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Voluntary Work for Children in the Republic of Croatia

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Abstract: In today's uncertain world events, it is necessary to promote volunteering from early education. Therefore, it is important and necessary to introduce such extracurricular activities from the first grade of primary school. In the Republic of Croatia, there are various humanitarian organizations that gladly accept any kind of help. Therefore, we need to find teachers who will use their influence to motivate children for humanitarian action and make them aware of the importance of empathy and helping others on a daily basis. This study shows the activities of first-graders to fourth-graders of primary school in the Republic of Croatia. The school curricula in 21 Croatian counties were randomly analysed, and the results are represented in this study. The results show that teachers who organize volunteer activities for their students have a greater level of agreement with the statements that a positive attitude of teachers about volunteering encourages volunteer activities in school. It also helps to enrich the school prevention program by establishing a volunteer club within the school, where volunteering should be encouraged in the classroom class. Volunteering should be encouraged at the school's Student Council, and volunteering should be planned in the school curriculum for participants who do not organize volunteer activities for their students. It can be concluded that teachers have positive attitudes about volunteering within the school. However, participants show significant differences in attitudes regarding gender and personal experience of volunteering.

Keywords: Civic education, curriculum, contemporary school, volunteering.

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Introduction

With complex concepts and words designated them it is not infrequent to reach for the etymology of the word to decipher their meaning. It is especially the case when different researchers and authors provide different definitions of the word, i.e., the concept, which frequently reflects their own theoretical framework or experience in their usage or implementation. Defining the word *curriculum*, for that matter, is also quite demanding, and over the history of its scientific study, there have been many different definitions. According to Portelli (1987, as cited in Marsh, 2004), there were more than 120 definitions of the term *curriculum* that had appeared in professional literature up to that point, probably due to the authors who were concerned about either delimiting what the term means or establishing new meanings that were associated with it.

As suggested by Marsh (2004), the most common definition that the majority of authors agree about is that it is derived from the word's Latin root, which means 'racecourse'. Comparing, very aptly, the school curriculum to a race that students have to run, with its obstacles or hurdles (in the form of subjects), Marsh (2004) claims that the planned curriculum is structured around the idea that the worth of knowledge is found in its important goals and objectives. According to the same author, the major concepts in the curriculum include curriculum planning and development, curriculum management, teaching perspectives, and collaborative involvement in the curriculum.

According to Milat (2005, p. 200), the main issue of the structure of the curriculum belongs to the strategic issues of a specific educational system, and in order to understand the importance of curricular topics, it is necessary to define the term curriculum. The idea of the flexibility of planning is supported by the idea of mutual support, or as Hirst (2010, p.16) claims, curriculum planning is seen as a specific and detailed characterization of objectives, using logically simple and understandable available terms and explanations. The author adds that these terms should reflect the proper character of the objectives and not distort them.

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Literature Review

According to Article 27, paragraph 9 of the Law on Education in Primary and Secondary Schools (Ministry of Science and Education, 2008; Official Gazette, 87/08, 86/09, 92/10, 105/10 - correction, 90/11, 16/12, 86/12, 94/13, 152/14, 17/07 and 68/18), the Minister of Science and Education passes a decision on the adoption of the curriculum for the curricular theme *Civic education for primary and secondary schools in the Republic of Croatia*, which came into force on 25th January 2019. Civic education represents curricular themes whose purpose is to empower and enable students to effectively and actively perform their civic roles. This cross-curricular theme allows students to be oriented in the society in which they live, increasing confidence in their strength and competence in finding answers and possible solutions to current social challenges. Civic competence includes civic knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Spajić-Vrkaš, 2015).

For the development of civic competencies, it is not enough for students to only know about human rights and political processes; they need to apply the skills of democratic principles within school life and the community. The success of teaching civic education depends on whether students find their interests and the possibility of self-realization (NN 10/2019). The current program of curricular and interdisciplinary content of civic education in the School for Life in the Republic of Croatia for both primary and secondary school plans introduces six structural dimensions of civic education, including the human-legal dimension, political, cultural, social, economic, and environmental dimension.

There is no single model for Civic Education. In most European countries, Civic Education has stabilized, but some developing countries are still trying to improve their new educational solutions and materials and strive to achieve greater efficiency of Civic Education as an important educational item (Klemenčić, 2007).

From the very beginning of their schooling in the context of compulsory primary education, according to the Law on Education in Primary and Secondary Schools in Croatia (Ministry of Science and Education, 2008), students have the opportunity to learn about new technology and develop skills for work and life in the modern environment. This leads to the six goals of learning and teaching these curricular topics, the one that will be analysed in this study is volunteering in primary and secondary schools comprising the development of effective, appropriate, timely, responsible, and creative student behaviour, with the aim of improving Croatian education improvement but also developing the other fields.

According to Perić (2010), the traditional understanding of the definition of being a volunteer is unselfish help to all people in need, closely connected to the traditional, cultural contexts where they appear. According to Forčić (2007), contemporary volunteering is mutual support, giving services, and active participation in society (Perić, 2010). The same author points out that the main difference is that in traditional volunteering, the key point is altruism and a one-way relationship, which is different from contemporary volunteering, which is centered on a two-way relationship. Perić also mentions that it is connected to the concept of leisure time activities while some authors describe it as a person's free time activity.

Very often both the students and the teachers are not sufficiently aware of the possibilities of using, organizing, and planning their own leisure time. In particular, these are not the teachers, who can use the school subject they teach to devise, foster, and create free time for students and their leisure activities (Pešorda, 2007). Furthermore, Zrno (2013) claims that volunteering is increasingly recognized as an important factor in returning to community development and strengthening society. The fact is that the European Parliament adopted a declaration that appointed the European Commission to declare 2011 the year of volunteering. Volunteering represents a lifestyle associated with desirable social values to which an individual can show tendencies and is characterized by pro-social behavior.

