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## **EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES AND LESSONS**

**Abstract:** Due to the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, certain adjustments in the way that extracurricular activities in school are implemented had to be introduced. Given the importance of extracurricular activities in the realization of the school's educational role and student development, research with the aim of investigating the manner of organization and implementation of extracurricular activities during the COVID-19 pandemic was conducted. A descriptive, non-experimental method and the survey technique were applied. The research included primary school teachers from three districts in Serbia (N = 242). According to the teachers, extracurricular activities were only partially organized due to the pandemic, most commonly directly and through a combination of face-to-face (direct) instruction and online learning platforms, but their implementation was marred by numerous difficulties, which had numerous implications for the areas and possibilities of student participation in school competitions, and the level of engagement in them. The assumption about the influence of independent variables (town, grade year, level of education, professional experience, attitude toward digitization in education, development of a teacher's digital competencies) on the teachers' opinions regarding the organization and implementation of extracurricular activities during the pandemic was partially confirmed. Based on the results obtained, recommendations regarding direct instruction were given, and directions for further research in this area were outlined.

**Keywords:** *extracurricular activities, primary school, online learning platforms, teachers, pandemic.*

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## Introduction

After declaring the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019/2020 and 2020/2021, significant changes occurred throughout the world forcing a transition to a different form of educational work. Such changed circumstances in Serbia prompted the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development to introduce a series of measures to ensure the continuity of both regular instruction and extracurricular processes. Despite the fact that educational policy measures in Serbia applied equally to the organization of all activities in primary school, it is noticeable that extracurricular activities were not nearly as much in the focus of researchers' attention as teaching and learning during the pandemic. As suggested by research results (Čutović, 2021), the pandemic contributed to the decrease and limited implementation of extracurricular activities in Serbian Language and Literature classes in junior grades of primary school during 2019/2020, forcing teachers to face numerous obstacles in their organization and implementation. A similar trend was observed throughout the world. In consequence of the pandemic, and public health and safety directives, extracurricular activities in Canada were completely or partially neglected in schools (People for Education, 2021). According to certain data, they were organized only in 18,0% of primary schools and 70,0% of secondary schools during 2020/2021. In consequence, the potential of extracurricular activities in improving the health, psychological and social well-being of children and adolescents determined by previous research (e.g., LaForge-MacKenzie et al., 2022), remains underused in the time of the pandemic.

Extracurricular activities are a special form of educational work that, in combination with teaching and other forms of educational activity, contributes to the successful fulfillment of educational tasks and goals, and the formation of a creative and versatile personality of students on the one hand, and identity development and recognizability of the school on the other hand. They include all those activities that students engage in outside of regular classes defined in the curriculum, which are in line with their interests and preferences (*Encyclopedia of Pedagogy I*, 1989), and are aimed at improving the organization of students' education, enhancing, and enriching their social life, as well as their leisure time (Bartkus et al., 2012). Extracurricular activities are described as integrative, because they link students' experiences with different areas of knowledge, thus enabling the synthesis of isolated and abstract knowledge into different real-life situations (Lunenburg, 2010). In the modern concept of education, the role of extracurricular activities is multi-faceted and involves: expanding and enhancing students' acquired knowledge and skills that are more difficult to acquire in regular classes (Nurullina, Muraviov, Martyanova, Yarmakeev, 2018; Rahayu & Dong, 2023), particularly general and cross-curricular competencies (*General Instructions for Strengthening the Educational Role of School through the Improvement of Extracurricular Activities in Primary and Secondary School*, 2020); developing students' social competencies

(Berger et al., 2020; Vučković, 1988); developing camaraderie, solidarity, humanity, and sense of belonging (Valjan Vukić, 2016); providing opportunities for affirmation and self-actualization of students' personalities (Massoni, 2011); improving mutual collaboration and trust between students and teachers (Berger et al., 2020); developing a culture of quality leisure time, motivation, creativity, and the desire to learn (*General Instructions for Strengthening the Educational Role of School through the Improvement of Extracurricular Activities in Primary and Secondary School*, 2020; Pavlović, Cicović, Sarajlić, Kovač, 2016). Given the above, they can become major support and a significant factor in educational work with students.

