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TABLE TENNIS AS SELECTED SPORT IN SLOVENIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Abstract

The electives represent an interesting variegation of the physical education process in Slovene schools. Children massively select elective subjects of sport activities which help to increase the variety of variegated and interesting sport activities in schools. Sports teachers thus have the possibility to offer extra activities in addition to the compulsory program.

The aim of this research was to acquire opinion of pupils from selected primary schools on the elective school subjects (electives) and position of table tennis in pupil's selection. The sample includes 245 male and female pupils from 11 Slovenian primary schools. Pupils have been given a questionnaire of 22 questions, targeted to establish the opinion of pupils on the subjects from various perspectives.

Based on the analysis of the questionnaire answers, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- Pupils like to attend Sports as elective subject, while there is slightly lower interest in Dance.*
- Within Sports as elective subject, pupils would most want to attend the following sports: swimming, handball, football, roller skating, volleyball, badminton, skiing. Table tennis is in the middle of pupils choices.*

The results indicate that teachers make good use of this fact for the benefit of children's harmonious physical and motor development.

Key words: *elective subjects (electives), table tennis, nine-year primary school, analysis, pupils*

INTRODUCTION

Sports education has a very significant role, not only as a positive compensation for the lack of children's natural need for movement but also as an effective means of education. The duty of each school is to provide its students with sports education according to the needs of a cultural human being and thus contribute to permanent acquisition of a healthy life style. Sports education is an important component of the integral conception of culture.

By using appropriate programs, forms and methods, aimed at individuals, we can influence the development and correlation among motor, cognitive, affective and social components of a child's personality.

As the society continuously changes, so is the education system subject to adequate changes. Novelties in the treasury of global knowledge, variations of earlier theories, different points of view, different requirements of society etc., are thus sooner or later reflected in the education system, requiring curriculum, organizational, methodological changes etc. The last major school system change in Slovenia was the implementation of a nine-year primary school (eight-year primary school before that).

The education system reform in Slovenia has introduced elective subjects to a nine-year primary school in the 1999/2000 school year. To enrich the compulsory program and to enable pupils extend their knowledge in the areas they are more interested and feel more successful in, the curriculum of the last three-year cycle includes a choice of elective subjects, which are approved by the RS Council of Experts for General Education.

Among the elective subjects offered by the school each year, pupils select two or three subjects of their choice (Markun Puhan & Kovač, 2003).

Electives can be of one, two, or three-year duration. According to the primary school law, the school is obliged to offer the following subjects: second foreign language, rhetoric, religions and ethics. All other electives are offered according to schools human and financial resources, local tradition, pupils' choice and according to orientation and specialization of teachers teaching at the school.

There are two groups of electives: natural and technical science group and sociologic and humanities group.

Electives are primarily designed as a one-year program, and are usually not upgraded. The school is obliged to offer at least three electives for each group.

Pupils can therefore select among over 50 electives, two of them are the sports electives Sports and Dance.

Sports as an elective subject includes the following three one-year programs: Sport for a healthy lifestyle, Sport for relaxation and Selected sport. Dance as an elective subject includes the following three one-year programs: Dance, Folk dance, Old fashioned and social dance.

Within these sports and dance activities, pupils can get to know new sports, improve in the sports they already know and thus gain more theoretical information and practical knowledge. These subjects offer such sports activities that cannot be implemented in the compulsory program. Because these contents have sports-recreational effects, such subjects are significant for adopting sports as a qualitative way of spending free time in all periods of their life. The focus is on the correlation between sports contents and other school subjects (cross-curriculum integration). The schools attempt to take account of the specific local community characteristics and to integrate with the local cultural community.

Electives can be performed also as out-of-school classes taking place after regular school periods. In these cases, special norms for forming groups should be observed (Kovač & Novak, 1999).