The opportunity for the development of humanism, solidarity, tolerance, and positive attitude is needed for the material and spiritual values (moral education), and finally, the opportunity for creative expression and adoption of aesthetic values and an immeasurable contribution to the cultural life of the entire community (aesthetic education) (Kotlar & Bašić, 2010). Volunteering, as a type of experiential learning, in the present situation and achieved level of legal framework development, is emerging as one of the most logical choices for students (Ribarić et al., 2013).

The importance of this part of the curriculum is that each educator and teacher will tailor the content in the domain in a way that best suits the environment and the teaching subject. By interpenetrating and complementing the content of the three key domains of Civic Education, we achieve the goals of learning and teaching the cross-curricular theme. There are three main domains: Domain of Human rights, Domain of Democracy, and Domain of Community. The volunteer and solitary work of students is included in the Domain of Community. The Domain of Community is: "By learning about community participation, the student responds to social exclusion. Through communication processes and negotiation skills, they prepare themselves for successful action, for spotting problems in the community, for research, for proposing solutions, and for engaging in various activities. By advocating and participating in community work (for example, non-governmental organizations promote community and common interest, initially focused on the interests of the class, school, or local community), and later grow into a civic initiative where citizens act publicly and advocate for their ideas for the welfare of society" (Ministry of Science and Education, 2008).

In Croatia in the new curriculum called the School for Life, voluntary activities are divided into two cycles, the first one is for the first and second graders and the second one for the third, fourth, and fifth graders. Both cycles include Community work, organizing humanitarian work, and helping others (Ministry of Science and Education, 2008).

The aim of this research was to examine the representation of volunteer activities in the curricula of primary schools in Croatia, to examine the attitudes towards volunteering among teachers, and to examine their attitudes towards volunteering within the school institution.

Volunteering was selected for the topic of this research because it is often considered part of modern education, as it helps students develop different important skills like leadership, communication, problem-solving, and teamwork (Radulescu, 2022; Truskauskaitė et al., 2020). According to different research conducted in many countries, teachers are usually role models for students and their attitudes toward volunteering can influence how their students view volunteering (Čekolj & Ćulum Ilić, 2023; Salavatulina et al., 2022). If teachers have positive attitudes about volunteering, they can inspire students to participate in volunteer activities. Research shows that a positive attitude toward volunteering can help create a school environment that values community service, collaboration, and social responsibility (Alzaareer & Abdalla, 2023). Research on volunteer activities in schools and teachers' attitudes toward them helps schools and communities foster a culture of service, support students' development, and create stronger connections between educators, students, and the community (Papavasileiou et al., 2016).

Methodology

Research Design

The research sample was convenient. The participants were teachers in schools in the Republic of Croatia. The questionnaire was distributed to the participants via mail groups that included schools in Croatia. The qualitative research was conducted randomly in 21 Croatian counties.

The design of the research was sequential. In sequential designs, either the data are collected in an initial stage, followed by the collection of the other data type during a second stage. This design was chosen although the collection of qualitative data did not in any way affect the collection of quantitative data. The content analysis of the curriculum was done in parallel with the implementation of a survey among teachers.

Research Aims

1. Examine the representation of volunteer activities in the curricula of Croatian primary schools.
2. Examine attitudes about volunteering among teachers.
3. Examine attitudes of teachers about volunteering within the school.

Research Participants

To examine the representation of volunteer activities in primary school curricula, 21 primary schools from the territory of the Republic of Croatia participated in the research. Ten (47.6%) representatives of urban primary schools and eleven (52.4%) representatives of rural primary schools were included.

317 participants participated in the research via the Internet, of which 21 (6.6%) were male participants and 296 (93.4%) were female participants. The highest number of participants is in the age category 31-40 years (38.8%), while the lowest number of participants is older than 60 years (2.5%). According to the years of work experience, most participants have 16-30 years of work experience (40.7%), while the least have more than 31 years of work experience (8.2%).

Materials and Procedure

The socio-demographic data questionnaire collected data on the age and sex of the participants and the years of service. For this research, a questionnaire of attitudes about volunteering of teaching staff was taken over and adjusted (Puljek, 2020). The questionnaire consisted of three subscales, the first subscale related to general questions about involvement in volunteering and contained three items. Also, the customized version of the questionnaire contained ten items that examine attitudes about volunteering and 20 items that examine attitudes about volunteering within the school. The total score on each plot is calculated as the average of the participants' self-assessments. The task of the participants was to assess the extent to which they agree with the offered statements on a Likert-type scale of 5 degrees (1 - not at all, 5 - completely). A higher score indicates greater agreement with the claims offered. The internal consistency coefficient of the scale used to assess attitudes towards teacher and teacher volunteering (Cronbach Alpha) is .76 and the coefficient of internal consistency of the scale used to assess attitudes towards volunteering within the school (Cronbach Alpha) is .98. This indicates satisfactory levels of reliability of the scales used.

The data collection process was conducted in two parts. In the first part of the research, data were collected on the representation of volunteer activities from the curriculum of Croatian primary schools. Representatives of primary schools were chosen at random. After that, an online survey was conducted using the Google online application to collect data on teachers' attitudes. Participants were given written instructions before completing a questionnaire explaining the goal and purpose of the research. Participants who agreed to participate in the survey expressed their consent to participate and continued to complete the rest of the questionnaire online. Completing the questionnaire took approximately 10 minutes. Participants were found/gathered through online publishing and the snowball method. Participants gave their written consent to participate in this study. They were informed that the answers, as well as their individual results, would be anonymous and that the participation is voluntary. They were informed about the purpose of the research.

