma značajnog pedagoškog pitanja.*

*Ključne reči: vaspitna funkcija škole, škola kao vaspitna sredina, aspekti vaspitnog delovanja, učenik.*