

ACTION RESEARCH IN THE FUNCTION OF ENCOURAGING READING HABITS IN STUDENTS: JOINT FAMILY AND SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

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Abstract: Taking into account the relevance of action research, as well as their positive characteristics and the effects they can lead to, this article is aimed at encouraging and developing reading habits among students and visiting the school library through the application of action research. Motivated by the examples of good practice of many practitioners, as well as the exceptional methodological expertise and desire of the school actors (teachers and school librarians) with whom we collaborated on this research, we tried to promote reading activities and visits to the school library through cooperation and the unique action of students, teachers, and parents through a spectrum of creative contents. The findings of the conducted action research show a number of achieved results in the positive aspect of building reading habits among students, attitude towards reading and activities in the direction of visiting the school library. Many research projects and activities are directed towards the promotion of reading, where further research could direct more attention to the active involvement of parents in the activities of the school library, providing opportunities and opportunities for parents to express their ideas in this sphere, creating conditions for their participation and applying action research to develop values and reading habits in students.

Keywords: action research, cooperation, reading, family, school

Introduction

Surrounded by the influence of the Internet, social networks and other platforms and applications that students use every day, we are witnesses that books are not a common prop for children and young people. The authors emphasize the special importance of reading among children and young people (Krnjaić et al., 2011; Perčić & Vukadinović, 2019; Stevanović et al., 2020; Milanović & Matejević, 2022). As today's modernist views and actions of the youngest are directed mainly towards technological innovations, we will focus on the promotion and encouragement of

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reading habits and more frequent use of books in students' leisure time. „Reading habits can be explained as a lifelong need to acquire new knowledge, which is perceived by individuals as a need and a source of satisfaction“ (Perčić & Vukadinović, 2019: 413). The task of the modern family and school is to popularize the book and reading activities through a unique action in an effort to ensure that these contents accompany today's times, circumstances and interests of the young population. As it is known that parental participation in school activities empowers students and has many benefits for their development, as well as more effective and smooth functioning of students in school (Kim & Sheridan, 2015), it is necessary to involve parents and work thoroughly with them on the aspect of popularization of reading. Joint ideas and endeavors should bring the activity of reading and the value it brings to the youngest. Many authors believe that the school library should also make a big contribution to the development of reading habits. In modern frameworks, libraries „change their appearance and function and become places where successful social communication takes place, where socially responsible behavior is shaped, information and media literacy is adopted, the use of modern technologies is directed to educational resources and readiness for lifelong learning is developed“ (Panić & Živković, 2022: 360). Therefore, in accordance with the postmodern framework, these institutions acquire more modern functions, while providing the opportunity for a spectrum of activities and content in the development of values, habits and learning. In addition to various modern approaches in popularizing books and reading among students, action research exudes uniqueness and practicality, both in the most diverse pedagogical situations, and in promoting reading among younger elementary school students. Therefore, „they make it possible to solve specific problems that teachers encounter in their practice, that is, they contribute to the improvement of practice“ (Maksimović, 2012: 231). The results of close action research (O'Connell, 2013) showed positive results in building students' love for reading through collaboration with parents, which was the basis for our understanding and approach to this topic. Therefore, the value of action research is reflected in the fact that they can be extremely useful to teachers in various pedagogical situations, as well as in the direction of promoting reading and developing reading habits among students. For this reason, we tried to look at the promotion of reading, the development of reading habits among students and the visit to the school library through the prism of the application of action research.

Methodological framework of research

The fundamental commitment of the practitioners significantly helped us to see the problem and approach the creation of further steps, content and activities in order to overcome it. Going in the direction of popularizing books and reading among younger elementary school students, we tried to apply action research and observe its effects in this sphere. The problem of this research is: Can the application of action research contribute to encouraging and developing reading habits among

