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THE ATTITUDES OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS TOWARDS PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

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Abstract: The aim of the study was to determine the factor structure of the assessment scale of the Physical Education Teacher Attitude Questionnaire, as well as to ascertain the existence of gender, age, and differences in whether students practice some sport outside of school or not, in terms of attitudes toward different physical education teacher competences. A sample of 119 students of both genders, grades 5 through 8, was assigned a USF assessment scale, modeled on existing instruments for assessing student attitudes toward physical education and physical education teachers. The factor structure was determined by using factor analysis. The ANOVA results for gender differences indicate that there are no statistically significant differences in the attitudes of students towards the competences of physical education teachers. ANOVA results for differences between coaching students and non-coaches suggest that there are statistically significant differences between these groups of respondents regarding the factor of socio-emotional competence of teachers, in the sense that students who train a sport are more inclined towards the socio-emotional competences of teachers.

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The ANOVA results for age differences indicate that there are statistically significant differences between younger and older students, regarding both factors, in the sense that younger students are more inclined towards both the socio-emotional and professional competences of physical education teachers. Attitudes towards the teacher provide valuable information about what students think and feel about them, thus creating adequate conditions for effecting change and improving both teaching and relationships with students.

Key words: *student attitudes, physical education teacher, competencies*

INTRODUCTION

With the changes and the increasing development of modern technologies, the role of teachers in the educational process is changing. According to the traditional approach, which is still partly present, the teacher is the lecturer and has authority, while the students are mostly inactive and exposed to front-line work, and the most attention is given to the teaching material. However, this type of teaching can adversely affect student motivation. Given that, according to this approach, communication between teachers and students is usually one-way, the individual needs of individuals are usually neglected and students are not sufficiently motivated (Karanac, Papić, & Jasić, 2010). The modern approach, however, is very different from the traditional one. In contrast to the formerly autocratic method, the democratic method used nowadays is becoming more and more prevalent. The purpose of the contemporary approach is to achieve the goals of education through teacher-student interaction. In order to achieve these goals, it is necessary to constantly improve the work of the students, but also the teachers, to change and improve the techniques and methods of work, as well as the methods of teaching.

Much of the research to date has focused on examining the factors associated with learning success and teaching. The results most often pointed to different psychological and other characteristics of the child as major factors (personality traits, gender, age, abilities, etc.), but many elements of the school environment should not be overlooked as important links in this process. In addition to research, teaching practice indicates that the number of these elements is large, so the organization of teaching, teaching content, physical conditions, school equipment for teaching, family support, etc., can be emphasized (Đigić, 2013). However, as noted above, one of the most important elements is the teacher. The positive and negative behavior of teachers largely determine the effectiveness of classroom work and significantly affect student achievement as well as interpersonal student-teacher relationships and student satisfaction, both in regards to teachers and teaching itself. There are several specific behaviors and characteristics of teachers that affect the teaching effectiveness of all school subjects and grade levels. These characteristics

are as follows: teacher personality, classroom management and organization, organization and orientation in teaching, application of instruction, and monitoring of student potential and progress and professionalism (Stronge, 2007). Of particular importance for concrete research are characteristics such as the personality of the teacher and the management of the class and the organization, but others should not be neglected. When it comes to the personality of the teacher, it is important to note that the way the teacher presents himself/herself significantly influences the attitude of their superiors, colleagues and students towards them. Very often, students associate the love for a particular subject with the teacher. Some of the personality traits of teachers that are particularly valued include a tendency to use personal experience as an example in teaching, understanding students' feelings, a sense of humor, an appropriate dress code, maintaining confidence and respect, flexibility and spontaneity, enjoying teaching and expecting students to enjoy learning, listening to students carefully, treating all students the same way, actively working with students, etc. When it comes to class management, it can be said that some of the more important aspects are clearly expressing the expectations that the teacher has of the students, encouraging interaction, establishing clear rules, showing consistency in class management, etc. (Stronge, 2007). As noted above, personality traits, teaching style, attitude toward the material, attitude towards the students, and behavior in class are just some of the important characteristics of the teacher. In order to consolidate all these characteristics under one concept and thereby facilitate the exploration of the relationship between the success of the teaching process and the characteristics of teachers, the concept of classroom management is often under discussion. This concept primarily refers to all the actions of teachers in order to initiate and sustain learning activities in class, while these procedures refer to the management of time, space, activities, materials for work and behavior of students in a group. In this way, the teacher, as the 'leader' of the teaching process, uses his/her personal and professional capacities and in cooperation with other members of the educational process, plans, initiates and maintains certain processes, making the teaching successful (Đigić, 2013). In line with the prior, it can be concluded that achieving success requires the teacher to know the possible effects of his or her actions, and to put them into practice in an adequate manner, which involves adapting and combining ways, procedures and methods to the needs and specific characteristics of the department.

