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Development of Students' Social Competencies during Post-COVID Times

KLJUČNE BESEDE: osnovnošolski učitelji, pandemija, postcovidni čas, socialne kompetence, učenci

POVZETEK – Sodobni globalni razvoj, pandemija, ki kar vztraja, hiter tehnološki napredek in digitalizacija so vplivali na vse vidike življenja, vključno z izobraževalnim sistemom na vseh ravneh. Celotna populacija je postala socialno izolirana. Vse omenjeno omejuje in onemogoča razvoj socialnih sposobnosti, ki so ključni temelj za uspeh v življenju. Cilj raziskave je ugotoviti mnenje učiteljev o tem, kako učencem pomagati pri izboljšanju njihovih socialnih veščin. Rezultati te raziskave kažejo, da mlajši učitelji bolj cenijo pomen razvijanja socialnih kompetenc učencev kot starejši. Mlajši učitelji tudi menijo, da je pandemija vplivala na razvoj socialnih kompetenc učencev. Učitelji, ki imajo mlajše učence, pogosteje ocenjujejo razvijanje socialnih kompetenc učencev kot pomembno. Raziskave lahko prispevajo k nadaljnjemu razmisleku o pomenu razvijanja socialnih kompetenc, saj so te pogosto ključne za uspeh učencev in odraslih v družbi in skupnosti.

KEYWORDS: social competencies, pandemic, post-COVID times, students, primary school teachers

ABSTRACT – All facets of life have been impacted by contemporary global developments, a persistent pandemic, rapid technology advancement, and digitalization – the same goes for the educational system at all levels. The entire population has become socially isolated, which impedes the development of their social abilities that are a crucial cornerstone for success in life. The study's objective is to ascertain how primary school teachers feel about the significance of helping children to improve their social skills. The results of this research imply that younger teachers value the importance of developing students' social competencies more than older ones. Younger teachers also believe that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the development of students' social competencies. Teachers who have younger students are more likely to assess the importance of developing students' social competencies. Research can contribute to further reflection on the importance of developing students' social competencies, as they are often crucial for the success of students and adults in society and the community.

1 Introduction

Unlike traditional curricula that focus on shifting the emphasis from teacher to student, modern curricula should focus on developing students' competencies. Competence takes on the meaning of decision-making rights, expertise, abilities, and knowledge that a person has in a certain field (Anić, 2007). Competence also includes the ability to apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed for achieving the desired results and for personal fulfilment, development, social inclusion, and employment, which all form the basis of lifelong learning (European Communities, 2007).

We can find several terminologies linked to social competencies (social skills, skills, social intelligence, social literacy, social communication, etc.) in the literature on children's social development that authors interpret differently. Despite their fre-

quent overlap, social competence and social skills are often distinguished by authors. Competence governs how a person employs their skills in a social situation. Skills are distinctive actions of an individual (Jurić, 2010). According to Buljubašić-Kuzmanović and Blažević (2015), social competence typically refers to the social, emotional, and cognitive abilities and behaviours that children and teenagers need for successful social adjustment. Katz and McClellan (2005) defined social competence as achieving sufficient developmental outcomes that permit satisfactory and competent engagement in society. Socially adept behaviour indicates honed emotional, cognitive, and social skills. A variety of social behaviours that are learnt, under the control of the individual, appropriate for the circumstance and interaction, and goal-oriented are referred to as social skills. When we talk about a child's social skills, we are talking about specific characteristics like assertiveness, tolerance, and non-violent conflict resolution. Children who learn social skills are better able to deal with everyday situations and build self-esteem and confidence. They also learn how to resolve conflicts, manage their emotions, express their feelings, and acknowledge the feelings of others. They also learn how to successfully cooperate with their environment and build relationships with their peers. Being socially adept and contributing to society both require the appropriate use of acquired social skills.