Strategic national documents and legislation (*Law on Primary Education*, 2013; *Law on the Fundamentals of the Education System*, 2017; *Strategy for the Development of Education in Serbia by 2020*, 2012; *Strategy for the Development of Education in Serbia by 2030*, 2021) are focused on the issue of extracurricular activity program, primarily: purpose, models, areas, principles, evaluation of extracurricular activities, and the role of the teacher. It is emphasized that: a) evaluation of school performance includes interdisciplinary extracurricular programs; b) implementation of parts of the curriculums can be carried out through extracurricular activities, which differ by approach and method, and as such, they put less burden on the students; c) professional development of teachers should include training for extracurricular activities (*Strategy for the Development of Education in Serbia by 2020*, 2012). The current Curricula (Teaching and Learning Plan) for the First Cycle of Primary Education prescribes 1–2 school periods for extracurricular activities per week in each grade. The prescribed areas of extracurricular activities that schools are obligated to organize include science, technology, culture, art, media, and sport. Serbian education system provides three models for the implementation of extracurricular activities, organized by level of education (first cycle of primary education, second cycle of primary education, secondary school), which differ in terms of goal, dominant student activities, and the role and activities of the teacher (*General Instructions for Strengthening the Educational Role of School through the Improvement of Extracurricular Activities in Primary and Secondary School*, 2020). Students can freely choose between the offered programs of extracurricular activities, provided that their overall workload defined under the school's normative acts is not exceeded. All stakeholders are involved in the design and development of extracurricular activities, generating content in the field of pedagogy, psychology, didactic, teaching methods, as well as socially relevant content. Content of extracurricular activities that are “voluntarily selected, flexible and open to everyone” (Vidulin & Papak, 2018: 17) can also be designed and developed by students, which encourages the development of their individual abilities, skills, and positive traits. Janković (2001) even believes that the content that forms the basis of extracurricular activities should include the interests, motives, and needs of each individual student, because they are not aimed at the adoption of strictly defined content.

The criticism of existing practices in the implementation of extracurricular activities in schools has also drawn great attention. Despite ostensible insistence on the importance of extracurricular activities, they are often neglected in our society, or they are not realized in keeping with the children's needs (Šiljković, Rajić, Bertić, 2007). There is increasingly frequent criticism regarding the types and content of extracurricular activities, as well as students' participation in them. In addition, it is indicated that the possibilities of extracurricular activities in encouraging creativity and divergent thinking among students are underused. Harsh critics of the existing programs of extracurricular activities and their implementation practices, such as Janković (2001) point to their competitive nature, which, in a way, renders their purpose and basic features meaningless.

A high-quality program of extracurricular activities should form a well-rounded unit with regular classes, both compulsory and elective courses, it should reflect different interests, needs, and abilities of students, inclinations and expertise of teachers and other employees in education, as well as specific conditions in which instruction in school is carried out (time-related, spatial, resource-related, technical, etc.), and the result of joint effort of teachers, parents, and expert associates. Ways in which teachers were additionally engaged in the implementation of extracurricular activities during the COVID-19 pandemic, student motivation or lack thereof, and the conditions in which the teachers implemented these activities are just some of the relevant questions that arose, considering the changed circumstances of educational work in schools. Moreover, the great educational opportunities of extracurricular activities on the overall student development were the initial motive to conduct the research with the aim of investigating the experiences and opinions of teachers regarding the ways in which extracurricular activities were organized and implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Research methodology

*Objective and research hypotheses.* In regard to the importance of extracurricular activities in fulfilling the educational role of school, students' development, and overall context of primary education in the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic that largely shaped the teachers' development and implementation of extracurricular activities and programs of such activities during the previous two academic years (2019/2020 and 2020/2021), the general objective of the research was defined: *examining the experiences and standpoints of teachers about the organization and implementation of extracurricular activities during the COVID-19 pandemic.* In keeping with the general objective, the appropriate research tasks were differentiated: a) investigating teachers' opinions about the possibilities and methods of implementation of extracurricular activities during the pandemic; b) investigating teachers' opinions about difficulties in the organization and

implementation of extracurricular activities during the pandemic; c) investigating teachers' opinions about the areas of extracurricular activities during the pandemic; d) investigating teachers' opinions about student engagement in extracurricular activities during the pandemic; and e) investigating the influence of independent variables (town, grade year, level of education, professional experience, development of digital competencies, attitude toward digitization in education) on their opinion about manner of implementation of extracurricular activities during the pandemic.

*Research methods, techniques, and instruments.* A descriptive non-experimental method, survey, and research technique were used in this research. The Questionnaire on Leisure Activities in Serbian Language Education (Čutović, 2021) was adapted for the purposes of this research.

