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LEISURE TIME ACTIVITIES AND INTERESTS OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

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Abstract. *The main objective of this research was to investigate the leisure time activities of elementary school children. This paper investigates the way in which these activities are grouped and their expression. In addition to this, it examined the existence of any difference between these grouped activities in relation to respondents' gender and school achievements, as well as to their relationship with the children's opinion of their parents' interest in how they spend their leisure time. For this purpose, an instrument has been designed consisting of 22 items of Likert-type (α = .69) which was used for a sample of 246 students of both genders (121 male and 125 female) from 4th and 5th grade (96 from 4th and 150 from 5th grade) from elementary schools in Vranje and Nis. Through factor analysis based on The Guttman-Kaiser Criterion and with the analysis of loadings of certain items, 5 factors have been identified and named as follows: organized extracurricular activities, home-related activities, computer-related activities, pastime, reality shows watching. The discovered differences in the expression of these groups of activities proved to be statistically significant. The results of t-test indicated that girls get more involved in activities at home, while boys rest more. The ANOVA results showed that there was the difference in the expression of activities done at home, as well as the organized extracurricular activities between students with different academic achievement. In the end, the results showed that as parents get less interested in the way their children spend their leisure time, more will their children get engaged in organized extracurricular activities, activities that are carried out at home, and watching sports, resting and using computers.*

Key words: *leisure time, activities and interests, gender, success at school, parental interest*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The basic stimulus for the research of activities and interests of students during their leisure time is a matter of intentionality and non-intentionality influence on personality development. Namely, it is well known that education is defined as *a developed system of intentional and meaningful influences (activities) for the purpose of development of an individual's personality* (Круљ, Стојановић, and Круљ-Драшковић, 2010, p. 20). In the part of the day which students spend at school, the prevalence of the abovementioned intentionality is presumed. After school is finished, as well as all the school work completed, children are left with that part of the day which falls under the category of pedagogical and sociological phenomenon of leisure time, either at home or outside of it. This part of the day involves an entire system of factors and activities which affect the personality of students, and whose intentionality, progressiveness and meaningfulness is not implied. Although, by definition, many activities are not a part of the education process, their influence cannot be denied, and their course of action cannot always be said to be positive and constructive. The abovementioned scenarios arise from the basic determinants of the concept of leisure time, its essence and role.

Firstly, within the conceptual definition of leisure time, it is emphasized that *this is the time that the individual is left with outside professional, family and social obligations, to use it based on their free will, and to use it for the purpose of rest, entertainment, leisure and creativity* (U Potkonjak and Šimleša, 1989 p. 352). At school age, this is the part of the day that children and young people have outside their usual, and primarily, school obligations. In the context of a broader discussion about leisure time, especially from a sociological point of view, we are introduced with the concept of the so-called *extra time*, which includes the entire leisure time that is free from specialized and organized work. Based on this, leisure time is not free of all duties; they are just isolated from the organized industrial work (Koković, 2013, p. 133). Activities that are deprived of these duties and where individuals have freedom of choice how they will spend this time are also called – Pastime (Ibid). However, we should bear in mind that children of elementary school age, beyond the immediate school work, can also choose organized, planned and purposeful activities based on their interests that can also help develop their personality. In accordance with this is the view of Dumazedier who back in 1962 (Dumazedier, 1962, according to Untaru, Albu, & Luca, 2014, p. 63) defined leisure as *a set of activities to which the individual can dedicate himself entirely according to his wishes either to recover, to have fun or to develop his intellect and formation according to his free will, after having completed his professional, familial and social tasks.* These specific leisure activities are linked to the interests of the individual. Connection between the activities and interests stems from the definition of interests which, among other things, are defined as a form of (mainly terminal) values characterized by preoccupation of conscience with favorite activities and/or practice of chosen activities (Pantić, 1980, p. 29). It is easy to see from this definition the conative aspect of interests, or their translation (transfer) into specific areas and forms of activity. Among others, Irby and Tolman (Irby & Tolman, 2002) state the positive impacts that leisure activities have on children and young people, which are as follows: social and emotional development and engagement, professional development/ orientation and engagement, as well as physical, cognitive and social development and engagement.