To check the justification of the use of parametric statistical procedures, it was checked whether the distributions of all variables deviate significantly from the normal distribution and found that the absolute values of these indices are equal to or close to zero, which justifies the use of parametric statistical procedures (Kline, 2011). Furthermore, the normality of the distribution of the results was not seriously disturbed because the values of the Skewness did not exceed 3, nor did the Kurtosis values exceed 10. T-test and ANOVA were used to process the results, and the data was processed using the statistical program SPSS 20.

In conducting a content analysis, researchers begin by defining precise research questions to maintain a systematic approach throughout the study. Data relevant to these questions, such as texts, audio, or visual content, is collected and prepared for analysis, often involving transcription for coding purposes. The coding process entails identifying significant patterns or themes within the data and breaking it down into manageable units that represent recurring themes or important segments. These codes are then categorized into larger themes, with researchers observing patterns and relationships for a higher-level interpretation aligned with the study's objectives. The final themes and insights are then contextualized within the research questions and thoroughly reported. To ensure the reliability of this process, multiple measures are employed: inter-coder reliability tests (e.g., Cohen's Kappa or Krippendorff's Alpha) assess the consistency of coding among researchers, while test-retest reliability checks confirm stability over time. A detailed coding manual is also developed, providing code definitions, examples, and rules to standardize coding practices. In addition, an expert review of the coding can further validate accuracy and consistency. Together, these steps enable a systematic, reliable analysis that supports the study's validity and the robustness of its findings.

Results

Representation of Volunteer Activities in Croatian Primary School Curricula

The results of the analysis of Croatian primary school curricula indicate the representation of voluntary activities in the curricula of 13 primary schools (61.9%), while the curricula of eight (38.1%) primary schools do not include voluntary activities. Taking into account primary schools, the results of the analysis show that volunteer activities are represented in the curricula of eight (80%) primary schools from the urban area, while in rural schools they are represented in 45.5% of cases.

Furthermore, a qualitative analysis of volunteer activities included in the curricula primary schools showed the following most common types of activities:

- Fundraising for poor and sick children
- Fundraising for the elderly
- Encouraging empathy and solidarity towards vulnerable groups
- Nature conservation activities

It can be concluded that most primary schools from the research sample have included voluntary activities in their curricula.

Teachers' Attitudes Towards Volunteering

According to teachers, it can be noticed that most teachers have personal experience of volunteering and have volunteered in civil society organizations. However, most teachers do not organize volunteer activities for their students, as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Indicators of Participants' Answers to Questions About the Personal Experience of Volunteering (N = 317)

	Men (%)		Women (%)		In total (%)	
	Yes	Not	Yes	Not	Yes	Not
Do you have personal experience in volunteering?	76.2	23.8	64.2	35.8	65.0	35.0
Have you volunteered in civil society organizations or non-profits?	47.6	52.6	56.4	43.6	55.8	44.2
Do you organize volunteer activities for your students?	9.5	90.5	38.2	61.8	36.3	63.7

The personal experience of teachers was analyzed according to age, with the largest percentage of participants who have personal experience in volunteering to belong to the age group under 30 years. However, the largest percentage of volunteer activities for their students are organized by teachers of the oldest age group (see Table 2).

Table 2. Descriptive Indicators of Answers to Questions About the Experience of Volunteering of Teachers (N = 317)

	<30%		31-40%		41-50%		51-60%		> 60%	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Do you have personal experience in volunteering?	85.3	14.7	71.5	28.5	60.4	39.6	48.2	51.8	50.0	50.0
Have you volunteered in civil society organizations or non-profits?	82.4	17.6	60.2	39.8	49.0	51.0	42.9	57.1	50.0	50.0
Do you organize volunteer activities for your students?	17.6	82.4	34.1	65.9	41.7	58.3	41.1	58.9	50.0	50.0

Taking into account the years of service, the largest percentage of participants who have experience in volunteering and have volunteered in civil society organizations belong to the youngest group of teachers. On the other hand, the largest percentage of teachers who organize volunteer activities for their students belong to the group with 16-30 years of work experience (see Table 3).

Table 3. Descriptive Indicators of Personal Experience of Volunteering Among Teachers (N = 317)

	<5%		6-15 (%)		16-30 (%)		> 31%	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Do you have experience in volunteering?	76.6	23.4	74.8	25.2	55.0	45.0	50.0	50.0
Have you volunteered in civil society organizations or non-profits?	74.5	25.5	60.9	39.1	45.7	54.3	50.0	50.0
Do you organize volunteer activities for your students?	21.3	78.7	33.9	66.1	42.6	57.4	42.3	57.7

Furthermore, the attitudes of teachers about volunteering were analysed. Teachers mostly agree with the statement 'Involvement in volunteering can help an individual meet interesting people.' while participants agree the least with the statement 'Mostly those who are financially well off can volunteer.', which can be seen from Table 4. Also, differences in attitudes about volunteering were examined, and the data indicate statistically significant differences in attitudes concerning the gender of the participants, which can be seen in Table 4. Women have more positive attitudes compared to men. Effect sizes (Cohen *d* values) for t-tests range from 0.5 to 0.8, which means effect sizes are medium.

Table 4. Results of T-Test Analysis of Attitudes Towards Volunteering Concerning the Gender of Teachers (N = 317)

Teachers' attitudes towards volunteering	Men		Women		In total		<i>t</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
1. Volunteers are more satisfied with themselves than people who do not volunteer.	3.24	1.179	3.75	1.043	3.72	1.058	-2.168 *
3. Volunteering is a good way to spend free time.	3.71	1.102	4.33	0.890	4.29	0.916	-3.019 **
6. Volunteering needs more attention.	3.86	1.236	4.32	0.917	4.29	0.946	-2.167 *
7. Volunteering can be done mainly by those who have a lot of free time.	3.67	0.966	2.87	1.053	2.92	1.065	3.360 **
8. Mostly, those who are financially well off can volunteer.	3.33	1.390	2.31	1.214	2.38	1.251	3.705 **

Note: ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

Differences in the attitudes of participants concerning years of service also proved to be statistically significant. A significant difference at the 1% significance level was shown in the questions "By getting involved in volunteer work, interesting people can be met" and "Mostly those who have a lot of free time can volunteer." (see Table 5).