*Sample.* The research was conducted on an appropriate sample of 242 primary school teachers from three districts in Serbia (Moravica, Zlatibor and Raška District). The sample was selected from the population of primary school teachers who organized extracurricular activities during the pandemic, in 2019/2020 and 2020/2021. With regard to all independent variables, the structure of the research sample is heterogeneous (Table 1).

*Table 1. Structure of teachers' sample with regard to independent variables (town, grade year, level of education, professional experience, development of digital competences, attitude toward digitization)*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Modalities</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Town</b>	Čačak	102	42.1
	Požega	20	8.3
	Užice	39	16.1
	Kraljevo	15	6.2
	Raška	5	2.1
	Gornji Milanovac	51	21.1
	Lučani	10	4.1
	Total	242	100.0
<b>Grade year</b>	First grade of primary school	51	21.1
	Second grade of primary school	46	19.0
	Third grade of primary school	52	21.5
	Fourth grade of primary school	52	21.5
	Fifth grade of primary school	9	3.7
	Sixth grade of primary school	9	3.7
	Seventh grade of primary school	10	4.1
	Eighth grade of primary school	13	5.4
	Total	242	100.0

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Modalities</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Professional experience</b>	Less than 10 years	25	10.3
	Between 11 and 20 years	62	25.6
	Over 20 years	155	64.0
	Total	242	100.0
<b>Level of education</b>	College of applied studies	25	10.3
	Bachelor's degree	145	59.9
	Master's degree	72	29.8
	Total	242	100.0
<b>Development of digital competencies</b>	Fully developed digital competencies	52	21.5
	Partially developed digital competencies	183	75.6
	Undeveloped digital competencies	7	2.9
	Total	242	100,0
<b>Attitude toward digitization</b>	Positive attitude	173	71.5
	Undecided	52	21.5
	Negative attitude	17	7.0
	Total	242	100.0

*Research organization.* The research was conducted in March, April, and May of 2023 in two ways: by directly distributing the written questionnaire, and electronically, via Google Forms.

*Data processing and analysis.* The collected data were processed with descriptive and inferential statistics, using the SPSS 20 software. Research results were tabulated and expressed using statistical measures of counting, relative ratio and average, and inference procedures by means of the chi-square test.

## **Research results and discussion**

Given that extracurricular activities are an important aspect in education (*General Instructions for Strengthening the Educational Role of School through the Improvement of Extracurricular Activities in Primary and Secondary School*, 2020; Pjurkowska Petrović & Ševkušić Mandić, 1997) and upbringing (Cole et al., 2007, as cited in: Bartkus, et al., 2012), and that extracurricular activities programs are an integral part of the annual teaching plan in primary school, the experiences of teachers regarding the organization and implementation of extracurricular activities during the two years of the pandemic were examined. As suggested by the results given in Table 2, most teachers highlighted that extracurricular activities were only

partially implemented during the pandemic, or that they were adapted to the changed circumstances caused by the pandemic. About one fifth of the respondents said that there were no extracurricular activities during the pandemic. Regarding the implementation of extracurricular activities, the presence of difference models is noticeable: a) *direct implementation, combined model* of implementation through the combination of direct (face-to-face) interaction and online platforms, and *online model*, realization of extracurricular activities solely through online learning platforms. It is evident that teachers organized and implemented extracurricular activities in line with the decisions and recommendations of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development regarding the realization of teaching in primary school in different stages of the pandemic (*Decision on Suspension of Teaching in Higher Education Institutions and Primary and Secondary Schools, and the Regular Work of Institutions of Preschool Education, 2020; Professional Instructions for Organization and Implementation of Teaching in 2020/2021, 2020*). After the declaration of the state of emergency and suspension of teaching in school, extracurricular activities were implemented through different online platforms, and in a considerable number of cases, their implementation was suspended entirely. Over a prolonged period of the pandemic, after the state of emergency was revoked, but the epidemiological situation was still unfavorable, a combined model, which involved the combination of direct instruction and online teaching was used, however, most teachers still opted for organizing extracurricular activities only when all the conditions for their realization were met. The focus of organized distance learning broadcast on Radio Television of Serbia's Channel 3 was on the content of general education and applied professional courses with the highest weekly class load (*Announcement of the Ministry of Education regarding Operational Plan for Continuing the Work of Schools in Difficult Conditions with a Distance Learning Program for Primary and Secondary School Students, 2020*). In such circumstances, the implementation of teaching content of all school subjects, including extracurricular activities, fell within the competence and the ability of schools, depending on their resources for supporting distance learning, as well as the readiness and motivation of teachers. Hence, the resulting distribution of teachers' answers is not surprising.