Electives are executed according to officially approved curricula. The curricula define the goals, levels of knowledge, the number of hours and place electives within the regular schedule. Pupils attend the subjects throughout the school year and are graded at the end of the year. A decree determines also who can be an appointed teacher for a selected subject. The electives thus complement regular physical education classes. Together they represent a well-rounded sports content offered to pupils in school.

The implementation of electives in our schools has been executed a while ago. Quite a few analyses of their implementation have been carried out. The aim of this research is to analyze the implementation of Sports and Dance as electives, and to acquire opinion of pupils from selected primary schools in Slovenia.

We wanted to find out:

- why do pupils decide to sign up for these electives,
- which contents are most interesting,
- position of table tennis in electives.

METHODS

PARTICIPANTS

The sample included 245 male and female pupils from 11 Slovene primary schools who attended electives Sports in the 2005/2006 school year. The electives are performed in the last three-year cycle; therefore, we have questioned pupils attending 7th, 8th and 9th grade (aged 12-15).

INSTRUMENTS

For the purpose of this research, we have used an anonymous questionnaire (Ismajlovič, 2005), including 22 closed type questions targeted to establish the opinion of pupils on the subjects from various perspectives. At each question pupils can select only one answer.

PROCEDURE

Data were collected during regular physical education hour of selected classes. Obtained data has been processed by the SPSS statistical software package and the Frequencies sub-program at the Faculty of Sports computer centre. Basic statistical parameters have been calculated (average values, standard deviation and frequencies of individual answers).

RESULTS

QUESTION: WHICH ELECTIVES DO YOU ATTEND TO THIS YEAR?

Most pupils attend sport for relaxation, then sport for a healthy lifestyle, selected sport, dance, old-fashioned and social dance, and folk dance. The results are presented in Figure no. 1.

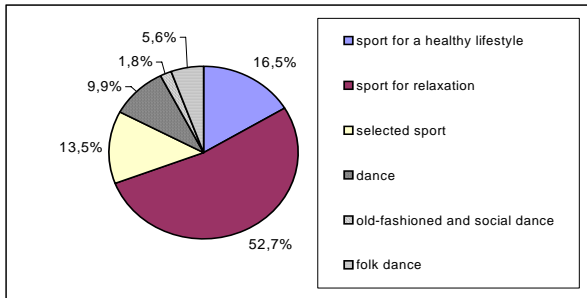


Figure no. 1

There are pupils who attended two electives given by sports teachers. Compared to the results of a similar research by Markun Puhan (2001), the number of such cases has now almost doubled.

Only a few percentage of pupils selected dance as elective subject (dance, old-fashioned and social dance, and folk dance). The main reason is that these contents have been offered by the least number of sports teachers.

QUESTION: WOULD YOU LIKE TO SELECT THE ELECTIVES SPORTS IN THE FOLLOWING YEAR TOO?