When it comes to the qualities of successful teachers, the research to date indicates the importance of their further study. Specifically, it has been shown that student attitudes towards learning, teaching and school, as well as school success, are related to their experience of teacher traits (Đigić, 2013). In these studies, a teacher's personality traits, behaviors and attitudes toward students, classroom work, a teacher's social role, and outward appearance are cited as categories of teacher traits. Research (Đigić, 2013) indicates that students are considered good and successful by those teachers characterized by warmth, a friendly attitude,

consistency, fairness, a sense of humor, kindness, cooperativeness, understanding for student problems, open-mindedness, different interest, a teacher's willingness to help, allowing greater student activity, good knowledge of the subject matter, and democracy (Đigić, 2013). Many authors believe that positive experiences related to teaching physical education can serve students to adopt physical activity as part of their lifestyle once they are adults (Sallis and McKenzie, 1991). In this regard, it is very important to identify the motivational, cognitive and affective processes that determine the experience of physical education as a subject that presents students with a pleasant and important experience. In addition, the success of physical education instruction depends largely on the teachers and their instructional skills. Research in the field of physical education indicates that teacher behavior greatly influences student attitudes, both positively and negatively. Specifically, students who have had positive experiences with a physical education (hereinafter: PE) teacher report a positive attitude toward the subject matter (Subramaniam & Silverman, 1999). When it comes to the discipline of students in physical education teaching, there is a perception of an environment in which the task to be performed is accurately related to the intrinsic motives that teachers encourage as exemplary behavior in class (Bakirtzoglou and Ioannou, 2011). In the research that included 6th, 7th and 8th grade elementary school students, attitudes towards the teacher and physical education classes were examined. The results indicate that students enjoy the variety of classroom activities, love their teachers, and have fun in physical education classes. When it comes to teacher traits, students are most valued by friendly teachers who possess good physical skills, and least liked when a teacher is inclined towards more skilled students (Ryan, Fleming, & Maina, 2003). Teachers who want students to have a positive experience with physical education should be aware of behaviors and lifestyle characteristics that may be offensive to students. The results of one study showed that students characterized PE teachers as the favorite adult at school, and that there was a special relationship between the propensity to assist a teacher and name a teacher as a favorite (Aicinena, 1991). Brumbach (1968), on the other hand, noted in his research that improvements occurred in those students where the teacher displayed a personalized style of working with students (remembering their names, talking to them about their fitness, participating in the class) (Aicinena, 1991). There is some research suggesting that students who exhibit unfavorable physical education classes often refrain from engaging in physical activities out of school (Subramaniam & Silverman, 1999). Unlike the situation when students have a positive attitude towards physical education, when the attitude is negative, teaching and learning become difficult for everyone involved (Subramaniam & Silverman, 1999). In addition, students also emphasize the opportunity to improve their skills and have fun in the classroom. They consider teacher disparagement, intransigence, and objectivity as the biggest disadvantage of teachers (Ilić and Stević, 1966). A more extensive survey of 928 elementary and 452 high school students from small towns in Serbia shows that, according to the students, PE teachers most often show