students of younger grades and visits to the school library? Therefore, the aim of this article is to encourage and develop students' reading habits and visits to the school library through the application of action research. Tangent literature was very helpful to us, which helped us to understand the problems and create individual activities, as well as to create an instrument with which we monitored the effects before and after the conducted research. Therefore, there are many studies that show activities, contents and examples of good practice that librarians and pedagogical workers initiate and organize, which represents a great support in the process of building a positive image, emotions and attitudes towards this cultural institution and reading as an essential activity. Eight third-grade elementary school students participated in the research. As the parental role is extremely important in the entire process, in addition to the students, their parents actively participated and provided help and support during the entire project. Parents expressed a great desire to participate, and an effort was made to adapt the activities to their leisure time, because it was necessary for them to come to school and attend the activities. The meetings that were held first with parents, teachers and the school librarian focused on the importance of reading for students, approaching the library and the value of books. In order to encourage reading in the family environment, parents were shown some of the ways they can motivate their children to read at home and support them in that process. Therefore, in addition to focusing on developing reading habits among students and visiting the school library, with this research we: introduced teachers and the school librarian to the characteristics of the application of action research in pedagogical work, involved parents in the school's extracurricular activities that emphasized the popularization of reading and the development of reading habits, exchanged ideas about motivating students for reading, raised parents' awareness of the importance of reading, visiting libraries, borrowing books and building students' attitudes towards books, fostered cooperation between school actors (teachers and school librarians) and parents.

Planning and reflection phase

In the conversation with the teachers and the school librarian, one, we can call it, educational failure was noticed, which concerns the insufficiently developed reading habits of the students. Teachers noticed this problem in Serbian language classes where they talked with students about what books they read in their leisure time, how much time they devote to reading, and which book characters attract their attention. Teachers also noticed a lack of motivation among students when reading school textbooks and other required texts, stating that students generally find and skim read only paraphrased texts on Internet pages. The teachers explain that some students borrow the required book from the library, but find the abridged version mostly on the virtual pages of the Internet. Also, the school librarian, in a conversation with the students, noticed that reading is not an activity close to the students, but that they spend their leisure time after school and classes in different ways, not including reading. Guided by this problem, we tried to create interesting and interactive activities with which we will present reading to students in a very

bright and positive way. Realized activities based on numerous literature and examples of good practice followed the ideas of teachers, parents, librarians and researchers. In addition to teachers and librarians, students' parents also presented ideas. The first meetings were aimed at concretizing steps and planning activities and content. The meetings were attended by parents, teachers, the school librarian and the researcher. Therefore, efforts and ideas were directed towards the popularization of books and reading among students of younger grades and their visit to the school library. Through joint work and agreement, the activities that will be part of the research were selected.

Implementation of activities and evaluation

Students, their parents, teachers and the school librarian gave great help and support to this project. The activities were carried out in the premises and yard of the school, as well as the school library. Before each activity, the librarian and teachers thoroughly prepared the steps, materials and explanations that needed to be conveyed to the students. The teachers and the librarian made an exceptional contribution with their competence, methodical skills, pedagogical ideas and activity suggestions, which followed their many years of experience. The aim was to make a positive climate imperative for the project and children's laughter and active work contribute to valid outcomes.

The conducted activities covered a spectrum of interest and ranged from getting to know and talking about books, reading texts, through creative-artistic games and workshops, short plays and interactive conversations. Starting from the fact that „the habit of regular reading and visiting the library is created in childhood, when the library becomes a place of pleasant and cultural leisure that the child always visits with joy and willingness“ (Filipović Petrović, 2017: 25), one of the first activities was a visit to the school library. After the lessons, the school library was visited and the students were introduced to its purpose. The school librarian introduced students to the beauty of the school library in an extremely original way, using the dramatic method, and introduced the student to the code of conduct in the library. With the help of adults, the students borrowed a book from the school library and promised the librarian that they would return it by a certain deadline. After reading the book, the activity of retelling and talking about the book was realized. Each student was given the task of retelling the book he borrowed from the school library. An interesting discussion followed after each reread book. In order to connect reading and creativity in one interesting game, the students had the task of presenting their favorite character from the book in their own way. They received a wide variety of materials - paper, felt-tip pens, plasticine, crayons, tempera, hammer, newspaper and others. Each student showed the obtained works and described why he chose that character, stating his qualities and characteristics. Other participants had the task of asking questions to the student who presented. The works were shown to other employees and students and displayed in the school hall. Students enjoyed praise and positive comments from peers, parents and school employees. As the