Throughout a child's development, social competency is developed. Many social skills must be developed by children in primary school. According to Brajša-Žganec (2003), the family and the school are two of the most significant systems that influence a child's development. Berčnik and Devjak (2018) also state that cooperation between teachers and parents (school and family) is essential for the effective development of students' skills. Social interactions have an impact on a child's behaviour, emotional expression, and experiences. The child learns which responses are acceptable in various circumstances by interacting (Romih and Košir, 2018; Romih and Bakračevič Vukman, 2015). It is a technique for managing one's own conduct and adjusting to other people. The child learns and gains knowledge and abilities that go beyond his/her own experience by seeing how others behave (observational learning). The youngster expresses his/her wants in social interactions with the environment, and when the environment responds, he/she starts to establish a social connection that is important to his/her overall development. As the child grows and matures, relationships with peers become important; games and socializing become diverse and richer; cooperation and obeying rules develop; division of roles and agreements take place, and the first friendships emerge. Kolak (2010) points out that peers are a very important social environment in which a child lives and develops, as the child spends most of his/her free time with them. Through the process of socialization, the child learns to behave in a peer group, learns to follow the rules, and to process defeat and victory. In a peer group, children satisfy the need for intimacy, form an image of themselves, acquire social skills, and learn to help, share, and cooperate. Formal peer groups in the school hierarchy consist of class sections.

The responsibility of adults is to promote a child's growth and learning by whatever methods they judge suitable, and teachers and students should engage in open dialogue and communication to further this goal. "The most important and most common forms of relations that students establish and maintain at school are peer relations and relations with teachers" (Košir, 2012). The function of the teacher as a lecturer supported

in the conventional teaching model has been replaced in modern schools by the roles of organizer, leader, mentor, associate (Zrilić and Marin, 2019) and innovator, advisor, coordinator (Maksimović et al., 2020).

The study backs up Vygotsky's socio-constructivist theory (Vygotsky, 1978) which states that interaction, communication, and discourse are always necessary for the social components of learning to take place. Instead of emphasizing the content, constructivist didactics places more emphasis on building relationships within the learning process, supporting the circumstances for student engagement and democratic control over the educational process (Palekčić, 2002). Additionally, Katz and McClellan (2005) point out several elements that have an impact on educational communities' social lives. These are the timetable for social interactions, as well as the physical and material surroundings where students can hone their abilities and attitudes.

During the protracted COVID-19 pandemic, pupils were socially isolated, which prevented them from interacting with others and growing socially competent. At the same time, children are spending an increasing amount of time with digital technology due to the rapid technical advancement, digitalization, and accessibility of different digital devices, which also impedes and limits the development of their social skills. The following essay outlines a framework for examining primary school teachers' opinions on the value of helping pupils to develop their social skills.

2   Research methodology

The aim of the research was to examine primary school teachers' opinions on and attitudes towards the development of students' social competencies. In accordance with the stated goal of the research, the following hypotheses were set:

☐ H1. Classroom teachers encourage the development of students' social competencies.
☐ H2. Younger teachers highly value the importance of developing students' social competencies.
☐ H3. Teachers are more focused on the development of social competencies of students in lower grades.

The survey was conducted during the 2021/2022 school year. 248 primary school teachers from different parts of the Republic of Croatia participated in the research. A questionnaire, specifically designed for the purpose of this research, consisted of two parts. The first part of the questionnaire contained questions related to the socio-demographic data of respondents, and the second part of the questionnaire contained questions that examined the attitudes and opinions held by primary school teachers about the importance of encouraging the development of students' social competencies. A five-point Likert scale was used to assess the importance of social skills that are an integral part of students' social competencies. The questionnaire was available in digital form and was filled in voluntarily.

3 Research results

Sociodemographic data

A total of 248 Croatian primary school teachers participated in the research; 17 (6.9%) were male and 231 (93.1%) were female. The length of respondents' teaching experience is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Number of primary school teachers by years of work experience

Years of work experience	N	%
0 – 5	28	11.3
6 – 10	20	8.1
11 – 20	43	17.3
21 – 30	95	38.3
≥ 31	62	25.0
Σ	248	100

Table 2 shows the grade level that the respondents were teaching during that school year.