physical and professional qualities, good physical fitness, naturalness, honesty and sociability (Radovanović, 1994). In addition, some findings indicate that students most value teachers who are accessible and comfortable, well organized and trusting in students, and that it is not desirable to provoke fear, to be uninteresting and assess unfairly, as well as to ridicule the students (Radovanović, Arunović, Madić, and Višnjić, 1993). Some research has compared the attitudes of boys and girls towards physical education and physical activity, and boys have been shown to have more positive attitudes towards activities that are challenging and contain risk elements, while girls have shown a positive attitude towards physical activities for mostly social reasons (Smoll & Schutz, 1980; Subramaniam & Silverman, 1999). In addition, the results of gender differences research support a greater attachment of boys to physical education (Colley, Comber, & Hargreaves, 1994; Subramaniam & Silverman, 1999), and this may be one of the explanations for the existence of differences in attitude toward physical education. When it comes to gender differences in attitudes towards teachers, previous research has shown that female students have more favorable attitudes towards teachers and the school in general than students, but also that they are more likely to have a more positive attitude towards teachers (Brophy & Good, 1974; Bratanić and Maršić, 2004). When it comes to age differences, research shows that generally younger children show a more positive attitude toward physical education compared to older ones (Wersch, Trew, & Turner, 1992). In relation to teacher behavior towards students, research shows that PE teachers pay more attention to boys than girls, and provide boys with greater acceptance and praise than girls (Duffy, Warren, & Walsch, 2001; Nicaise, Cogerino, Bois, & Amorose, 2006). In relation to these results, it can be assumed that the different attitude of teachers towards boys and girls may be a significant factor influencing their differing attitudes towards the teacher and the teaching of physical education.

The aim of this research was to determine the structure of the scale of assessment of student attitudes towards PE teachers and to see if there are gender and age differences

METHOD

Sample of respondents

The study had 119 participants, students of the Branko Radičević Elementary School from Sava Selo, aged from 11 to 14 years. The sample included 64 girls (54%) and 55 boys (46%) from the 5th to the 8th grades. There were 23 students from the 5th grade (19%), 37 from the 6th grade (31%), 21 from the 7th grade (18%) and 38 students from the 8th grade (32%). Of these, 76 (64%) of the students trained a sport, while 43 (36%) of the students trained no sports.

Measuring instruments

The USF (Physical Education Teacher Attitude Questionnaire) - This questionnaire was modeled on the one designed by 36 sports pedagogy experts (Luke & Cope, 1994). In the final form of the Attitude Assessment Scale used in this particular research, the scores, to some extent, have been adapted by the author of the assessment of student attitudes toward the PE teacher. The aim was to evaluate the scale to capture all three components of attitude (emotional, cognitive and conative) in order to gain a better understanding of student attitudes. The total number of items in this scale is 30. However, based on preliminary warnings, the number of items was reduced to 24. Responders responded to the items on a three-level Likert-type scale. The answers varied from 1 - disagree, 2 - not sure, to 3 - agree.

Organization and flow of research

The survey was conducted at the Branko Radičević Elementary School in Sava Selo in April 2018. Before the test itself, the subjects were given instructions to answer the questionnaire, as well as information about the purpose of the test, what data would be used for and who would be aware of the results. The questionnaire was anonymous and it was printed on paper and completed during class. Respondents provided answers by rounding up an appropriate number that represented the degree of agreement of the respondents with each statement. Also, the questionnaires were done individually and the response time was not limited.

Methods and data processing

A factor analysis was conducted in order to determine the factor structure of the USF questionnaire. Correlations were calculated to determine the association between the obtained factors. A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to determine the existence of differences by gender and whether a student is training some sport. In order to determine the differences between older and younger respondents in attitudes towards the PE teacher, a one-way analysis of variance was conducted.

RESULTS

Factor analysis was applied in order to determine the factor structure of the USF questionnaire. Two main components were retained in the analysis, which together explain 26.57% of the variance of the system of variables.