school library is a unique place that exudes the beauty of books and peace, another creative workshop was held there. The aim of this activity was to decorate the school library room called the Library according to the taste and measure of the students. Participating in creative activities turned out to be an extremely good choice, because the students solved all the tasks very actively and dedicatedly, willingly participated, wrote quotes from famous writers, asked questions and discussed with each other. With the aforementioned activities, an effort was made to present the school library in a different way and as a place that students should be close to and often visit. „Activities carried out in the school library encourage students to read, but also to exchange opinions, cooperate and work as a team, to mutual respect, to acquire competences, and these are important prerequisites for building students as complete persons“ (Radovanović Pejović & Duković, 2020: 100). Therefore, the school library provides many opportunities for the implementation of various activities that will promote reading and contribute to the development of students. Creating the Children’s colorful book lexicon was another interesting activity for the students. It was necessary for each student to create a lexicon about books for himself, which he gave to other students, parents, teachers and the school librarian to fill out. The lexicon should have questions about their favorite book, character, author, description of the book, explanation of why that particular book is their favorite, what they like and don’t like about that book, which character they would invent and add to the book, why they would recommend that book to their peers to read. As the focus is on children’s literature, the adults’ task was to list their favorite book from their childhood when filling out the lexicon and direct the other answers to that book.

Making the book attracted a lot of attention from the students. The activity ‘In the role of a writer...’ required more time, because it was necessary to make a book from different materials according to the students’ ideas and wishes. This activity was preceded by an activity in which the students, their parents, teachers and the librarian used the received words (which were prepared in advance) to string together sentences and create a children’s story. The task was to present the written story in the form of an unusual smiling book. As already mentioned, different materials were used to create and produce the unusual smiling book. In order to encourage prosocial values among students, an action called Book lovers with a smile on their faces was organized. The activity was organized by project participants, but all students and employees could bring books. One of the requirements was that everyone bringing the book as a gift should write an interesting dedication (parents also helped the students in writing the dedication). At the organized event, students’ works were exhibited, among which there was the so-called ‘An unusual smiling book’. At the end of all the activities, each student received a book and a certificate of appreciation for their exceptional efforts with a motivational message about reading and the hope that they will continue to cultivate reading habits and visit the school library.

Summative evaluation process of action research

In this part, we will present the results of the conducted research. At the beginning, we wanted to examine the students' attitude towards books and reading. Table 1 presents the answers of the students obtained before the conducted research.

Table 1

Students' responses on how they perceive books and reading before the research

How students experience books and reading	„I don't really like reading books, because I prefer playing games on the computer.“
	„I practice and study with my grandfather every day. I also need to rest.“
	„It's enough that I study for school, I can't even read books. I have to read the readings.“
	„It's nice to read, but I don't have time because of school, dancing and English.“
	„I hate reading. My mom reads me stories all the time.“
	„I like to read comics when I have time in the evening.“
	„My grandmother always makes me read when I'm at her house.“
„I think books are a bit boring and I find reading a bit boring.“	

The students' answers obtained before the research do not exude a positive attitude and joy towards books and reading. We notice that students find other activities more interesting than reading and that they mostly state that they don't have time for reading. After conducting research, the students answered that reading books is very fun, as well as going to the school library. Some of the comments were and are great; like it; reading is not so boring anymore; it's very exciting; for my birthday I asked to get that yellow book that the teacher showed us in the library; when I grow up I want to be a librarian.

The next task we were guided by was to examine whether the students have a favorite book and, if so, whether they can answer basic questions about that book. Therefore, it was necessary for the students to answer whether they have a favorite book, to state the name of the book if they know it, the author of the book and to briefly tell what the book is about.

Table 2

Students' answers about their favorite book obtained before the research

	The student knows how the answer		The student does not know how to answer	
	Frequencies	Percentages	Frequencies	Percentages
I have a favorite book	8	100%	0	0%
Name of the book	3	37,5%	5	62,5%
Author of the book	1	12,5%	7	87,5%
Retelling the book	3	37,5%	5	62,5%

The presented results, which were reached before the conducted research, show that all students answered that they have a favorite book. Then they were required

to say the name of their favorite book, where only three students knew the name of their favorite book. Then the students were asked to say, if they knew, who wrote the book, and only one student was able to state the name and surname of the author of his favorite book. The key item was for the student to retell their favorite book, with three students succeeding in retelling the plot of the book. The analyzed answers that were obtained before the research show the not-so-positive reading habits of the younger students. Table 3 shows the students' answers after the research.