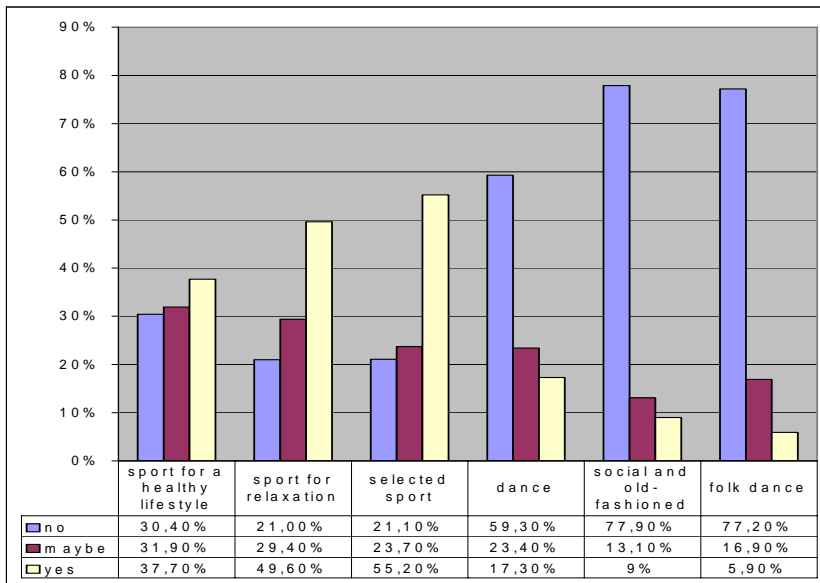


Figure no. 2

The results in Figure no. 2 indicate that in the year to follow, the largest number of pupils would select Selected sport as an elective. Selected sport is followed by Sport for relaxation, Sport for a healthy lifestyle, Dance, Social and old-fashioned dance, and Folk dance.

The majority of pupils gave a NO answer to all three programs of Dance elective, which indicates that dance is not among the most attractive activities. The reason for such a situation could be that many of the selected schools do not offer Dance as an elective as they do Sports, therefore pupils are not familiar with such contents. The other reason could also be that these contents are (non)interesting and (in)attractive. Pupils are more likely to be interested in modern dance, rather than old-fashioned and folk dance.

QUESTION: WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO SELECT THE ELECTIVES SPORTS?

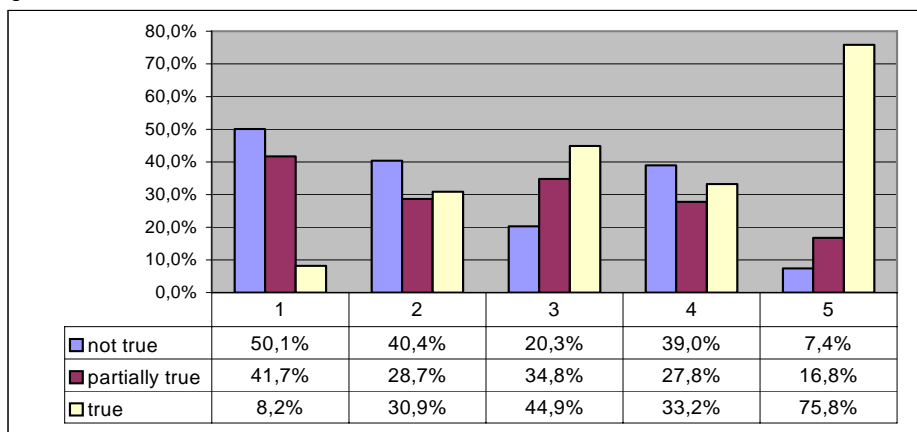


Figure no. 3

In this question, pupils rated the following five options:

- 1 – because of friends
- 2 – because there is no homework and afternoon studying
- 3 – because of a good grade
- 4 – because of the last year's good experience
- 5 – because the content is interesting and applicable

Figure no. 3 shows that the largest number of pupils selected the elective because they are of the opinion the content are interesting and applicable (75.8%). 44.9% of all pupils questioned stated their decision was driven by the fact they could get good grades. A little over 30% decided to select the electives because there is no homework and afternoon studying and because they have a good last year's experience. The least important in decision making was the choice of their friends (8.2% of all pupils questioned).

By introducing Sports as elective subject, children are offered a possibility to get to know new sport contents – the contents that are exempt form the curriculum or cannot be implemented at regular physical education classes. It is therefore not surprising that pupils rated the option »because is interesting and applicable« so high.

QUESTION: WHICH SPORT WOULD YOU SELECT AS AN ELECTIVE SUBJECT?