In determining the basic starting point of current research, among other things, a study was done and the assertions from it (Stepanović, Videnović, and Plut, 2009, p. 251) were also taken into account; the study showed that the interests of thirteen-year-old children include a wide variety of things (*catchall)* and that most of the students have several strong preferences (29.2% of respondents). In addition to this, the results of this study showed that a large number of interests are present among students with better success at school, and that most of the interests are significantly associated with school success.

In his research, Iljišin (Iljišin, 2003) examines the role of the media in the structure of leisure time for the sample of 1000 respondents from 5th to 8th grade. His results show that the largest number of respondents (39%) had 4 or more hours of leisure time a day. Besides this, based on the frequency, the most frequent activities include playing and socializing with friends, then watching television and listening to music. Children participate in other activities only occasionally. Maksić and Tenjović (Maksić and Tenjović, 2008) investigated the interests and verbal fluency of elementary school students. The research included the students of 6th and 7th grade. These respondents mostly read books not required for school, do sports, have a hobby, train at sports clubs and learn foreign languages. Less than a half of the students are members of various extracurricular groups, one fourth of students have an activity which they devote their leisure time to, while one fifth of students go to a music or ballet school.

Longitudinal study done by Sener, Copperman, Pendyala, & Bhat (Sener, Copperman, Pendyala, & Bhat, 2008) found that children spend most of their free time doing passive and unstructured leisure activities at home. In the sample that included children under 13 years of age, Hofferth & Sandberg (Hofferth & Sandberg, 2001) found that leisure time spent in reading books for pleasure, as well as structured time spent doing sports and social activities are all associated with high achievers at school.

By using a sample of 155 fifth grade students, Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding (Anderson, Wilson & Fielding, 1988) found that the amount of free time that children spend reading books is the best predictor of several levels of reading achievements. However, most of the children spend most of their leisure time reading either very little or do not read at all.

The research results by Lupu, Norel, & Laurenţiu (Lupu, Norel, & Laurenţiu, 2013) showed that although children of preschool age prefer the activities outside home, they still seem to spend more time doing static and activities that are home-related.

Posner & Vandell (Posner & Vandell, 1999) investigated the leisure time activities of children from 3rd to 5th grade. They found that girls prefer to engage in activities involving academic engagement and socializing, while boys are more likely to engage in organized sports activities. However, children spend as much as 20% of leisure time watching TV, while only 4% of their time is spent doing sports.

Hofferth and Curtin (Hofferth & Curtin, 2005) investigated how much time during the week, children aged between 6 and 12 years spend engaging in leisure activities. During leisure time, children play, learn, use the computer, watch television, and do art, have hobbies, do sports and reading. The authors grouped the activities that dominate everyday life of children into three main categories, and the results have shown that the groups of activities (reading, sports and activities related to religion) are positively linked to children's achievements assessed with standard tests. Their results showed that between 9 and 12 years of age, watching TV is the most universal way to spend leisure time (94%), while only 4% engage in arts, and 17% engage in activities outside home. Children of this age spend 22% of their free time at the computer. When it comes to gender differences, the authors came to the

conclusion that girls get involved in art twice as much as boys, and they also read more. On the other hand, around 83% of boys engage in sports activities, as opposed to 69% of girls.

The basic methodological framework of this paper was established based on the results of this and other similar researches.

2. OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this research are as follows:

- Investigate how leisure time activities and interests are grouped
- Investigate the expression of these grouped activities, as well as the existence of any difference in the expression of these groups of activities in relation to gender and success at school.
- Investigate the correlation between these activity groups and students' estimation of the parental interest in how children spend it.