Table 2

*Number of teachers according to the grade level they teach*

Grade	N	%
1st	49	19.8
2nd	59	23.8
3rd	50	20.2
4th	62	25.0
Combined classrooms	28	11.3
Σ	248	100

Descriptive statistics of selected dimensions of examined variables

Data from the second set of questions, which focused on primary school teachers' attitudes and opinions regarding the significance of helping pupils to improve their social skills, were chosen. Teachers had a choice of several responses when asked what affected the growth of pupils' social skills. Graph 1 illustrates their response, which is that the development of social skills is primarily influenced by family upbringing (95.6%) and classroom instruction (73.8%).

Graph 1

Teachers' attitudes about areas of influence on students' social competencies
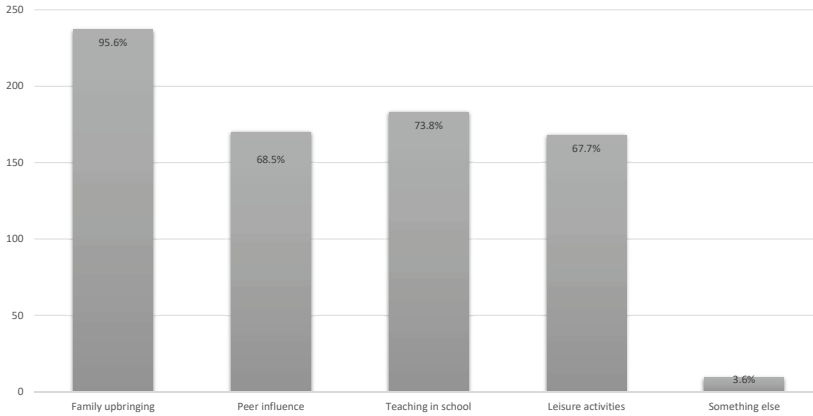
The development of students' social competencies was affected by the long-lasting pandemic (45.2% of teachers), as well as technological development and digitalization (55.2% of teachers). The social climate in their class was assessed by teachers as very positive (26.6%) and positive (48.4%). Teachers estimated that students spend their free time using digital technology sometimes (31.5%), often (33.5%), and very often (27%). Teachers estimated that students spend their free time playing with peers very rarely (11.3%), rarely (23%), occasionally (39.5%), often (21.4%) or very often (4.8%). When asked about the social skills of students, the majority of teachers (75%) report developing compliance with the rules in their classes (Graph 2).

Graph 2

Teachers' attitudes about the social skills they develop in students
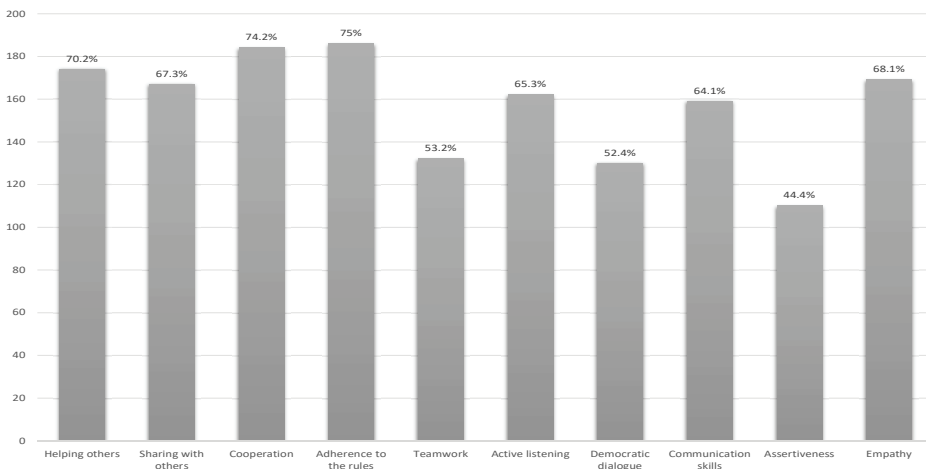
T-test results for independent samples

Table 3 details the variations in how the relevance of helping students to develop their social skills is evaluated in relation to the job experience of teachers. Regarding the effect on students' social competence development and the job experience of teachers, there was a statistically significant difference. Specifically, teachers with up to five years of professional experience are statistically considerably more likely to think that the epidemic affects their pupils' social competencies ($t = 2.742$, $p = 0.007$).