Table 5. Results of a Simple Analysis of Variance on the Attitudes of Participants Concerning Years of Service (N = 317)

Attitudes about volunteering	<5		6-15		16-30		> 31		<i>F</i> (313.3)	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
4. By getting involved in volunteer work, interesting people can be met.	4.60	0.614	4.52	0.730	4.28	0.884	4.42	0.809	2.789 *	1-3 *
7. Volunteering can be done mainly by those who have a lot of free time.	3.26	1.113	3.01	1.080	2.81	1.031	2.54	0.905	3.504 *	1-3 * 1-4** 2-4 *

Note: ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

Differences in attitudes about volunteering were also tested concerning the engagement of participants in volunteering, where there is a statistically significant difference (see Table 6). Teacher who participated in volunteering have more positive attitudes towards it. Effect sizes (Cohen *d* values) for t-tests are in the range from 0.2 to 0.4, which indicates small effect sizes.

Table 6. Descriptive Indicators of Participants' Attitudes Towards Volunteering and Results of T-Test Analysis of Differences in Participants' Responses Concerning the Personal Experience of Volunteering (N = 317)

Attitudes about volunteering	Do you have any experience in volunteering?				<i>t</i>
	YES		NO		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
1. Volunteers are more satisfied with themselves than people who do not volunteer.	3.84	1.015	3.49	1.103	2.908 **
3. Volunteering is a good way to spend free time.	4.38	0.845	4.13	1.019	2.357 *
4. By getting involved in volunteer work, interesting people can be met.	4.53	0.717	4.23	0.894	3.198 **
6. Volunteering needs more attention.	4.38	0.896	4.12	1.016	3.365 **
7. Volunteering can be done mainly by those who have a lot of free time.	2.79	1.064	3.17	1.026	-3.071 **
8. Mostly those who are financially well off can volunteer.	2.19	1.202	2.71	1.275	-3.579 **
10. Volunteers can be entrusted with serious work.	4.18	0.897	3.86	0.942	3.056 **

Note: ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

Differences in attitudes towards volunteering of participants were examined concerning whether participants organize volunteer activities for their students, where t-test analysis confirmed the existence of statistically significant differences, which can be seen in Table 7.

Teachers who organize volunteering activities have more positive attitudes toward volunteering. Effect sizes (Cohen d values) for t-tests range from 0.3 to 0.55, which indicates small to medium effect sizes.

Table 7. Descriptive Indicators of Participants' Attitudes About Volunteering and the Results of T-Test Analysis of Differences in Participants' Responses Concerning Organizing Volunteer Activities for Their Students (N = 317)

Attitudes about volunteering	Do you organize volunteer activities for your students?				<i>t</i>
	Yes		No		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
1. Volunteers are more satisfied with themselves than people who do not volunteer.	3.90	1.079	3.62	1.036	2.253 *
7. Volunteering can be done mainly by those who have a lot of free time.	2.56	1.036	3.13	1.026	-4.800 **
8. Mostly, those who are financially well-off can volunteer.	2.09	1.151	2.54	1.278	-3.141 **

Note: ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

It can be concluded that most teachers have personal volunteer experience and have volunteered in civil society organizations, but most teaching staff do not organize volunteer activities for their students despite positive attitudes about volunteering.

Attitudes of Teachers About Volunteering Within a School

In addition to attitudes about volunteering, teachers' attitudes about volunteering within the school were analyzed. Teachers express positive attitudes about volunteering in the school environment. Also, differences in attitudes concerning the gender of the participants proved to be statistically significant (see Table 8). Women have more positive attitudes compared to men. Effect sizes (Cohen d values) for t-tests range from 0.2 to 0.7, depending on the item, which means effect sizes are small to medium.

Table 8. Descriptive Indicators and Results of T-Test Analysis of Participants' Attitudes Towards Volunteering Within the School Concerning Gender (N = 317)

Teachers' attitudes about volunteering within the school	Men		Women		In total		<i>t</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
2. A positive attitude of teachers about volunteering encourages volunteer activities in school.	3.90	1.179	4.31	0.855	4.29	0.884	-2.062 *
3. The establishment of a volunteer club within the school would enrich the school's prevention program.	4.14	1.014	4.30	0.873	4.29	0.882	-0.809 *
4. Volunteering should be encouraged in the classroom lesson.	3.81	1.209	4.31	0.866	4.27	0.899	-2.474 *
11. Volunteering encourages empathy for vulnerable groups-needy	4.48	0.680	4.52	0.754	4.52	0.749	-0.260
18. Volunteering is a useful way to spend free time.	3.81	1.078	4.47	0.793	4.43	0.830	-3.589 **
19. Volunteer activities foster a sense of usefulness and belonging.	4.10	0.768	4.48	0.750	4.45	0.756	-2.247 *

Note: ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

Differences in attitudes towards volunteering within the school were also tested with regard to the engagement of participants in volunteering, where statistically significant differences were found, which can be seen according to Table 9. Teachers who participated in volunteering have more positive attitudes towards it. Effect sizes (Cohen *d* values) for t-tests range from 0.2 to 0.4, which indicates small effect sizes.