Table 1. *Structure matrix of the USF assessment scale*

Items	Components	
	Socio-Emotional Competences ($\alpha = 0.73$)	Professional Competences ($\alpha = 0.66$)
5. The games that the PE tacher asks us to play should be interesting.	0.669	
13. The PE teacher should make our lesson interesting.	0.576	
18. It is very important for the PE teacher to be kind and friendly to the students in class.	0.543	
8. The games that the PE teacher asks us to play should not be boring.	0.539	
29. The PE teacher should always be neat and in sports gear in class.	0.521	
27. A PE teacher should have an understanding of students whose favorite school subject is not PE.	0.512	
25. I think the PE teacher should make an effort to get students interested in classroom activities.	0.488	0.312
26. I think the PE teacher should understand the importance and usefulness of physical education.	0.455	
1. It is very important for the PE teacher to encourage the fair play principle in class.	0.428	
30. The PE teacher should understand that someone may not like physical education.	0.402	
12. I think it is good for the PE teacher to realize that some students cannot do an exercise the first time.	0.400	0.304
4. I think it is good that the PE teacher requires that we are always in sports gear in class.	0.387	0.336
24. The PE teacher should not tolerate indiscipline in class.	0.350	
16. The games assigned by the PE teacher should be such that everyone can do them.	0.313	

20. I think the PE teacher should be living a healthy life.		0.652
17. The PE teacher should appreciate the effort made in class.		0.644
22. The PE teacher should not make a physical education lesson useful.		-0.632
23. I think the PE teacher should monitor and highlight our success in competitions.		0.604
19. The PE teacher should not be sensitive and understanding.		-0.479
7. The PE teacher should help me realize the importance of physical education.		0.414
15. The PE teacher should require sports equipment every class.	0.331	0.380
28. It is important that the PE teacher takes care of student safety at all times.		0.365
21. The PE teacher should not regularly check the hygiene of the equipment.		-0.355
11. Responsibility and conscientiousness is something that should characterize a PE teacher.	0.345	0.346

From Table 1 it can be concluded that the first major component is described by indicators related to teacher friendliness and kindness, the degree of understanding for the students, adaptation of the exercises to student abilities, the teacher's tendency to make the exercises and lessons interesting for the students and thus motivate them, as well as encouraging fair play principles in the classroom - this factor has been called the socio-emotional competence of teachers. The second major component is described by the topics related to the consistency of teachers, emphasizing the usefulness and importance of physical education, the responsibility and conscientiousness of teachers, as well as stressing the effort and success of students by teachers and adherence of teachers to a healthy life and demands placed on students - this factor is called the professional competence of teachers.

Table 2. *Correlation of obtained factors*

	Professional Competences
Socio-Emotional Competences	0.198*

* The correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.

By looking at the correlation of the obtained factors, it can be said that there is a statistically significant correlation, with this correlation being low, which means that they are relatively independent factors. A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to determine the existence of gender differences in student attitudes toward the PE teacher. The results indicate that there are no statistically significant gender differences, both in the case of the first factor ($F = 0.23$, $df = 117$, $p = 0.63$) and in the case of the second factor ($F = 0.02$, $df = 117$, $p = 0.90$).

Table 3. *Descriptive indicators for the sport coaching variable*

		N	AS	SD
Socio-Emotional Competences	He trains	76	2.78	0.18
	He does not train	43	2.65	0.29
Professional Competences	He trains	76	2.42	0.16
	He does not train	43	2.38	0.18

Based on the descriptive indicators shown in Table 3, it can be concluded that higher scores are achieved by those students who train a sport than those who do not train when it comes to the socio-emotional competence factor.

Table 4. *Results of an one-way analysis of variance for the sport coaching variable*

	Df	F	P
Socio-Emotional Competences	117	8.27	0.005
Professional Competences	117	1.92	0.168

Based on the results of a one-way analysis of variance (Table 4), it can be concluded that the differences between those students who train and those who do not train are statistically significant. According to the results in Table 3, it can be concluded that statistically significant differences exist in the factor of socio-emotional competence in the sense that students who train are statistically significantly different from those who do not train in terms of attitudes towards the socio-emotional competences of teachers. Specifically, it can be said that students who train value these competences of PE teachers more.

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to determine the existence of age differences in student attitudes toward a PE teacher. The

results of this analysis indicate that there are statistically significant differences in age, both in the case of the first factor and in the case of the second factor.