3. METHOD

For the purpose of data collection of children leisure time activities a questionnaire consisting of 22 items of Likert type, which was designed by the author of this paper for the purpose of current research, was used. When preparing the research activities, similar conceptual researches were used as a starting point, primarily the researches conducted by Maksić & Tenjović (Maksić and Tenjović, 2008), Iljišin (Iljišin, 2003), and Stepanović, Videnović & Plut (Stepanović, Videnović and Plut, 2009). Reliability of the measurement instrument expressed in Cronbach α coefficient is .69. In the first part of the questionnaire, the children answered the questions about their gender and the overall success at school. At the end of the questionnaire, the students were asked a Likert-type question about the interest of their parents for the way they spend their free time. The questionnaire was given to a sample of 246 students of both genders (121 male and 125 female) from 4^{th} and 5^{th} grade (96 from 4^{th} and 150 from 5^{th} grade) from elementary schools in Vranje and Nis. The structure of the sample when it comes to the overall success of students is as follows: 17 students have satisfactory grades (6.9%), 37 students have good grades at school (15%), 70 of them have very good grades (28.5%), while most of them are excellent – 122 of them (49.6 %).

4. RESULTS

By applying the principal component analysis on the basis of Guttman-Kaiser criterion, seven factors that explain 61.63% of variances were isolated. However, with additional analysis of loadings of certain items with corresponding factors, this number was reduced to 5. Table 1 provides an overview of the factor structure and saturation of items in the questionnaire.

The first isolated factor groups the variables related to organized forms of extra-curricular activities such as game rooms, music schools, dancing, language schools, sports activities and going out with friends. The second factor groups those activities which imply that leisure time is spent at home, whether reading (children's books or newspapers),

Table 1 Factor loadings of questionnaire items

Items	Component						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Books	-0,22	**0,67**	0,04	0,29	0,01	0,14	0,14
Rest	0,40	0,08	0,24	**-0,47**	-0,21	0,19	-0,18
Games	0,20	0,17	**0,58**	-0,16	-0,25	0,26	-0,11
Facebook	0,43	-0,07	**0,64**	0,19	-0,08	-0,30	0,28
Internet	0,48	0,05	**0,65**	0,07	-0,14	-0,22	0,22
Playroom	**0,48**	0,23	-0,09	-0,39	-0,13	-0,13	0,08
Music	-0,24	**0,54**	0,15	-0,07	-0,21	0,14	-0,03
Movies/series	-0,37	**0,40**	0,24	-0,09	0,21	0,38	0,26
Tvsport	-0,06	0,31	0,09	**-0,50**	0,43	0,23	0,01
Cartoons	0,14	**0,42**	0,08	-0,20	0,42	-0,14	0,40
Musical program	0,11	**0,61**	-0,03	0,26	-0,07	-0,33	-0,23
Rialiti program	0,18	0,23	0,41	0,21	0,32	-0,01	**-0,60**
Musical instruments	0,29	0,47	**-0,53**	-0,03	-0,08	-0,15	0,07
Musical school	**0,62**	-0,16	-0,19	0,32	-0,03	0,32	0,05
Foreign language school	**0,64**	-0,09	0,00	0,39	0,18	0,36	0,02
Dancing school	**0,72**	-0,26	-0,17	0,25	0,20	0,21	0,07
Training	**0,47**	0,19	-0,07	-0,20	0,41	-0,01	-0,04
Scientific program	0,27	**0,54**	-0,19	0,09	0,28	-0,31	-0,15
Children's papers	0,04	**0,56**	-0,16	0,30	-0,27	0,10	0,30
Housework	-0,25	**0,47**	0,21	0,32	-0,06	0,11	-0,16
Going out	**0,63**	0,11	-0,14	-0,33	-0,27	-0,05	-0,07
Playing at home	0,25	**0,44**	-0,28	-0,12	-0,33	0,23	-0,13

playing, doing housework, watching television (entertainment or scientific programs) or listening to music. The third factor includes the groups of items related to the activities where free time is spent at the computer (playing games, using Facebook or Internet), but also playing an instrument. The fourth factor includes the activities related to watching sports shows and resting. These activities could also be called “pastime”. The fifth factor relates to only one item – watching reality shows. These factors have been identified and named as follows: organized extracurricular activities, home-related activities, computer-related activities, pastime, reality shows watching. Data on the expression of these groups of activities is shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Expression of certain groups of leisure time activities

	Min	Max	AS	SD
Organized extra-curricular activities	1.17	4.83	2.41	.87
Home-related activities	1.70	4.93	3.68	.62
Computer-related activities	1.00	5.00	3.10	.92
Pastime	1.00	5.00	3.19	1.03
Rialiti program	1	5	3.11	1.43
N = 246				