Table 9. Descriptive Indicators of Participants' Attitudes About Volunteering Within the School and the Results of T-test Analysis of Differences in Participants' Responses With Regard to Personal Experience of Volunteering (N = 317)

Teachers' attitudes about volunteering within the school	Do you have personal experience in volunteering?				<i>t</i>
	Yes		No		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
2. A positive attitude of teachers about volunteering encourages volunteer activities in school.	4.38	0.857	4.12	0.912	2.534 *
3. The establishment of a volunteer club within the school would enrich the school prevention program.	4.38	0.846	4.13	0.926	2.499 *
5. Volunteering should be encouraged at the School Student Council.	4.37	0.911	4.13	0.896	2.278 *
6. Volunteering should be planned in the school curriculum.	4.27	0.993	3.87	1.096	3.240 **
7. Volunteer activities contribute to better connections among students.	4.45	0.829	4.24	0.855	2.109 *
8. Volunteer activities contribute to a better connection between teachers and students.	4.38	0.852	4.14	0.893	2.347 *
9. Volunteering contributes to reducing social disparities among students.	4.14	0.995	3.81	1.958	2.755 **
10. Active participation of students and school staff in conducting volunteer activities contributes to a better school atmosphere	4.40	0.888	4.05	0.942	3.266 **
15. Volunteering should be an integral part of civic education within the school.	4.47	0.903	4.21	0.945	2.439 *
17. Volunteering acquires new knowledge and develops social skills.	4.57	0.700	4.40	0.704	2.077 *
18. Volunteering is a useful way to spend free time.	4.50	0.807	4.30	0.859	2.035 *

Note: ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

Differences in attitudes about volunteering within the school were examined with regard to whether participants organize volunteer activities for their students, with t-test analysis showing statistically significant differences between participants (see Table 10). Teachers who organize volunteering activities have a more positive attitude toward volunteering. Effect sizes (Cohen *d* values) for t-tests are all around 0.2, which indicates small effect sizes.

Table 10. Descriptive Indicators of Participants' Attitudes About Volunteering Within the School and The Results Of T-Test Analysis of Differences in Participants' Responses With Regard to Organizing Volunteer Activities for Their Students (N = 317)

Teachers' attitudes about volunteering within the school	Do you organize volunteer activities for your students?				<i>t</i>
	YES		NO		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
2. A positive attitude of teachers about volunteering encourages volunteer activities in school.	4.43	0.849	4.20	0.894	2.260 *
3. The establishment of a volunteer club within the school would enrich the school prevention program.	4.43	0.829	4.21	0.903	2.167 *
4. Volunteering should be encouraged in the classroom lesson.	4.41	0.897	4.20	0.892	2.017 *
5. Volunteering should be encouraged at the School Student Council.	4.42	0.917	4.21	0.901	1.977 *
6. Volunteering should be planned in the school curriculum.	4.30	0.984	4.03	1.069	2.262 *

Note: ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

It can be concluded that teachers have positive attitudes about volunteering within the school. However, there are significant differences in attitudes regarding gender, personal experience of volunteering participants, and, therefore, whether they organize volunteer activities for their students.

Comparison of Curriculum Activities in the School Year 2019/2020 on Civic Education – Volunteering Among 1-4 Year Graders

There are 21 counties in the Republic of Croatia, and they are described according to the volunteer activity they have in their curricular documents (see Appendix). From these results, we can conclude that in some schools, there are no volunteering activities, while in some other schools, there are several. All schools should encourage volunteering among students and teachers. After analyzing 21 different county primary school curriculums for the school year 2019/20, for the first to fourth graders, there is no correlation between rural and urban parts of the country where voluntary actions are included in the school curriculum.

Discussion

The aim of this research was to examine the representation of volunteer activities in the curricula of Croatian primary schools, the attitudes towards volunteering among teachers, and the attitudes towards volunteering within the school institution among teachers. Research on volunteerism in schools is essential for understanding its impact on students, teachers, and communities, as well as for developing policies and programs that foster a culture of volunteerism.

The results of the analysis of Croatian primary school curricula suggest that most of the primary schools that participated in the research include voluntary activities in their curricula. The most frequent volunteer activities were fundraising, activities to encourage empathy and solidarity with vulnerable groups, and environmental activities.

Teachers' Attitudes Towards Volunteering

According to teachers who participated in this research, it can be noticed that most teachers have personal experience of volunteering and have volunteered in civil society organizations. However, most teachers, do not organize volunteer activities for their students. Similar results were obtained in previous research (Papavasileiou et al., 2016; Puljek, 2020).

Furthermore, the personal experience of teachers was analyzed according to the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants, and it was found that the largest percentage of participants who have personal experience in volunteering belongs to the age group under 30 years. Also, most of the participants of the youngest age group

volunteered in civil society organizations. However, the largest percentage of volunteer activities for their students are organized by teachers of the oldest age group, which leads to the conclusion that younger teachers, although they have more personal volunteer experience, are less likely to organize volunteering for their students. Taking into account the years of service, the largest percentage of participants who have experience in volunteering and have volunteered in civil society organizations belongs to the youngest group of teachers.

Teachers' attitudes about volunteering were analysed. Teachers largely agree with the statements 'Through the involvement in volunteering an individual can meet interesting people', 'Volunteering is a good way to spend free time' and 'Volunteering needs more attention', while they least agree with the statements 'Volunteering can be done mainly by those who are financially well off' and 'Mostly those who have a lot of free time can volunteer'. Given the above, it can be concluded that teachers have predominantly positive attitudes about volunteering. This finding is in line with previous international research (Papavasileiou et al., 2016; Puljek, 2020). Also, the data show that women express greater agreement with the statements 'Volunteers are happier with themselves than people who do not volunteer, Volunteering is a good way to spend free time, mostly those who have a lot of free time can volunteer' and 'Mostly those who are financially well off can volunteer'. Women in this research have more positive attitudes compared to men; these findings were also obtained in some previous research (Puljek, 2020). Women are by their nature more empathetic and directed towards others, so this result is not surprising.