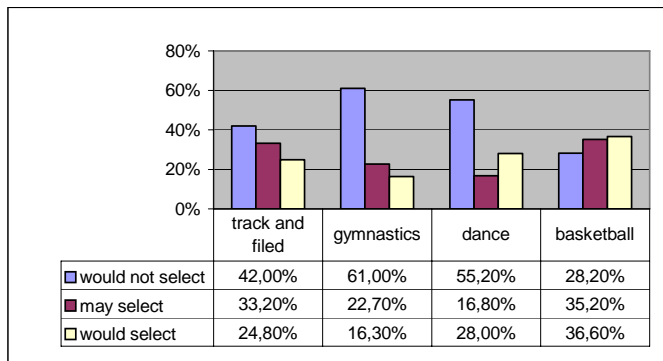


Figure no. 4

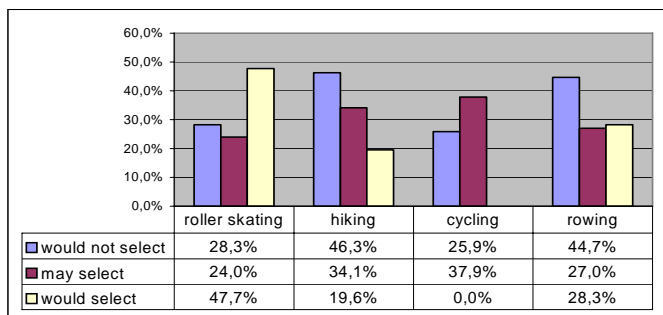


Figure no. 5

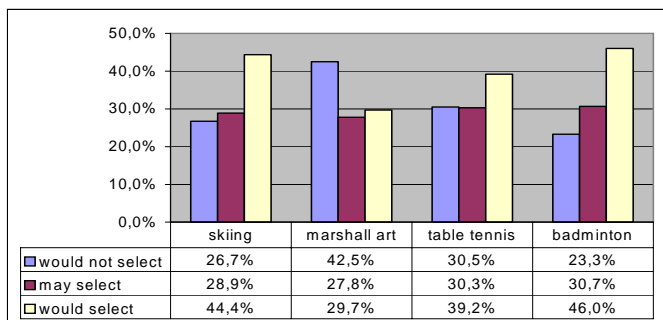


Figure no. 6

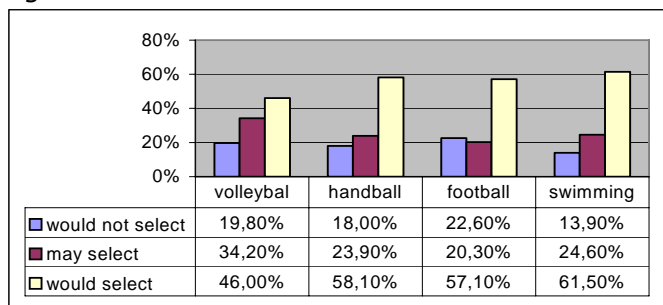


Figure no. 7

Pupils were offered the following 16 sports: track and field, gymnastics with aesthetic gymnastics, dance, basketball, volleybal, handball, football, swimming, roller sating, hiking, cycling, rowing, skiing, marshal arts (karate, judo...), table tennis and badminton. In this question, pupils had to mark each sport with one of the following options: would not select, may select, would select as elective subject Sports.

The results are presented in Figures 4 through 7. The majority of pupils questioned would select swimming (61.5%). Sports that follow are: handball (58.8%), football (57.1%), roller skating (47%), badminton and volleybal (46%), skiing (44.4%), table

tennis (39.2%), basketball (36.6%), cycling (36.2%), marshal arts (29.7%), rowing (28.3%), dance (28%), track and field (24.8%), hiking (19.6%) and gymnastics (16.3%).

The majority of pupils would *not* select gymnastics (61%) and dance (55.2%).

It is surprising that swimming is the most favourable sport – it would sooner be expected it would be one of the group, ball games. We anticipated a lower percentage in hiking (19.6%) since children of this age are not particularly keen on long-lasting and monotonous activities.

Table tennis as elective sport is somewhere in the middle of pupils preferences. Table tennis is often played in small rooms in breaks between scheduled curriculum hours. Many schools doesn't have all equipment or suitable place to offer table tennis as a conducted teaching process as a selected sport.