*Table 2. Organization and implementation of extracurricular activities during the pandemic*

	<b>Modalities</b>	f	%
<b>Possibilities for implementation of extracurricular activities</b>	There were no extracurricular activities	47	19.4
	Partial implementation	114	47.1
	Activities were adapted to changed circumstances	81	33.5
	Total	242	100.0

	<b>Modalities</b>	f	%
<b>Manner of implementation of extracurricular activities</b>	Direct implementation	108	44.6
	Online	6	14.9
	Combined model	98	40.5
	Total	242	100.0
<b>Difficulties in implementation and organization of extracurricular activities</b>	Impossibility of direct interaction	85	35.1
	Lack of necessary resources and conditions	58	24.0
	Focus on regular instruction	122	50.4
	Uncertainty and fear	19	7.9
	Lack of interest among students	61	25.2
	Total	242	100.0
<b>Areas of extracurricular activities</b>	Culture	150	62.0
	Science	17	7.0
	Art	50	20.7
	Other (sport, environment, etc.)	25	10.3
	Total	242	100.0
<b>Student engagement in extracurricular activities</b>	Fully engaged	71	29.3
	Partially engaged	160	66.1
	Disengaged	11	4.5
	Total	242	100.0
<b>Student participation in student competitions</b>	Yes, they were able to participate in student competitions	46	19.0
	No, there were no organized competitions	196	81.0
	Total	242	100.0

The analyzed results of the second research task (Table 2) that involved examining the opinions of teachers about the difficulties in the organization and implementation of extracurricular activities during the pandemic indicate the existence of various organizational, psychological, and health-related challenges. The implementation of extracurricular activities was plagued by the following difficulties: a) teachers' preoccupation with regular instruction, impossibility of direct interaction, lack of interest among students, lack of the necessary conditions and resources, as well as uncertainty and fear. It is not, therefore, surprising that the interviewed teachers view their preoccupation with regular instruction and organizational challenges as the biggest difficulties regarding the organization of extracurricular activities. On the one hand, the former is a direct implication of the decisions and recommendations of the competent Ministry on education during the pandemic. On the other hand, organization of extracurricular activities is a great



challenge for teachers even in normal circumstances, because it often includes students from different grade years and classes, and their teachers. It implies the establishment of collaboration and synchronicity between teachers, teachers and students, and between students themselves, as well as modes of work that are suitable for all direct participants, and possible to achieve with the school's existing technical, material and other resources.

Extracurricular activities in combination with instruction should help achieve educational goals and tasks, and are planned, organized, and implemented accordingly in different areas, using different content and forms. Areas of extracurricular activities during the pandemic were investigated in the third research task. Thanks to these results, we indirectly learned about their potential in helping to fulfill the goals and tasks of primary education. The results given in Table 2 indicate that teachers implemented extracurricular activities in the following areas: a) culture, b) art, sport, environmental protection, and others. Teachers' answers further suggest that the offer of extracurricular activities was not varied enough, which may indicate that they were not focused on meeting the needs and interests of a diverse student population to a sufficient extent.

As part of the fourth research task, the teacher assessed the level of student engagement in extracurricular activities during the pandemic and their participation in student competitions (Table 2). As the data suggests, most teachers estimated students only partially took part in extracurricular activities during the pandemic which can be explained by the changed social and educational circumstances, and the mode of instruction. About one third of the teachers believe that students were fully engaged in extracurricular activities, while the smallest percentage of the respondents think that student engagement was entirely lacking, therefore, one cannot speak about real student participation in extracurricular activities.

The results also indicate an extremely low student participation in competitions (Table 2). A meager 19% of the teachers said that their students had the opportunity to participate in student competitions over the observed two-year period. The interpretation and explanation for such results can be sought in reduced student aspirations brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, but also in the strict protocols and guidelines for organizing student competitions adopted during the pandemic.

The fifth research task referred to the examination of the influence of the independent variables (town, grade year, level of education, professional experience, development of digital competencies, attitude toward digitization in education) on teachers' opinions about the organization and implementation of extracurricular activities during the pandemic. For the sake of systematicity and transparency of the presentation, only the results about statistically significant relationships between the examined variables and teachers' opinions are presented.