In comparison to teachers with 31 years or more of professional experience, these teachers likewise place a higher priority on students' social competence development ($t = 3.623$, $p = 0.000$). It has been determined that teachers with fewer than five years of service believe that the pandemic has had a great impact on students' social competencies and highly value the importance of developing students' social competencies, as opposed to teachers with 31 years of service and more.

Table 3

Assessing the impact of the importance of developing students' social competencies in relation to teachers' work experience

Social competencies	Work experience	N	m	SD	t	p*
Assessing the impact of the pandemic on students' social competencies	0–5	28	3.5306	0.49159	2.742	0.007
	≥ 31	62	3.2281	0.48148		
Assessment of the development of students' social competencies	0–5	28	4.4929	0.47837	2.742	0.008
	≥ 31	62	4.1871	0.75866		

Note: *p < 0.01

A statistically significant difference between the grade and the amount of impact on the development of students' social competencies is seen in Table 4 in connection to the assessments of the level of influence on students' social competencies made by teachers. In particular, 3rd grade teachers are statistically significantly more likely than 4th grade teachers to think that they should have an impact on students' social competence development ($t = 2.714$, $p = 0.008$). In contrast to the fourth-grade teachers, it is shown that the third-grade teachers have a positive perception of their influence on students' development of social skills.

Table 4

Assessment of the impact on the development of students' social competence in relation to the grade

Social competencies	Grade	N	m	SD	t	p*
Assessing the impact of the pandemic on students' social competencies	3rd	50	3.5571	0.41550	2.714	0.008
	4th	62	3.3295	0.46098		

Note: *p < 0.01

In summary, it can be seen from the analysis of the pandemic's effects on students' social competencies in Table 5 that everyone has been severely impacted. Since they found it challenging to engage in social relations, teachers usually concluded that the pandemic had a detrimental impact on social competencies. It is clear, however, that third-graders were the ones who were affected the most; this is an unexpected outcome, given that the youngest pupils, whose social skills had only recently begun to develop, would have presumably been affected the most.

Table 5

Assessment of the impact on the development of students' social competence

Grade	m	N	SD
1st	3.4257	49	0.50717
2nd	3.4528	59	0.43763
3rd	3.5571	50	0.41550
4th	3.3295	62	0.46098
Comb	3.3651	27	0.40857
Total	3.4280	247	0.45441

4 Discussion

The idea that the modern curriculum is constantly looking for new ways to teach that would meet the needs and interests of modern students and prepare them for logical thinking, entrepreneurship, creativity, collaboration, and working in pairs, groups and teams reflects the relevance of the research. The development of social skills has taken precedence over the acquisition of the knowledge and information that children can access via the Internet and other digital gadgets all around them.

The research's findings support the first hypothesis, which proposes that primary school teachers should support the growth of their pupils' social skills, particularly those relating to following rules, cooperating with others, and assisting others. In mod-

ern schools, collaborative relationships are expressed in a flexible approach to the selection and execution of teaching materials that involve students directly (Valjan-Vukić, 2009). A study by Buljubašić-Kuzmanović and Blažević (2015) examined the effect of the school curriculum, specifically of its co-creators (teachers, parents, and peers), on the social skills development of lower primary school children.

The study's findings revealed that teachers typically give themselves high marks for how frequently they use instructional tactics that promote pupils' socio-emotional growth. Teachers rank the following among the highest values: fostering mutual respect, avoiding fights and arguments, respecting and appreciating students' opinions, respecting and appreciating differences among students, promoting freedom of expression and feelings, and allowing students to freely demonstrate their skills and abilities. According to Raboteg-Šarić (1999), those who lend a hand to others tend to have more self-esteem, are more competent, and have more faith in their own talents. Cooperation and aiding others are the most crucial factors in the author's study. People who lend a hand to others are more competent, have greater self-confidence, and have higher self-esteem. In our study, this variable was also highlighted.