Table 5. *Descriptive indicators for the age variable*

		N	AS	SD
Socio-Emotional Competences	Younger	60	2.78	0.17
	Older	59	2.68	0.28
Professional Competences	Younger	60	2.44	0.17
	Older	59	2.37	0.16

Based on the descriptive indicators presented in Table 5, it can be concluded that younger students have higher scores compared to older ones when it comes to both factors, socio-emotional competences and professional competences.

Table 6. *Results of the one-way analysis of variance for age variable*

	Df	F	p
Socio-Emotional Competences	117	5.83	0.017
Professional Competences	117	4.40	0.038

Based on the results of the one-way analysis of variance (Table 6), it can be concluded that the differences between younger and older students are statistically significant. According to the results from Table 5, it can be concluded that there are statistically significant differences in the socio-emotional competence factor as well as in the professional competence factor, in the sense that the younger students are statistically significantly different from the older ones regarding their attitude towards socio-emotional and professional teacher competences. Namely, it can be said that younger students appreciate these competences more in regards to PE teachers.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study suggest that the latent space, i.e. the factorial structure of the USF questionnaire consists of two latent dimensions or factors. The first factor, referred to as the socio-emotional competence of the teacher, refers to the various forms of a pleasant, understanding behavior of the teacher. The content of this dimension is in support of the data found in literature that discusses teacher competences (Jennings and Greenberg, 2009).

Another isolated factor, referred to as teacher professional competences, relates to the responsibility, consistency, and conscientiousness of PE teachers. This dimension can be said to refer to those teacher behaviors that should set an example for students. The content of this dimension, as in the previous one, is in support of the data found in the literature (Mićanović, 2012). Although in the literature and previous studies the division and structure of the competences mentioned is not identical to that obtained in this particular research, it can be said that it corresponds to the descriptions of competences identified in the already existing literature (Mićanović, 2012; Markuš, 2010; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). It should also be noted that the structure of isolated factors is more in line with the results of some previous research, which lists the categories of teacher traits that students often evaluate and which are important to them (Đigić, 2013; Ilić and Stević, 1966; Radovanović, 1994). Specifically, girls were expected to be more inclined towards the socio-emotional and professional competences of teachers than boys. However, this assumption has not been confirmed, and it can be said that the results of some previous studies have not been replicated (Ilić and Stević, 1966; Brophy & Good, 1974; Bratanić and Maršić, 2004). Also, it can be assumed that there were no significant differences due to the relative unevenness of the sample by gender.

When it comes to assumptions about determining differences in student attitudes toward a PE teacher, depending on whether or not they train a sport out of school, they can be confirmed in part. Namely, statistically significant differences were obtained with regard to student attitudes towards the socio-emotional competences of teachers, but not in the case of professional competences. In this regard, it has been shown that the students who practice some sport in comparison with those who do no training are more inclined towards the socio-emotional competences of teachers. In this context, it can also be said that the results of some earlier studies have been partially confirmed (Višnjić, Martinović, Ilić, & Marković, 2010). Namely, it can be assumed that students who practice a sport outside the school context already have implanted values that imply socio-emotional competences and therefore value them more. Younger students have been shown to be more inclined towards both socio-emotional and professional competences of PE teachers, relative to older students. In this regard, it can be said that the results of earlier research (Višnjić, Martinović, Ilić, & Marković, 2010) and some of the data found in the literature have been relatively confirmed (Kermeci, 2011). There are several ways to explain the results obtained. First of all, it can be assumed that older students (7th and 8th grade), due to the adolescence period they are entering and adjusting to, have a certain disinterest and opposition to anything that has to do with school. Unlike the first four grades of elementary school, when the students had no PE teacher but were taught by part-time teachers,