QUESTION: WHICH ARE THE REASONS ONE WOULD NOT SELECT SPORTS AS ELECTIVE SPORT?

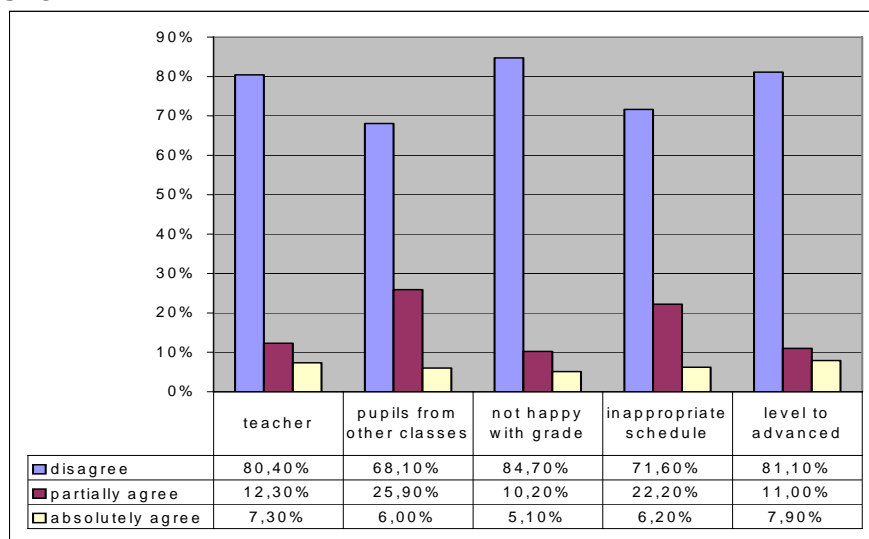


Figure no. 8

We have included a hypothetical question, asking pupils why they would not select the electives Sports or Dance in the following year. They were given five possible things we thought could bother them or would be the reason for not selecting the electives. The reasons given in this question were: teacher, pupils from other classes, not happy with the grade, inappropriate schedule, too advanced level. Figure no. 8 shows that the majority of pupils questioned do not agree with the offered reasons, and that these reasons are not so disturbing as to make them not select the desired elective.

DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis of questionnaire answers related to the organization of Sports electives, it can be ascertained that there have been no major difficulties, despite the fact that electives are a novelty in our education system and that schools have not had lot of experience in their design, organization and implementation.

A large percentage of the pupils questioned were of the opinion that the pedagogical process at Sports and Dance electives was very well organized. The majority of pupils would select these electives again in the following school year.

The electives which include sport activities are very popular among pupils and the highest number of pupils decides to select these subjects. Some pupils even decide to attend two such subjects. The majority of pupils select Sport for relaxation, Sport for a healthy lifestyle and Selected sport, while the least number of pupils select Old-fashioned, social and Folk dance.

This research gives very similar results to other researches: Markun Puhan (2000), Markun Puhan (2001) and Ačimovič Svenšek (2002), Ismajlovič (2005). All previous researches indicate that electives, particularly those that include sports contents, are very well accepted in schools and that these subjects are in fact among the most popular ones. They represent a very good variegation in the school curriculum and offer pupils a wide range of activities to satisfy individual desires. There are a large number of areas and contents to select from, so each individual can find something that he/she will enjoy doing, satisfy the creativity needs and develop his/her own potential.

Subjects like Sport for a healthy lifestyle offer a number of opportunities to make pupils keen on sport, to introduce the benefits of sports activity, to make pupils accept sport as the element of a quality way of life, to accept sport as an activity, which can help an individual avert the harmful consequences of modern life and bad habits like smoking, drinking, drugs, etc. (Videmšek et al., 2003).

The experiences in elective subjects in the field of sports have so far been very positive. We must therefore strive to preserve these subjects as a very significant part of the school curriculum.

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