Many authors (Rosić and Zloković, 2002; Brajša-Žganec, 2003; Katz and McClellan, 2005; Valjan-Vukić, 2009; Kolak, 2010; Buljubašić-Kuzmanović and Blažević, 2015) state that social skills are acquired from the earliest years of childhood. They first acquire knowledge through their families, other children, kindergarten, school, and the larger social environment. School is one of the most crucial systems that influence a child's development, along with the family. Students adopt various social experiences in the unique social milieu of each school. One can strive to impact children's and young people's social abilities from an early age, lessen the risk that they will exhibit improper behaviour, and enable pupils to establish positive relationships with their classmates. School is a place where children learn and grow into full-fledged individuals. The modern school is a place to live (Hentig, 1993), as well as a creative, compassionate, and sociable community (Previšić, 1999). It plays a vital role in the socialization and personality development of young people. The goal of the new school is to give pupils the conditions and atmosphere necessary for positive social interactions and as many kinds of contacts as possible. This gives pupils the chance to practice and build social skills that improve their relationships with others (Klarin, 2006). Teachers in this study support the authors' assertions that social competence development first occurs in the family and only subsequently in the educational setting of the school.

The role of adults is to encourage students' development in all areas. In the modern school, the role of the teacher as a lecturer who advocates the traditional curriculum has been changed to the role of an organizer, leader, mentor, and collaborator (Zrilić and Marin, 2019). Through creative and innovative activities in the educational process, which are complemented by advice, coordination and guidance of students, the teacher can move away from traditional teaching and learning. Tot (2013) examines this modern communication model of the teacher's role in the context of the relationship of cooperation and togetherness, and links it to the procedures and interactions in a challenging educational environment. Given that teachers place a high value on helping students to develop their social skills in this study, which supports the second research hypothesis, it appears that younger teachers with less work experience were more amenable to taking on this position. Additionally, these teachers are statistically more likely to think

that the pandemic has had an impact on the children' social skills. The findings of this research show that teachers do not value the importance of playing, learning and socializing with peers. That may be related to the COVID pandemic and the isolation of children from peers because many authors (Brajša-Žganec, 2003; Klarin, 2006; Kolak, 2010; Buljubašić-Kuzmanović and Blažević, 2015; Uyanık et al., 2018) emphasize the world of peers as an important social environment in which the child lives and develops. Most of the child's leisure time is spent with his/her friends. Through the socialization process, the youngster learns how to act in a peer group, how to follow the rules, and how to deal with failure and success. In a peer group, the child finds intimacy, develops an identity, learns social skills, and gains the ability to help, share, and cooperate. According to the theory of social learning, peers operate as role models; they reward or penalize specific behaviours, and are a source of the evaluation of self-efficacy (Kolak, 2010).

The findings of the research conducted by Buljubašić-Kuzmanović (2012) imply that younger students assess that they more frequently have the opportunity to show their skills in different school activities. Our study found that teachers of younger pupils, or lower-grade children, place a greater emphasis on their social development, supporting the third research hypothesis. It stands to reason that teachers in the lower grades concentrate more on helping children to improve their social skills because they strive hard to create a welcoming learning environment in the classrooms from the start. The social environment in which learning occurs is crucial because the social components of learning usually involve conversation, reciprocal communication, and engagement. The ability of teachers to interact with pupils in a way that fosters tolerance, collaboration, and compromise is mirrored in their grasp of social interactions, which is "reflected in the ability to interact based on communication that promotes tolerance, cooperation, and compromise" (Prevendar, 2007, p. 591). Teachers who foster a pleasant learning environment encourage respect, equality, partnership, tolerance, and cooperation. They consequently help their students to become more socially adept as those students imitate them. According to Kolak (2010), students' social competence is frequently influenced by the classroom environment or the calibre of interactions; hence, it is crucial that the curriculum fosters social skills that support students' competence.

5 Conclusion

Students' prolonged social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic hindered them from making friends and, as a result, from developing social skills. Children are spending more time with digital technology due to the rapid technical advancement, digitization, and accessibility of different digital gadgets, which also impedes and inhibits the development of their social skills.