Furthermore, participants who have less than five years of work experience and those who have a range of 6 - 15 years of experience to a greater extent agree with the previous statements compared to a group of participants aged 16-30 years of experience. Furthermore, teachers who have less than five years of experience agree to a greater extent that volunteering can be done mainly by those who have a lot of free time compared to the participants of the two groups with the longest work experience. Such data support some previous results which show a higher percentage of personal involvement in volunteering of groups of participants with less work experience (Puljek, 2020).

In addition to the above, participants who have experience in volunteering express greater agreement with the particles that volunteers are happier than people who do not volunteer, that volunteering is a good way to spend free time, that students engaging in volunteer work can meet interesting people, that volunteering is necessary and that volunteers can be entrusted with serious work, compared to participants who do not have the experience of volunteering. On the other hand, participants without volunteer experience expressed a greater degree of agreement with the claims that mostly those who have a lot of free time can volunteer and that those who are financially well-off can volunteer. Also, participants who organize volunteer activities for their students have a greater degree of agreement with the claim that volunteers are more satisfied with themselves than people who do not volunteer. However, participants who do not organize volunteer activities for their students express a greater degree of agreement that volunteering can be done mainly by those who have a lot of free time and that volunteering can be done mainly by those who are financially well off. Such data are consistent with previous data concerning the personal experience of volunteering (Puljek, 2020).

It can be concluded that most teachers have personal volunteer experience and have volunteered in civil society organizations, but most teaching staff do not organize volunteer activities for their students. Despite significant differences in attitudes about volunteering concerning gender, age, personal experience of volunteering participants, and organizing volunteer activities for their teachers, teachers have predominantly positive attitudes about volunteering.

Attitudes of Teachers About Volunteering Within a School

According to previous research, teachers recognize volunteering potential to enhance students' skills and social responsibility (Čekolj & Čulum Ilić, 2023; Papavasileiou et al., 2016; Radulescu, 2022). Teachers who participate in or promote volunteering are likely to build stronger relationships with the community. This connection can enhance communication, trust, and collaboration between schools and local organizations, creating more opportunities for students. However, barriers such as time constraints, workload, and a lack of institutional support can sometimes limit teachers' ability to engage in or promote volunteering fully (Salavatulina et al., 2022).

In addition to attitudes about volunteering, teachers' attitudes about volunteering within the school were analysed in this research. Teachers express positive attitudes about volunteering in the school environment, most of which agree that volunteering encourages empathy towards vulnerable groups and that volunteering provides new knowledge and develops social skills. Also, women largely agree that a positive attitude of teachers about volunteering encourages volunteer activities in school, that the establishment of a volunteer club within the school enriches the school prevention program, that volunteering should be encouraged in the classroom, that volunteering is a useful way of spending free time and that volunteer activities foster a sense of usefulness and belonging to male participants. Teachers' positive attitude towards volunteering encourages volunteer activities in school, such as that volunteering contributes to reducing social differences among students, that active participation of students and school staff in conducting volunteer activities contributes to a better school atmosphere, that volunteering should be an integral part of civic education within the school, that volunteering acquires new knowledge and develops social skills, and that

volunteering is a useful way to spend free time. It can be concluded that teachers have positive attitudes about volunteering within the school. However, there are significant differences in attitudes regarding gender, personal experience of volunteering participants, and, therefore, whether they organize volunteer activities for their students.

However, the effect sizes obtained in this study are small to medium, so the results should be taken with caution.

Conclusion

The data of this research suggest that most schools participating in this research have included volunteer activities in their curricula, with volunteer activities being more prevalent in urban schools. Furthermore, teachers mostly have positive attitudes towards volunteering and towards volunteering within the school. Although most teachers have personal experience of volunteering and volunteering in civil society organizations, volunteer activities are less often organized for their students.

The education of children and young people for the quality of life in today's world is directed towards the development of competencies different from those that were dominant in the past. In addition to the necessary knowledge and skills related to the performance of a specific task, developed civic competencies are an important factor, and adequately, the moral behavior of the individual in the narrow social context is enriched by modern information and communication technology (Vrkić Dimić, 2014). This raises the question of what the competencies of students essential to a quality and productive life are and whether these competencies should be acquired during their education and then later through independent, self-regulated learning.

Recommendations

Schools and educators are part of the wider community. Teachers' engagement in volunteer activities helps address local challenges, whether through tutoring, mentoring, or participating in community projects. By examining volunteer activities, schools can ensure they are addressing real community needs and contributing meaningfully. Understanding teachers' attitudes toward volunteering can guide the development of policies and programs that can promote volunteerism within schools. Schools and policymakers can identify barriers that prevent teachers from volunteering or promoting volunteering among students and work to remove them.

In the context of this study, we suggest that future research should conduct a longitudinal study of the further education process. A longitudinal study is essential to make the results more accurate and meaningful. Therefore, voluntary activity studies will be extended to primary and secondary students as well as faculty students.

Future studies could examine how participation in volunteer activities affects academic performance, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. A study of the role of volunteerism in fostering empathy, leadership, teamwork, and civic responsibility among students should be conducted. There is also a lack of research on the role of volunteering in preparing students for future careers by developing their skills. Furthermore, it would be interesting to investigate what motivates teachers to engage in volunteer activities. Schools should identify challenges that prevent teachers from being actively involved in volunteerism. Lastly, it is necessary to investigate how volunteerism can be integrated into the school curriculum.