The first investigated socio-demographic variable – *town* – proved to be a significant determinant of teachers' opinions regarding the organization and implementation of extracurricular activities during the COVID-19 pandemic, regarding most of the aspects considered. There are significant differences in the way teachers perceive: a) possibilities for the realization of extracurricular activities ( $\chi^2 = 31.524$ ;  $df = 12$ ;  $p = .002$ ); b) models of implementation of extracurricular activities ( $\chi^2 = 38.930$ ;  $df = 12$ ;  $p = .000$ ); c) certain difficulties in their implementation, such as: lack of necessary resources and conditions ( $\chi^2 = 15.987$ ;  $df = 6$ ;  $p = .014$ ), teachers' preoccupation with regular instruction ( $\chi^2 = 19.096$ ;  $df = 6$ ;  $p = .004$ ), uncertainty and fear ( $\chi^2 = 21.273$ ;  $df = 6$ ;  $p = .002$ ); d) areas of extracurricular activity ( $\chi^2 = 37.967$ ;  $df = 18$ ;  $p = .004$ ); and e) level of student engagement in extracurricular activities ( $\chi^2 = 21.355$ ;  $df = 12$ ;  $p = .045$ ) with regard to their place of work. Previous research (Vasiljević et al., 2023) indicates that there are significant differences in the perception of online instruction between teachers who work in urban, suburban, and rural schools, as well as that teachers and students do not have access to the technology and resources needed for online instruction, which is particularly noticeable in rural environments. The crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has additionally revealed many weaknesses of the education system generated by the educational policy measures, hence the criticism of the adopted universal measures and uniform organization of instruction, regardless of the specific conditions in different schools, needs and possibilities of teachers, students and other participants in the educational process is justified (Tadić, 2021).

Differences in teachers' opinions about the organization and implementation of extracurricular activities during the COVID-19 pandemic with regard to the grade year they teach reached statistical significance within three aspects: a) possibility of implementation ( $\chi^2 = 46.254$ ;  $df = 16$ ;  $p = .000$ ); b) manner of implementation ( $\chi^2 = 30.362$ ;  $df = 16$ ;  $p = .016$ ); and c) student participation in competitions ( $\chi^2 = 19.914$ ;  $df = 8$ ;  $p = .011$ ). As indicated by the teachers' answers, in the extraordinary conditions of the pandemic, extracurricular activities were implemented in each grade year, but with different frequency. Teachers who teach students in the first cycle of primary education organized extracurricular activities more frequently than those who teach students in the second cycle of primary education. Such significant differences between teachers are expected, given the differences between students of different ages in terms of their knowledge, skills, interests, capacities, and needs, which must be taken into account (*General Instructions for Stengthening the Educational Role of School through the Improvement of Extracurricular Activities in Primary and Secondary School*, 2020). In the first cycle of primary education, the focus of extracurricular activities is on socialization, psychomotor development of students, creative expression and getting to know oneself and one's environment, whereas in the second cycle of primary education, the emphasis is on all aspects of student development (intellectual, emotional, moral, physical, and social) through collaboration, camaraderie, and friendship.

The results of the chi-square test confirm that the observed differences in the opinions of teachers with different professional experience (years of service) are statistically significant, especially regarding the possibility of organizing extracurricular activities ( $\chi^2 = 19.914$ ;  $df = 8$ ;  $p = .011$ ); identifying certain difficulties in their organization and implementation, namely: teachers' preoccupation with regular instruction ( $\chi^2 = 10.160$ ;  $df = 2$ ;  $p = .006$ ), fear and uncertainty ( $\chi^2 = 10.075$ ;  $df = 2$ ;  $p = .006$ ), and their assessment of student engagement in extracurricular activities ( $\chi^2 = 11.514$ ;  $df = 4$ ;  $p = .021$ ). Most experienced teachers are more likely to express the attitude that extracurricular activities were partially realized and adapted to changed circumstances during the pandemic, than those who spent fewer years in the teaching profession. They perceive their own preoccupation with regular instruction as the greatest obstacle to the implementation of extracurricular activities, and fear and uncertainty as the smallest. Teachers with more years of service in education share the opinion that students partially or fully participated in extracurricular activities compared to other categories of teachers. The obtained results regarding the influence of teachers' professional experience on their opinion about extracurricular activities agree with the results of previous research (Čutović, 2021), and can be interpreted by the greater competency of more experienced teachers to create and implement extracurricular activities to fit the diverse needs and interests of students, which is one of the most important requirements for active student participation in them. In addition, extracurricular activities are one of the elements of assessment of student achievement (Vučković, 1988), so we assume that this was one of the reasons that motivated more experienced teachers to try and increase student engagement.