The findings of this study demonstrate teachers' awareness of the need for fostering students' social competence, which is a crucial cornerstone for success in life. To foster collaboration, adherence to rules, and assisting others, teachers emphasized the importance of the family, followed by the school. These are the principles of a contemporary democracy that parents and subsequently teachers should encourage in children. Traditionalism includes the transmission of knowledge from teacher to pupil and the

emphasis on subject-matter learning. The modern classroom fosters systematic and active learning, and students grow in their capacity for observation, critical thinking, judgment, and logical reasoning. Such education ought to be conducted in an environment that is supportive of collaboration and stimulation.

The study's findings demonstrate that younger educators are prepared to collaborate with students, foster more social skills in them, and value their input into curriculum development. Modern students in the twenty-first century require a capable and qualified instructor who possesses social knowledge and abilities, can identify their developmental requirements, knowledge, and interests, and will be able to motivate them to make progress.

The study's findings demonstrate that contemporary teachers work to establish a pleasant learning environment in the classroom from the start and help children to develop more social skills. Most teachers, however, are not satisfied with the social environment in the classroom, and this study presents a chance to question which methods support the development of a positive climate and pose fresh challenges for academics and practitioners.

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Razvoj socialnih kompetenc učencev po pandemiji

Sodobni globalni razvoj, pandemija, ki kar vztraja, hiter tehnološki napredek in digitalizacija so vplivali na vse vidike življenja, vključno z izobraževalnim sistemom na vseh ravneh. Celotna populacija je postala socialno izolirana, učenci imajo manj socialnih povezav in več časa preživijo z digitalno tehnologijo, kar vse omejuje in onemogoča razvoj njihovih socialnih sposobnosti, ki so ključni temelj za uspeh v življenju.

Poleg družine je šola eden izmed najpomembnejših sistemov, ki vpliva na otrokov razvoj (Košir, 2012). Učenci doživljajo različne socialne izkušnje v edinstvenem socialnem okolju posamezne šole. Potrebno si je prizadevati, da že v zgodnjem otroštvu vplivamo na socialne sposobnosti otrok in mladostnikov, da bi zmanjšali tveganje za neprimerno vedenje in učencem omogočili dober odnos s sošolci. Šola je prostor, kjer se otroci učijo in rastejo v polnopravne posameznike. Sodobna šola je prostor za bivanje, pa tudi ustvarjalna, sočutna in družabna skupnost in ima ključno vlogo pri socializaciji in osebnostnem razvoju učencev. Cilj sodobne šole je omogočiti učencem pogoje in vzdušje, potrebno za pozitivne socialne interakcije in čim več vrst stikov. Sodobni učni načrti bi morali biti usmerjeni v razvijanje socialnih kompetenc učencev in nenehno iskanje novih načinov poučevanja, ki bodo ustrezali potrebam in interesom sodobnih učencev ter jih pripravljali na logično razmišljanje, podjetnost, ustvarjalnost, sodelovanje, delo v paru, skupini in timsko delo.

Kompetence zajemajo načine, kako oseba uporablja svoje sposobnosti v družbeni situaciji. Ko govorimo o socialnih veščinah učencev, govorimo o specifičnih lastnostih, kot so asertivnost, strpnost in nenasilno reševanje konfliktov. Otroci, ki se učijo socialnih veščin, se lažje soočajo z vsakodnevnimi situacijami ter gradijo samospoštovanje in zaupanje. Naučijo se tudi reševanja konfliktov, obvladovanja in izražanja svojih čustev

ter sprejemanja čustev drugih. Učijo se tudi uspešnega sodelovanja z okoljem in gradnje odnosov z vrstniki. Biti socialno spreten in prispevati k družbi zahteva ustrezno uporabo pridobljenih socialnih veščin. Številne socialne veščine morajo otroci razviti že v osnovni šoli. Skozi proces socializacije se otrok nauči obnašanja v skupini vrstnikov, nauči se upoštevanja pravil ter občutiti in sprejeti poraz in zmago. Otroci v skupini vrstnikov lahko zadovoljijo potrebo po pristnosti, oblikujejo podobo o sebi, si pridobijo socialne veščine, se naučijo nudenja pomoči, deljenja stvari in sodelovanja. Odgovornost odraslih je, da spodbujajo otrokovo rast in učenje. Socialno kompetenco lahko opredelimo kot doseganje zadostnih razvojnih rezultatov, ki omogočajo zadovoljivo in kompetentno sodelovanje v družbi. Socialno spretno vedenje kaže na dobro izostrene čustvene, kognitivne in socialne veščine. Socialne veščine vključujejo različna socialna vedenja, ki so naučena, pod nadzorom posameznika, primerna okoliščinam in interakciji ter ciljno usmerjena.