Limitations

This study has some limitations. It was conducted quantitatively using only a questionnaire as a research instrument and data was collected at only one point in time. We do not have any longitudinal data in this research. Also, there is a possibility that the participants gave socially desirable answers. Furthermore, the question of the representativeness of the sample itself arises. Since the research was voluntary, it is possible that those who have more positive attitudes towards volunteering and decided to participate in it. This study might include only teachers who already participated or participated in some voluntary activities. When we conduct an online survey, there is a possibility that the questionnaires were not filled out only by teachers, so in future research, a more representative sample should be included, and the research should be conducted live so that the results can be more justifiably generalized to other populations. The results should be taken with caution and some other assessment measures should be included in future research.

Ethics Statements

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by the University of Osijek. Also the participants gave written consent to participate in this study. They were informed that the participation is voluntary and answers as well as their individual results would be anonymous.

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Appendix

Table A1. Schools and Volunteer Activities in the Counties of Croatia

Counties of Croatia	Schools and Volunteer Activities
SISAČKO-MOSLAVAČKA:	<p>OŠ Zorke Sever, Popovača</p> <p>Activity: Visit the Oldman home - Popovača and Gornja Gračenica, grades 2 and 3. The aim is to learn by real example how to be a good man to your neighbour, to emphasize the importance of the meeting, talking, and helping your neighbour, and to recognize the term Caritas in every good deed to one's neighbour.</p> <p>Activity: "20 days of kindness" (Croatian, "20 dana dobrote") – 2 graders, the main aim: to raise the importance of helping each other and feeling solidarity towards those in need and who are lonely in the days of Advent, and a small "drop makes a river" of positive activities is the slogan of all activities of "20 days of kindness".</p> <p>Students' artwork (Učenička zadruga) students from 2-8 grade. The aim and the purpose are to gather as many students as possible voluntarily and to provide them with the appropriate methodological procedures under the guidance of teachers and external assistants. They participate in environmental and humanitarian action. They also raise funds for the people in need.</p> <p>They participated in the project called "Maria's meals" (Croatian "Marijini obroci"). Grades included from the first grade to the eighth grade. The students who attend the school subject Religion watched the film "The generation of hope" to get acquainted with the poorest part of the world. The students who attend the extracurricular activity Humanitarians prepared stalls with promotional materials, T-shirts, mugs, and books and raised money which was donated to charity.</p>
KRAPINSKO-ZAGORSKA	OŠ Oroslavje, there is a rural school branch as a part of the Oroslavje School - Područna škola Krušljevo Selo – there are no activities connected to voluntary work.
KARLOVAČKA:	OŠ Dubovac, Karlovac - All the students were included together with their teachers and parents. They collected all goods needed for the poor which was donated to the charity Social Self-Service. The aim is to raise solidarity, humanity, and understanding.
VARAŽDINSKA:	OŠ Petar Zrinski, Jalžabet – no activities connected to humanitarian work.
KOPRIVNIČKO-KRIŽEVAČKA:	<p>OŠ „Antun Nemčić Gostovinski“, Koprivnica – Project "Schools for Africa", all students involved from the first grade to the eighth grade. The objective is to promote the humanitarian assistance and action of students, to organize and encourage voluntary work aimed at the needy, to develop social sensitivity, and to discover new knowledge and interests about the African continent. It has been noticed that the students show the willingness for humanitarian and voluntary work. With the help of constructive conversation, they develop a positive attitude towards the UNICEF organization and humanitarian action. The students can compare the lives of children on the African continent with their own. They can acquire new knowledge and discover new interesting facts about Africa. The students organize a second-hand fair.</p> <p>Activity – "Thousand wishes under the Christmas Tree" – all grades in the primary school are included. The aim is to develop a relationship of co-operation and tolerance with students and to make them socially aware of the needs of others around them. The main goal is to develop an awareness of the students that they are surrounded by many social problems. Christmas time is a time of giving and also of helping those most in need. They will also become aware of how much is their help needed and thus be encouraged to continue helping others around them throughout the whole year and not just at Christmas time. The students will collect things for people in need.</p> <p>The student takes care of abandoned animals by donating the food and other goods (e.g. Dog houses, blankets...) needed for the easier and more joyful life of abandoned dogs in Asylum "Otto's shelter" and "Good Heart Shapes".</p>