Table 3

Students' answers about their favorite book obtained after the conducted research

	Knows how the answer		Does not know how the answer	
I have a favorite book	8	100%	0	0%
Name of the book	8	100%	0	0%
Author of the book	5	62,5%	3	37,5%
Retelling the book	8	100%	0	0%

Looking at the findings from Table 3, we see a significant improvement when it comes to providing information about a favorite book. In support of these positive answers, we can mention the activities that involved borrowing a book from the school library. In this sense, we wanted to see if the students listed that particular book (the book they borrowed from the library and read during the activity) as their favorite. Two students listed the borrowed book as their favorite during the activity, while the others listed other titles. The data obtained after a series of implemented activities proved to be successful and expedient.

The question of what students read is very current among researchers who deal with this topic, and accordingly we wanted to examine what literature students borrowed from the school library.

Table 4

Students' answers about the type of borrowing books from the school library obtained before the research

	I only borrow reading materials from the school library	In the school library, I borrow reading materials and books that the teachers ask for	In the school library, in addition to books for school (reading books and others), I also borrow books for reading that are not related to school duties	I never borrow books from the school library
n	4	2	1	1
%	50%	25%	12,5%	12,5%

Students' responses before the research show that the largest number of students state that they only borrow reading materials and books that their teachers ask for from the school library. The largest number of students borrows only books that are needed for teaching.

Table 5

Students' answers about the type of borrowing books from the school library obtained after the conducted research

	I only borrow reading materials from the school library	In the school library, I borrow reading materials and books that the teachers ask for	In the school library, in addition to books for school (reading books and others), I also borrow books for reading that are not related to school duties	I never borrow books from the school library
n	0	1	7	0
%	0%	12,5%	87,5%	0%

After the conducted research, we observe, as in previous situations, very positive progress. Seven students in the school library, in addition to reading materials and other books needed for teaching activities, borrow books to read according to their interests. Interesting results show that in addition to borrowing books, students often attend workshops and activities organized by the school librarian. Therefore, in addition to the participation of students in the implemented activities, we believe that the participation of teachers and librarians, as well as parents, also led to positive outcomes. Evaluation and summarization of impressions is the last step of our research. Students, parents, teachers and the school librarian expressed their impressions about participating in this research.

Table 6

Students' impressions of participation in activities

	I felt great and happy during the activity	All activities were interesting and fun	I would like to participate in these activities again	I would rate all activities five (excellent)
n	8	8	8	8
%	100%	100%	100%	100%

The presented impressions of the students at the very end of the research show their satisfaction (table 6). Also, the general impression of parents is extremely positive. They expressed great satisfaction and happiness that they had the opportunity to participate in activities, be part of research and acquire knowledge and skills about encouraging reading habits in children. Some of the parents' responses are shown in Table 7.

Table 7
Parents' impressions of participation in activities

Impressions of parents about participation in research and conducted activities	„I myself did not believe that reading could be this exciting and interesting.“
	„ Both the child and I joined the city library.“
	„The evening at home is reserved for reading together. Everyone reads their own book and we enjoy the silence and the book.“
	„Dad didn't like to read, but now we all read together.“
	„We are delighted with the games in the school library. Now we are building our own little library at home.“
	„She enjoys decorating the lexicon. A lexicon of favorite books is filled in by each of our friends, neighbors and relatives when they come to our house. It's a great idea!“
	„I have to admit that I was skeptical at the beginning, but as the activities and days progressed I enjoyed it a lot and it all turned out to make sense.“

The enthusiasm and positive impressions of the students and parents were shared by the participating teachers and the school librarian. In Table 8 we presented their answers.

Table 8
Impressions of teachers and school librarians about participation in activities

Impressions of teachers and school librarians about participation in research and conducted activities	„With this gathering, we had more time to devote to the library and to involve the parents of our students through these workshops and activities. We talk to the children about how important it is to read, but the key thing of this gathering is the arrival of parents and their help in developing children's awareness of books.“
	„We are happy when we see our children come out of that wonderful room full of books and bring with them reading material to read. It brings a smile to my face every time we are asked when we will be doing reading activities again.“
	„It was a pleasure to be a part of this useful game, as I like to call it. Why is he playing? Because we all, regardless of age and position, played happily and most importantly played and participated in games that send a message about reading. We are always available for all such high-quality, cheerful and professional projects and activities.“
	„I grew up in a time when I read a lot and when books and newspapers were everywhere in the house. We were taught that a book is a treasure, that's why I decided on a vocation where I will share the company of books every day. I am happy about the commitment to this topic, which activated the children and involved the parents and brought joy and happiness to our library.“

The quoted and presented responses of all actors show an extremely high level of satisfaction with participation in the activities carried out, but also with the relevance of the topic covered by this research.