Based on the value of the chi-square test, it is possible to conclude that a teacher's level of education significantly determines their opinion about the possibility of realization of extracurricular activities ( $\chi^2 = 10.622$ ;  $df = 4$ ;  $p = .031$ ); perceiving fear and uncertainty as a difficulty in the organization and implementation of extracurricular activities ( $\chi^2 = 9.969$ ;  $df = 2$ ;  $p = .007$ ), and their assessment of student engagement in extracurricular activities ( $\chi^2 = 11.730$ ;  $df = 4$ ;  $p = .019$ ). Teachers with a bachelor's degree are more likely to say that extracurricular activities were at least partially implemented and adapted to the changed circumstances during the pandemic than those with applied degrees or master's degrees. They also rated student engagement in extracurricular activities as higher than the other categories of teachers and were less likely to perceive fear and uncertainty as an obstacle in the organization and implementation of extracurricular activities.

The realization of instruction and extracurricular activities in a changed social context over the two consecutive school years required an appropriate level of digital competencies and skills from teachers. Given that digital competencies are a complex and multidimensional construct that integrates knowledge, skills, critical and safe use of modern information and communication technologies in different segments of social practice (Carretero et al., 2017; Vuorikari et al., 2016; Vuorikari et al., 2022), we were interested in whether the teacher's self-assessment of their

digital competencies influence their opinion regarding different aspects of the implementation of extracurricular activities during the pandemic. The results of statistical analysis show that the development of teachers' digital competencies significantly impacts their opinion on: a) the manner of implementation of extracurricular activities ( $\chi^2 = 18.942$ ;  $df = 4$ ;  $p = .001$ ); b) certain difficulties in their implementation, namely: impossibility of direct instruction and interaction ( $\chi^2 = 8.603$ ;  $df = 2$ ;  $p = .014$ ), lack of the necessary resources and conditions ( $\chi^2 = 6.297$ ;  $df = 2$ ;  $p = .043$ ), preoccupation with regular instruction ( $\chi^2 = 6.297$ ;  $df = 2$ ;  $p = .043$ ), lack of student interest ( $\chi^2 = 7.918$ ;  $df = 2$ ;  $p = .019$ ); and c) level of student engagement in teaching activities ( $\chi^2 = 25.381$ ;  $df = 4$ ;  $p = .000$ ). Teachers who assess their digital competencies as fully developed were more likely to realize extracurricular activities using the combined model, more positively assess the level of student engagement in extracurricular activities and perceive difficulties in the implementation of extracurricular activities to a lesser extent. Teachers who perceive their own digital competencies as partially developed or underdeveloped were more likely to perceive difficulties in the realization of extracurricular activities and use the direct model.

Based on the values of the chi-square test, it is possible to conclude that the attitude of the teachers toward digitization in education greatly determines their opinion on: a) possibilities of realizing extracurricular activities ( $\chi^2 = 23.046$ ;  $df = 4$ ;  $p = .000$ ); b) certain difficulties in the organization and implementation of extracurricular activities, such as: lack of the necessary resources and conditions ( $\chi^2 = 12.337$ ;  $df = 2$ ;  $p = .002$ ) and fear and uncertainty ( $\chi^2 = 28.274$ ;  $df = 2$ ;  $p = .000$ ); and c) student engagement in extracurricular activities ( $\chi^2 = 22.425$ ;  $df = 4$ ;  $p = .00$ ). Analyzing teachers' responses, it is noticeable that teachers with a more positive attitude toward digitization in education said that they at least partially realized extracurricular activities and adapted them to the changed circumstances, are more likely to highlight the lack of necessary resources and conditions as a difficulty in the implementation of extracurricular activities, and believe that students were partially or fully engaged compared to their colleagues who foster a negative attitude toward digitization in education, or do not have a formed opinion regarding the matter. Since the attitude toward digitization in education can be viewed as an important predictor of a teacher's behavior in the conditions that involve the use of ICT in the teaching process and extracurricular activities, the need for additional support to teachers is recognized, so that they would be able to better identify the good sides (benefits) of digitization in education.