Table A1. Continued

Counties of Croatia	Schools and Volunteer Activities
BJELOVARSKO-BILOGORSKA	<p>OŠ Sirač, Sirač, Students of all grades collect food and personal hygiene products, clothes, and shoes for the needs of low-income families, to cooperate with the charity Caritas in December and in March. The students develop social sensitivity and promote volunteer work among children.</p> <p>Solidarity in action – The students take part in the action of collecting funds in cooperation with the Red Cross from Daruvar. The aim is to develop social sensitivity among students.</p> <p>Volunteer work fosters social sensitivity among children, used in everyday life for 1000 JOY during December to participate in the action of collecting funds for Caritas to purchase appropriate gifts for only 5.00 kunas to develop social sensitivity among students, teachers, parents. The Caritas Sale of commemorative bracelets is organized, the aim is to foster social sensitivity among children in everyday life.</p>
PRIMORSKO-GORANSKA	<p>OŠ "Rikard Katalinić Jeretov" Opatija - "Schools for Africa" the aim is to develop empathy for people in need by participating in humanitarian work activities: making suitable gifts, greeting cards, bags, useful or decorative objects and similar. They will be exhibited at school and in that way, they will collect money, which will be donated. The students' pocket money will also be donated to help the needy. The project they participate in is an initiative of UNICEF, the Nelson Mandela, and Hamburg Foundation societies for the promotion of democracy and international law.</p>
LIČKO-SENJSKA	<p>OŠ Jure Turića, Gospić, a project called "20 dana dobrote" ("20 days of humanism") The curriculum area: social – humanistic: classes included 1st, 2nd and 3rd classes (Extended stay). The objective is to participate in the humanitarian work that students choose and that they agree about. The aim of the project is to raise awareness of the importance of helping each other, caring for the community, and developing empathy for those who are needy and helpless, especially in the days of Advent, to recognize that not everyone has the same right, that a "small drop makes a river" of positive activities. Expected outcomes/achievements: (Student will be able to: They will realize the importance of helping one another and caring for the community they live in. It will develop empathy if they participate in the implementation of humanitarian action.</p>
VIROVITIČKO-PODRAVSKA	<p>OŠ Antuna Gustava Matoša, Čačinci</p> <p>The project "Schools for Africa" help children in Africa and make students aware of the problems of children in Africa. There is a week for Africa, raising money from various humanitarian activities like fairs and sales, encouraging humanity and mutual assistance.</p>
POŽEŠKO-SLAVONSKA	<p>OŠ „Ivan Goran Kovačić“, Velika, Humanitarian activity for those who are in need. The aim is to help those who are in need and to identify ways we can help the sick, the lonely, and the others who are suffering and who are in need. Expected outcomes students will be able to notice and help those who are in need - charitable action, participants students 1 and 3 graders, teachers and parents "Ways to learn" collecting funds in order to plan, prepare, promote and foster teamwork.</p> <p>The project, School for Africa – the way of implementation of activities - workshops with the collected materials for students - designing activities such as collecting recyclable packaging, preparing food for sale at the school performance - collecting money and savings both at homes and in classes.</p>
BRODSKO-POSAVSKA	<p>Osnovna škola "Antun Mihanović" Nova Kapela, Batrina, International volunteering day, to promote the voluntary work among students, the students from the first to the eighth grade visit the Oldman home and bring collected goods.</p> <p>"From plastic plugs to expensive drugs" - (humanitarian project) the teachers and the students from the first to the eighth grade, the aim is to raise awareness and promote social sensitivity among children, parents, and teachers. Humanitarian activities and events to help improve the living conditions of children in the community to implementation of activities, programs, and/or projects. During the school year, the students collect toys, school supplies, or other supplies for students from poorer families. They also organize the collecting of old bottle caps during the school year. The funds are intended for the procurement of expensive drugs for the treatment of severe malignant diseases.</p>

Table A1. Continued

Counties of Croatia	Schools and Volunteer Activities
ZADARSKA	OŠ Bartula Kašića, Zadar- "20 days of goodness" - Students of the first class are involved in the project. The main objective is that students become aware of the importance of helping each other and feeling solidarity towards those in need. The purpose is to develop small classroom activities that will serve the development of the atmosphere of Advent in class, encouraging students to the more common organized activities. The students will make 20 positive activities that will point out the importance of helping and respect, they will also design and send greeting cards with positive thoughts.
OSJEČKO-BARANJSKA	OŠ Drenje, Drenje: there are no activities connected to voluntary work.
ŠIBENSKO-KNINSKA	OŠ Ivana Gorana Kovačića, Cista Velika, There is no curriculum for 2019/20 on the website of the school, so the curriculum of the previous school year is analysed. There are several humanitarian projects. The most important one is to raise money for Mary's Meals. The money collected in the school year will be donated to the international project Mary's Meals that establishes a project of nutrition in schools in communities where poverty and hunger prevent children to gain an education. Activity, project humanitarian - environmental project (collection of bottle caps). The main objective is to stimulate awareness of students about the need for proper disposal of the old bottle caps. To draw attention of the students to not throwing bottle caps with PET packaging and to encourage the development of awareness of the need to preserve the quality of the natural environment. To encourage environmental awareness of students, parents, and residents. Boost humanitarian awareness also aiding to Multiple Sclerosis Society collected through the caps themselves provides a means for further work. The purpose is to promote activities that act in the direction of environmental protection and preservation of our planet. Helping people with disabilities in the procurement of the necessary funds for their humanitarian work.
VUKOVARSKO-SRIJEMSKA	OŠ Dragutina Tadijanovića, Vukovar, grades 1-4 called Little Missionaries. The aim is to improve the spiritual and other communication and creative abilities of students. Furthermore, to enable them to deeper understanding and connection of the biblical message with everyday personal and social life. Also, to educate them on moral and social values, solidarity, shared responsibility, empathy. The identification of problems and situations in which we can help. Humanitarian actions to collect material assistance in cooperation with parents and after that visiting institutions for the care of children and the sick.
SPLITSKO-DALMATINSKA:	OŠ Lučac, Split elementary school joined the action "A di si ti?" in 2014. Most teachers, students, and parents were happy to support the action, and they gave donations. There were 22 small volunteers included (students from grades 2 to 8). What was interesting that there were 62 stalls, 627 volunteers, and that the school Lučac collected HRK 4,300.00 on 17 December 2019. They also visited Voluntary centre Split and for the 19th consecutive year organized a celebration on December 5, International Volunteer Day. The ceremony was attended by our two valuable volunteers, students 2c class who received recognition for their volunteer work. Their teacher is the first winner of the annual award "Davor Belaic" for part-time work with children and the promotion of volunteerism among young people. They also organized the cycling race as a humanitarian activity for the 1 st to the 4 th graders.
ISTARSKA:	OŠ Vitomir Širola Pajo, Nedešćina, no activities for this age of students.
DUBROVAČKO-NERETVANSKA	OŠ Ante Curać-Pinjac, Žrnovo, no activities.
MEĐIMURSKA	II. osnovna škola, Čakovec, there are no activities.
GRAD ZAGREB	OŠ Dobriše Cesarića, Zagreb, no activities for this age.
ZAGREBAČKA:	OŠ Milke Trnine, Križ; there are no activities connected to voluntary work.