Cilj raziskave je ugotoviti mnenje osnovnošolskih učiteljev o tem, kako učencem pomagati pri izboljšanju njihovih socialnih veščin. Študija podpira sociokonstruktivistično teorijo Vigotskega, ki trdi, da so interakcija, komunikacija in diskurz vedno potrebni za izvajanje socialnih komponent učenja. Namesto vsebinskega poudarka daje konstruktivistična didaktika večji poudarek grajenju odnosov znotraj učnega procesa, podpiranju pogojev za angažiranost učencev in demokratičnemu nadzoru nad izobraževalnim procesom.

Namen raziskave je bil preveriti mnenja in stališča osnovnošolskih učiteljev o razvoju socialnih kompetenc učencev. Anketa je bila izvedena med šolskim letom 2021/2022, v raziskavi pa je sodelovalo 248 osnovnošolskih učiteljev iz različnih delov Republike Hrvaške. Vprašalnik, izdelan posebej za namen te raziskave, je bil sestavljen iz dveh delov. Prvi del vprašalnika je vseboval vprašanja, povezana s sociodemografskimi podatki anketirancev, drugi del vprašalnika pa vprašanja, ki so preučevala stališča in mnenja osnovnošolskih učiteljev o pomenu spodbujanja razvoja socialnih kompetenc učencev. Za ocenjevanje pomena socialnih veščin, ki so sestavni del socialnih kompetenc učencev, smo uporabili Likertovo petstopenjsko lestvico. Vprašalnik je bil na voljo v digitalni obliki, izpolnjevanje le-tega pa je bilo prostovoljno.

Dolgotrajna pandemija je vplivala tako na razvoj socialnih kompetenc učencev kot tudi na tehnološki razvoj in digitalizacijo. Ugotovitve raziskave so podprle prvo hipotezo, po kateri naj bi osnovnošolski učitelji podpirali razvoj socialnih veščin svojih učencev, predvsem tistih, ki se nanašajo na upoštevanje pravil, sodelovanje z drugimi in pomoč drugim. Sodelovalni odnosi se v sodobni šoli izražajo v fleksibilnem pristopu k izbiri in izvedbi učnih gradiv, ki neposredno vključujejo učence. Med epidemijo covida-19 so bili učenci socialno izolirani, kar jim je onemogočalo interakcijo z drugimi in razvijanje socialnih kompetenc. Hkrati pa zaradi hitrega tehničnega napredka, digitalizacije in dostopnosti različnih digitalnih naprav vedno več časa preživijo z digitalno tehnologijo, kar tudi ovira in omejuje razvoj njihovih socialnih veščin.

Rezultati raziskave kažejo, da učitelji menijo, da na razvoj socialnih veščin učencev vpliva predvsem družinska vzgoja, nje sledi šola. Učitelji menijo, da je dolgotrajna pandemija vplivala na razvoj socialnih kompetenc učencev, pa tudi na tehnološki razvoj in digitalizacijo. Učitelji z do petimi leti delovnih izkušenj statistično značilno pogosteje menijo, da epidemija vpliva na socialno usposobljenost učencev. V primerjavi z učitelji z 31 ali več leti delovnih izkušenj ti učitelji dajejo tudi večjo prednost razvoju socialnih