in this period of transition they encounter a new authority, which they know insufficiently. In this developmental period, one can assume that obedience and respect for authority is much more prevalent. When it comes to the factor of the socio-emotional competence of teachers, younger respondents are also more inclined towards these competences. Namely, since they are still young and experiencing major changes in the teaching process for the first time, including the change of teaching staff, it can be said that they appreciate the understanding, support and kindness much more than older children who are used to it. Also, it should not be overlooked that until the 5th grade, PE is taught by the subject teacher instead of the classroom teacher. Such a change brings with it much greater demands and expectations from the students, as well as a transition to a new level in physical activity. For this reason, in their case, it is more important for them than for older students for their teacher to realize that they cannot do the exercise immediately as it may be expected, as they lack the same level of ability, as well as taking into consideration that not everyone likes physical education. The key element in this dimension is the teacher's tendency to take into account the individual differences of students, which is why these competences are appreciated by younger students. Also, younger students feel that a PE teacher should strive to stimulate their interest in physical education and point out the importance of this subject, probably because they are open to change and willing to assess and evaluate the teacher's effort. It can be assumed that younger students are comfortable with a style of teaching in which an adequate amount of freedom is intertwined, as well as control over the students. Namely, younger students are sympathetic to teachers who require discipline, order and work, and are consistent with what they do, as well as being responsible and conscientious, but at the same time strive to motivate students by endeavoring to teach each student and understanding and adjusting exercises and lessons with the abilities of each child. These are not necessarily indulgent teachers, but more democratically or authoritatively oriented, which is in line with some results of a previous research, which indicates that this style of teaching is most effective (Šimić Šašić, 2011).

CONCLUSION

This research has sought to render a concise account of student attitudes toward their PE teacher, and may also serve as a guide for other researchers to examine the nature of student attitudes in more depth. One might think that this is just the initial step on the road to discovering all the traits, behaviors and attitudes that students value. On the other hand, until a broader and deeper insight is obtained, the results of the research can serve

as a guide to all those teachers who seek to improve their work and attitude towards students, so that they can more easily and effectively achieve the goals of their own teaching, as well as much interaction as possible with the students. The theoretical significance of the research is reflected in the ability to determine the characteristics, i.e. the competences of PE teachers that are especially appreciated by elementary school students. Also, the research provides important information about the differences between children of different ages when it comes to attitudes towards a PE teacher, and can therefore be considered as an adjunct to the domestic literature dealing with student attitudes. The same can be said for the information received regarding differences based on whether or not students train some sport out of school. Considering how different demographic characteristics (gender, age, coaching of a sport) are related to student attitudes toward a PE teacher, information that is valuable to both teachers and students can be obtained. Also, examining attitudes toward a PE teacher can enrich knowledge relevant to sports pedagogy. In addition, the questionnaire used in this research, previously unused and designed specifically for this particular research, can serve as a starting point in formulating and standardizing a more detailed questionnaire to assess student attitudes toward a PE teacher. In addition, the theoretical significance of this research can be reflected in the ability to compare its results with those of other environments and cultures, in order to determine the influence of culture and environmental factors on student attitudes toward a PE teacher.

The practical importance of this research is also very important. Gaining insight into the nature of student attitudes toward PE teachers and the competences they value in particular can make a significant contribution to more effective and adequate planning and implementation of the teaching process, thus helping both students and teachers in the learning process. It is important to note that this particular research was conducted on a sample of elementary school students from a rural area. For this reason, the results cannot be generalized in regards to the population of elementary school children. It would be useful to examine attitudes in a sample of children from different backgrounds so that more detailed conclusions can be drawn. In addition, it would be interesting to conduct research that would address differences in student attitudes towards PE teachers between children from the countryside and from the city, as a way to gain insight into whether and how environmental factors influence student attitudes. In this regard, it should be noted that one of the limitations of this research is certainly the size of the sample, which should be larger so that the results can be interpreted and generalized more adequately. However, it can be said that the sample is uniform only by age, by gender and whether the students train in a sport or not, which can also be considered as a limitation of the research. Given that attitudes may be

difficult to change, it would be interesting to organize a longitudinal study to determine how attitudes toward a PE teacher change depending on the developmental stage the student is in. This would certainly provide useful information on how teachers can adapt their behavior to different ages. In this context, high school students could also be involved in examining their attitudes towards a PE teacher, thereby providing a more complete picture of the development and change of student attitudes. It can be assumed that the results of this research are influenced by some other factors not included in the analysis, such as the personality traits of particular students, the size of the class, the gender of their PE teacher, their behavior, attitudes, etc. It would be interesting to include these factors in some future research, and thus to examine, for example, the link of student attitudes toward PE teachers with their personality traits.

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