The results of repeated measures ANOVA indicated the existence of significant differences in the expression of these groups of activities based on respondents' answers ($F(4)=57,14$, $p<,001$; $\eta 2 = 0,19$), and that 19% of the variance can be explained based on the choice of particular activities. The next step checked the structure of individual differences of the expression of certain activities. Comparison of the degree of expression of paired groups of activities was done using Fisher's Least Significant Difference method (LSD), and the results showed no difference in the expression between computer use and pastime groups of activities (Mean Difference = -.084, p = .299), as well as no difference in the expression of groups of activities related to computer use and watching reality shows (Mean difference = -.013, p = .893). A statistically significant difference was also not found even when we compared pastime and watching reality shows (Mean Difference = .071, p = .506). On the other hand, the difference in the expression of organized extracurricular activities and all other isolated groups is statistically significant and in favor of these activities (home-related activities – Mean Difference = -1.262; p <.001; use of computers – Mean Difference = -.686; p <.001; pastime - Mean Difference = -.770; p <.001; watching reality shows - Mean Difference = -.699; p <.001). The same result was found when it comes to the expression of the activities done at home and the remaining groups of activities – this type of activity is more pronounced when linked to the use of computers – Mean Difference = .576; p <.001, pastime – Mean Difference = .492; p <.001 and watching reality shows – Mean Difference = .563; p <.001. So, as we can see from the results, the majority of leisure time activities are done at home.

Table 3 shows the results regarding the expression of certain groups of activities based on gender.

Table 3 The expression of certain leisure time groups of activities in relation to gender

	Min		Max		AS		SD	
	male	female	male	female	male	female	male	female
Organized extra-curricular activities	1,17	1,17	4,75	4,83	2,49	2,34	0,75	0,98
Home-related activities	1,70	2,35	4,93	4,89	3,58	3,77	0,64	0,58
Computer-related activities	1,00	1,00	5,00	5,00	3,11	3,09	0,91	0,93
Pastime	1,00	1,00	5,00	5,00	3,48	2,90	1,00	0,98
Rialiti program	1,00	1,00	5,00	5,00	3,20	3,03	1,44	1,43
N=249 (mail N=121, femail N =125)								

T-test results showed that there are differences in activity between children of different gender – girls are more engaged in activities at home ($t(244) = -2.41$, $p <0.05$) while boys ($t(244) = 4.65$, $p \leq 0.00$) watch sports and relax.

Table 4 shows the results regarding the expression of certain groups of activities in relation to students' success at school.

The results of ANOVA test showed that there is a difference in the expression of certain leisure time groups of activities that children engage in based on their success at school. This difference can be found in the activities carried out at home ($F(3) = 3.12$; $p <0.05$), as well as in organized extracurricular activities ($F(3) = 2.87$; $p <0.05$). In addition to the above test, the comparison of the degree of expression of certain groups of activities among students with different academic achievement was done using the Least Significant Difference (LSD) method. The results showed that in the group of organized extracurricular activities these differences can actually be found between students with

good grades and very good grades (Mean Diff. = 0.35; p≤.05), as well as between those with good and excellent grades (Mean Diff. = 0.42; p≤.01). In the group of activities that are performed at home, differences can be observed between students with satisfactory and good grades (Mean Diff. = -0.48; P≤.01), then, among students with satisfactory grades and very good grades (Mean Diff. = -0.40; P ≤.01), and with satisfactory and excellent grades (Mean Diff. = -0.47; p≤.00).