kompetenc učencev. Ugotovljeno je bilo, da imajo učitelji z manj kot petimi leti izkušenj visoko mnenje o vplivu pandemije na socialne kompetence učencev in visoko cenijo pomen razvoja socialnih kompetenc učencev za razliko od učiteljev z 31 ali več leti izkušenj. Rezultati te raziskave kažejo, da so mlajši učitelji bolj cenili pomen razvijanja socialnih kompetenc učencev kot starejši. Tudi mlajši učitelji menijo, da je pandemija vplivala na razvoj socialnih kompetenc učencev. Glede na to, da v tej študiji dajejo veliko vrednost pomoči učencem pri razvoju njihovih socialnih veščin, kar je podprlo drugo raziskovalno hipotezo, se zdi, da so bili mlajši učitelji z manj delovnimi izkušnjami bolj sprejemljivi za prevzem tega položaja. Poleg tega je statistično bolj verjetno, da bodo ti učitelji menili, da ima pandemija vpliv na socialne veščine njihovih učencev. Učitelji tretjega razreda statistično značilno pogosteje kot učitelji četrtega razreda menijo, da bi morali vplivati na razvoj socialnih kompetenc učencev. V nasprotju z učiteljicami četrtega razreda se je pokazalo, da učitelji tretjega razreda pozitivno zaznavajo njihov vpliv na razvoj socialnih veščin učencev. Iz tega je razvidno, da so najbolj prizadeti tretješolci, kar je nepričakovan rezultat, če upoštevamo, da se predvideva, da bodo najbolj prizadeti najmlajši učenci, katerih socialne veščine so se v šoli šele začele razvijati.

Naša raziskava je pokazala, da učitelji mlajših učencev dajejo večji poudarek njihovemu socialnemu razvoju, kar podpira tretjo raziskovalno hipotezo. Bolj se osredotočajo na pomoč otrokom pri izboljšanju njihovih socialnih veščin, ker si že od samega začetka močno prizadevajo ustvariti prijetno učno okolje v učilnicah. Učitelji, ki skrbijo za prijetno učno okolje, spodbujajo spoštovanje, enakost, partnerstvo, strpnost in sodelovanje. Posledično pomagajo svojim učencem, da postanejo bolj socialno spretni, saj jih ti učenci posnemajo. Ugotovljeno je bilo, da so mlajši učitelji bolj pripravljeni sodelovati z učenci. Poudarjen je pomen spodbujanja več socialnih veščin. Prav tako je pomembno ceniti njihov prispevek in aktivno sodelovanje pri razvoju učnega načrta. Sodobni učenci v 21. stoletju potrebujejo sposobnega in usposobljenega učitelja, ki ima socialna znanja in veščine, prepoznava njihove razvojne zahteve, znanja in interese ter jih motivira za napredek. Z ustvarjalnimi in inovativnimi dejavnostmi v izobraževalnem procesu, ki jih dopolnjuje svetovanje, usklajevanje in usmerjanje učencev, se učitelj lahko in mora odmakniti od tradicionalnega poučevanja in učenja. Učitelji nižjih razredov se bolj osredotočajo na pomoč otrokom pri izboljšanju njihovih socialnih veščin, saj se zelo trudijo ustvariti udobno učno okolje v učilnicah že od samega začetka. Družbeno okolje, v katerem poteka učenje, je ključnega pomena, saj socialne komponente učenja običajno vključujejo pogovor, vzajemno komunikacijo in sodelovanje.

Raziskava lahko prispeva k nadaljnjemu razmisleku o pomenu razvijanja socialnih kompetenc učencev in ustvarjanju priložnosti za njihov razvoj, saj so te pogosto ključne za uspeh učencev in odraslih v družbi in skupnosti. Ta raziskava predstavlja priložnost za preizpraševanje metod, ki podpirajo razvoj pozitivnega ozračja, in predstavlja nove izzive za akademike in praktike. V skladu z načeli sodobne demokracije, ki naj bi jo pri otrocih spodbujali starši, nato pa učitelji, je treba preseči tradicionalizem, ki vključuje prenašanje znanja z učitelja na učenca, in umakniti poudarek s predmetnega učenja. Sodobna učilnica naj bi spodbujala sistematično in aktivno učenje, učenci pa naj bi razvijali sposobnost opazovanja, kritičnega mišljenja, presojanja in logičnega sklepanja. Takšno izobraževanje bi moralo potekati v okolju, ki podpira sodelovanje in komunikacijo.

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