Conclusion

The modern school is an exceptional place for creating students' attitudes towards the values that books possess. It is necessary to approach it from the student's sphere of interest, his knowledge and desires, as well as a modern approach. Therefore, the creativity and originality of pedagogical workers requires a high degree when it comes to the development of reading habits among students. Due to the range of strengths that action research possesses, this article was aimed at encouraging students' reading habits and their visit to the school library by applying action research. Conducted research and monitoring of students' activities and engagement show a very positive progress of students towards reading activities. The students' desire to participate in all activities (games, workshops, etc.) show that promoting reading and visits to the school library among the youngest is possible and leads to positive outcomes, but it requires the commitment of adults (parents, teachers, etc., relevant persons). Very successful results of action research were achieved through the involvement of parents in building a love of reading in students (O'Connell, 2013), which was confirmed by the findings of our research on encouraging reading habits and visits to the school library.

The advantages of this research are reflected in the joint action and continuous cooperation of the family and the school in order to promote reading and visiting the school library. Parents came to school and actively participated in all thematic activities. Therefore, with this research, we managed to unite students, parents, teachers and the school librarian in order to popularize the book, visit the school library and create new patterns for spending leisure time. The implementation of the activities and the achievement of positive results were accompanied by certain difficulties in the organizational sense. It was not easy to fit in the presence of parents and the time for extracurricular activities of the students when the contents were taking place. In the entire work, it was possible to overcome this organizational obstacle, which meant a lot of work regarding agreements and implementation of activities. This is one of the reasons why the focus was placed on a smaller number of participants. Therefore, further research can include a larger number of students and parents, as well as people who will provide help with organization and agreement, which are an important postulate of the entire process. Weaknesses and/or risks are that the obtained effects and results may be short-lived, so it is necessary to continue with purposeful promotion of reading, visits and implementation of activities in the school library and the inclusion of all participants in extracurricular activities that clearly focus on raising awareness of the importance of reading, going to the library and the formation of positive reading habits, because in addition to all the privileges of the postmodern age, the book must not be a neglected and/or forgotten element in student life.

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AKCIONA ISTRAŽIVANJA U FUNKCIJI PODSTICANJA ČITALAČKIH NAVIKA KOD UČENIKA: ZAJEDNIČKE AKTIVNOSTI PORODICE I ŠKOLE

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Apstrakt: Uzimajući u obzir relevantnost akcionih istraživanja, kao i njihove pozitivne karakteristike i efekte do kojih mogu dovesti, cilj ovog rada usmeren je ka podsticanju i razvoju čitalačkih navika kod učenika i poseti školske biblioteke kroz primenu akcionih istraživanja. Motivisani primerima dobre prakse mnogih praktičara, kao i izuzetnom metodičkom kompetentnošću i željom školskih aktera (nastavnika i školskog bibliotekara) sa kojima smo sarađivali na ovom istraživanju, nastojali smo da saradnjom i jedinstvenim delovanjem učenika, nastavnika, roditelja i školskog

bibliotekara promovišemo čitalačke aktivnosti i posetu školskoj biblioteci kroz spektar kreativnih sadržaja. Nalazi sprovedenog akcionog istraživanja pokazuju niz ostvarenih rezultata u pozitivnom aspektu izgradnje čitalačkih navika kod učenika, odnosu prema čitanju i aktivnosti u smeru posete školske biblioteke. Mnogobrojna istraživanja i aktivnosti su usmereni ka promociji čitanja, pri čemu bi dalja istraživanja mogla više pažnje usmeriti ka aktivnom uključivanju roditelja u aktivnosti školske biblioteke, pružanju prilike i mogućnosti roditeljima da iznesu svoje ideje u ovoj sferi, stvaranju uslova za njihovu participaciju i primenom akcionih istraživanja razvijaju vrednosti i navike čitanja kod učenika.

Ključne reči: akciona istraživanja, saradnja, čitanje, porodica, škola

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