## Conclusion

This research aimed to investigate the perspectives and experiences of primary school teachers in the organization and implementation of extracurricular activities during the pandemic. The few previous studies on this topic (LaForge-MacKenzie et al., 2022; People for Education, 2021; Čutović, 2021) indicated that this segment of instruction of junior primary school students was insufficiently represented, despite its enormous educational potential. In line with the initial research tasks, the following conclusions of this research can be pointed out. As suggested by teachers' answers, extracurricular activities were, as a rule, organized partially during the pandemic, usually through direct instruction and combined activities, i.e., online learning platforms. The realization of extracurricular activities was plagued by numerous difficulties (teachers' preoccupation with regular instruction, lack of necessary resources and conditions, impossibility of direct interaction, etc.), which had numerous implications regarding the variety and forms of extracurricular activities, level of student engagement in them, and the possibility of participating in student competitions. The influence of independent variables (town, grade year, level of education, professional experience, attitude toward digitization in education, development of teachers' digital competencies) on the teachers' opinions about the organization and implementation of extracurricular activities during the pandemic was partially confirmed. All observed variables, especially town and grade year, proved to be significant determinants of teachers' opinions about the implementation of extracurricular activities during the pandemic.

Given that the aim of this research concentrated on certain aspects of the implementation of extracurricular activities during the two-year period of the pandemic, the obtained results may have significant practical implications for their organization and realization in the future, especially in changed social contexts. Based on the obtained results, we have drawn the following guidelines for the teaching practice: a) possibility of relieving teachers of part of their duties related to regular instruction so that they could better integrate extracurricular activities with other school activities; b) a different support system for teachers, which would allow them to implement extracurricular activities in regular and changed conditions is needed, one that sufficiently recognizes all the specifics necessary for their successful realization; c) it is necessary to provide a more effective support system in terms of human and technical resources that would allow teachers to act with autonomy and establish quality collaboration with students and parents; d) teacher training in the use of different learning platforms so that they could be used in the implementation of extracurricular activities; e) developing a concept of extracurricular activities which is, among other things, based on direct experiences of teachers in the realization of such activities during the pandemic; and f) a system

of rewarding and promoting teachers who show initiative in the realization and organization of extracurricular activities.

The results of the research indicated possible directions for future research of this topic. Our study did not include secondary school teachers, so there was no possibility to compare experiences with respect to different levels of education. Qualitative analysis of the programs of extracurricular activities as part of school documents has also proved useful in determining the difference between what has been planned and what has been achieved. The data obtained by such a comparison could provide more precise guidelines on the type of support the teachers need to better implement extracurricular activities in the changed educational conditions. The collected data on the areas of extracurricular activities did not include data on the forms represented and their content, so the need for qualitative research on this issue is also recognized.

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## **ВАННАСТАВНЕ АКТИВНОСТИ У ВРЕМЕ ПАНДЕМИЈЕ КОВИД-19: ИСКУСТВА НАСТАВНИКА И ПОУКЕ**

### **Резиме**

Услед појаве пандемије вируса корона дошло је до прилагођавања у реализацији програма ваннаставних активности у школама. Полазећи од значаја ваннаставних активности у остваривању васпитне улоге школе и развоју ученика, спроведено је истраживање са циљем испитивања начина организације и реализације ваннаставних активности у условима пандемије ковид-19. Примењена је дескриптивно-неекспериментална метода и техника анкетања. Истраживањем су обухваћени наставници основних школа из три округа у Србији (N = 242). Услед пандемије, како сугеришу наставници, ваннаставне активности су углавном делимично организоване, најчешће непосредно и посредством комбинованих активности кроз непосредни рад и онлајн платформе за учење, а њихову реализацију ометале су бројне тешкоће, што је имало бројне импликације на области и форме ваннаставних активности, могућност учествовања ученика на такмичењима, као и на степен ангажовања у њима. Делимично је потврђена претпоставка о утицају независних варијабли (место, разред, степен стручне спреме, радни стаж, став према дигитализацији у образовању, развијеност дигиталних компетенција наставника) на мишљење наставника о организацији и реализацији ваннаставних активности током пандемије. На темељу добијених резултата изведене су препоруке за непосредну праксу и наговештени су правци за даља истраживања у овој области.

**Кључне речи:** ваннаставне активности, основна школа, онлајн платформе за учење, наставници, пандемија.