Table 4 The expression of certain leisure time groups of activities in relation to success at school

	grades	AS	SD	Min	Max
Computer-related activities	satisfactory	2,81	0,99	1,25	4,00
	good	3,28	0,97	1,00	5,00
	very good	3,04	1,00	1,00	5,00
	excellent	3,12	0,85	1,00	5,00
Pastime	satisfactory	3,32	0,90	2,00	5,00
	good	2,96	1,22	1,00	5,00
	very good	3,26	1,05	1,00	5,00
	excellent	3,19	0,98	1,00	5,00
Home-related activities	satisfactory	3,25	0,56	2,30	4,17
	good	3,73	0,74	1,70	4,78
	very good	3,66	0,51	2,50	4,69
	excellent	3,73	0,62	2,35	4,93
Organized extra-curricular activities	satisfactory	2,68	0,96	1,33	4,08
	good	2,73	0,92	1,25	4,83
	very good	2,38	0,79	1,17	4,75
	excellent	2,30	0,88	1,17	4,83
Rialiti program	satisfactory	3,29	1,31	1,00	5,00
	good	3,05	1,53	1,00	5,00
	very good	3,13	1,43	1,00	5,00
	excellent	3,10	1,43	1,00	5,00
N=249 (satisfactory – 17, good – 37, very good- 70, excellent –122)					

In the end, the correlation between certain groups of activities and the students' opinion on how much their parents are uninterested in how they spend their free time was checked.

Table 5 Correlation between certain groups of activities and students' opinion on their parents' lack of interest

r	Organized extra-curricular activities	Home-related activities	Pastime	Computer-related activities	Rialiti program
Lack of interest	**0,31****	**0,25****	**0,19****	**0,19****	0,08

** correlation is significant at the 0.01 level
* correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

It can be seen from the results shown in Table 5 that as parents get less interested in the way their children spend their leisure time, more will their children get engaged in organized extracurricular activities, activities that are carried out at home, but also resting and using computer.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

One of the specifics of the interests of young school children, who were respondents during this research, is that they are ephemeral, loose or extensive, and that their differentiation occurs only in puberty and maturity period. This process ranges from diffusive through imaginary, and then it goes to verification stage, after which comes the stage of final identification of interests (Maksić and Tenjović, 2008, p. 313). The results of repeated measures ANOVA in our study pointed to the existence of statistically significant differences in the expression of activities grouped around five isolated factors. This could indicate that young school children start differentiating interests at this age.

Out of all investigated activities, the most prominent ones are those activities that are carried out at home. Within these activities, the ones that stand out are those that are predominantly receptive and passive, and which are done for the purpose of pleasure (listening to music, watching music shows, cartoons and series), while some of them have self-educational or educational traits (reading children's books and magazines, watching educational shows). These research findings partially correspond to the already mentioned research by Sener et al. (Sener, Copperman, Pendyala, & Bhat, 2008) who came to the conclusion that children spend most of their free time doing passive and unstructured leisure activities at home. Our results are also consistent with those in the research done by Lupu, Norel, & Laurenţiu (Lupu, Norel, & Laurenţiu, 2013) where they found that children spend more time doing static activities at home. Within the first factor there are also activities related to carrying out certain household chores, but also to playing. The common characteristic of these activities mentioned is that they are done at home. The presence of game confirms one of the standpoints of modern sociology, according to which if certain time is spent truly playing (especially at younger school age), that is the real and proper use of leisure time (Božovic, 2010).

The second research task was to investigate the difference in the expression of activities in relation to gender and success at school. Regarding gender, a significant difference exists in the context of pastime in favor of boys. When it comes to girls, more expressed are those activities related to the home environment, which is not the case with boys, where the difference is statistically significant. These results can be partly explained by the influence of traditional and stereotypical expectations and the nurture of male and female children that is present in our culture (Maksić and Tenjović, 2008); the results are partially in line with the mentioned paper (Posner & Vandell, 1999) which claimed that girls prefer to engage in activities involving academic engagement (isolated factor of home activities includes reading books and children's magazines, watching educational shows).

Passive rest time and watching sports programs (pastime), as well as the activities related to the use of computers are present in all categories of students (based on their achievement) with no significant differences. Similar results were found within all categories of school achievement in the context of watching reality shows. This indicates that this type of show attracts the attention of all categories of students.

A significant difference in expression was found between the activities carried out at home and organized extracurricular activities. The first group of activities showed significant difference in expression between students with satisfactory and good grades, then, between those with satisfactory and very good grades, and those students with satisfactory and excellent grades. These results suggest greater involvement of students with better academic success in activities that could be educational (books, newspapers,

TV shows), which may explain this correlation. Moreover, the above factor also includes participation in housework, which can be interpreted as a higher level of responsibility of students with better success at school.

When we talk about organized extracurricular activities, there is a significant difference in expression between the students with good grades (this activity is most prominent with them), and those with very good grades, and between good and excellent students (with whom these activities are present the least). Furthermore, similar studies (Maksić i Tenjović, 2008) found that students with better success at school have a higher average number of interests. However, regardless of the motivational character of interests, it is still necessary to pay attention to the relationship of these interests and specific activities that are really done. The question is whether each of the mentioned interests is encouraging enough to actually make the students act based on that specific interest. Conversely, if this conative component of interest is too strong, which is probably the case in this study, it can happen that instead of doing their homework, children devote too much time to the activities they enjoy. In methodological literature (Mužić, 1981), one example of negative correlation is between the increase in the number of extracurricular activities and the decline of success at school.

Finally, the results showed that as parents get less interested in the way their children spend their leisure time, more will their children get engaged in organized extracurricular activities, activities that are carried out at home, but also resting and using computers. A positive correlation between parents' lack of interest and the intensity of activities in almost all areas (except for watching reality shows) probably stems from the very understanding of the notion of leisure time and its emancipatory role in the development of the personality of each individual. Namely, in this time that is free from the direct responsibilities related to school and formal education, young people get free space for personal or group activities. According to some authors, when the pressure of adults ceases, and when the daily routines stop, young people have the opportunity to try to discover who they really are, what and whom they like or do not like, what they want to become. Leisure time is probably the most important time for young people! (Stepanovic, Videnović, and Plut, 2009, p. 248).

In the end, we must not lose sight of the fact that this research surely did not cover all the activities that are available for children to do in their leisure time. Besides this, we believe that it would be important for some further analyzes to examine the influence of a wider range of family and social variables in general.

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AKTIVNOSTI I INTERESOVANJA U TOKU SLOBODNOG VREMENA KOD UČENIKA OSNOVNIH ŠKOLA

Glavni cilj ovog istraživanja odnosio se na ispitivanje aktivnosti kojima se u toku slobodnog vremena bave deca osnovnoškolskog uzrasta. U radu je ispitan način na koji su grupisane ove aktivnosti, kao i njihova izraženost. Pored toga, ispitano je i postojanje eventualnih razlika ovako grupisanih aktivnosti u odnosu na pol i školski uspeh ispitanika, kao i njihova povezanost sa sa dečjom procenom zainteresovanosti roditelja za način na koji oni provode to vreme. U ovu svrhu konstruisan je instrument koji se sastoji od 22 stavke Likertovog tipa (α = .69) koji je zadat prigodnom uzorku od 246 učenika oba pola (121 muški i 125 ženski) 4. i 5. razreda (96 četvrti i 150 peti) osnovnih škola u Vranju i Nišu. Faktorskom anlizom na osnovu Gutman-kajzerovog kriterijuma i analizom zasićenja pojedinih stavki izdvojeno je 5 faktora uslovno imenovanih kao: organizovane vanškolske aktivnosti, aktivnosti vezane za kuću, aktivnosti vezane za računar, dokolica, praćenje rijaliti programa. Pronađene razlike u izraženosti ovako grupisanih aktivnosti pokazale su se statistički značajnim. Rezultati t testa ukazali su na to da se devojčice više bave aktivnostima vezanim za kuću, a dečaci više odmaraju. Rezultati ANOVE pokazali su da među učenicima sa različitim školskim uspehom postoji razlika u izraženosti aktivnosti koje se obavljaju u kući, kao i organizovanim vanškolskim aktivnostima. Na kraju, rezultati su pokazali da što su roditelji nezainteresovaniji za način na koji deca provode svoje slobodno vreme, to se ona više bave organizovanim vanškolskim aktivnostima, aktivnostima koje se vrše u kući, ali i gledanjem sporta, odmaranjem i korišćenjem računara.

Ključne reči: *slobodno vreme, aktivnosti i interesovanja, pol, školski uspeh, zainteresovanost roditelja.*