

WHERE THERE IS A WILL, THERE IS A WAY: THE SOCIAL TEACHING PRACTICES OF PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

The study aimed to examine the implementation of social teaching practices (STP) in primary schools in Serbia during the COVID-19 pandemic. We explored how the flexibility of STP relates to teachers' socioemotional competencies (SEC), general teaching difficulties during the pandemic, their satisfaction with the education system, and perception of professional future on a sample of 817 teachers. Research findings suggest that those teachers with higher SEC, less teaching difficulties, and those who are more satisfied with the education system and more optimistic about their professional future implement more STPs. Differences in STPs were also found regarding the teachers' gender, education cycle, and teaching modality. The study indicated that use of STPs by teachers in times of crisis can be empowered with diverse support opportunities through professional development.

Key words: socioemotional learning (SEL), social teaching practice, pandemic education, primary school.

ГДЕ ИМА ВОЉЕ, ИМА И НАЧИНА: СОЦИЈАЛНЕ НАСТАВНЕ ПРАКСЕ НАСТАВНИКА У ОСНОВНИМ ШКОЛАМА ТОКОМ ПАНДЕМИЈЕ КОВИД-19

Апстракт

Истраживање је усмерено ка процени могућности коришћења социјалних наставних пракси (СНП) у условима пандемијског образовања. На узорку од 817 наставника основних школа испитана је флексибилност социјалних наставних

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пракси у вези са социоемоционалним компетенцијама (СЕК) наставника, генералним тешкоћама извођења наставе током пандемије, задовољством наставника образовањем у време пандемије и перцепцијом будућности професије. Резултати истраживања упућују на то да социоемоционално компетентнији наставници, наставници задовољнији функционисањем образовног система у време пандемије, као и наставници оптимистичнији у вези са својом професионалном будућношћу примењују више СНП. Откривене су разлике у примени социјалних наставних пракси у односу на пол, образовни циклус и модалитет наставе. Резултати истраживања упућују на то да примена социјалних наставних пракси у кризним временима може бити унапређена различитим могућностима подршке у склопу професионалног развоја наставника.

Кључне речи: социоемоционално учење (СЕЛ), наставне праксе, пандемијско образовање, основне школе.

INTRODUCTION

The functioning of the education system during the COVID-19 pandemic brought a lot of changes to the primary teaching process. During the pandemic, teaching seems to have become a more difficult and complex profession than it had previously been. Face-to-face communication with students, which is so important for teachers' work, suddenly became risky for them. Research shows that teachers and school counsellors identify online communication with students to be a great difficulty, generally describing it as one-way, with inadequate, incomplete, or simply missing feedback (Aladrović Slovaček & Matković, 2020; Đerić, 2021). Moreover, communication with stakeholders is often one-way too, where are teachers most often not involved in the decision about the modalities of pandemic education. However, authors (Jones & Kessler, 2020; Sequeira & Dacey, 2020) find that teachers are often isolated from one another, and that school cultures often fail to provide counselling services to help them cope with the daily stressors associated with working in the educational system during the pandemic. The pandemic is, more than ever, challenging the capacities of teachers to be flexible, adapt and overcome obstacles in achieving educational goals with their students while maintaining positive relationships and influences.

Caring, emotionality, understanding of others, and the ability to build connections with students are all necessary attributes of the teachers' profession. Along with the COVID-19 crisis, the socioemotional capacities of teachers in primary education especially comes to focus. We are all witnesses of the caring behaviours of teachers who want their students to understand the content of their class, and feel good and safe at the same time. Miller (2021) notes that during pandemic education teachers practice authentic care and cultivated connectedness by acting as warm demanders, and responding to students' socioemotional needs during the online teaching process. Teachers' socioemotional learning (SEL)

skills are even more important for students who are often surrounded by other added stressors (beside the pandemic) that make it difficult for them to learn. Researchers report that, along with shifting education in a virtual context, the lack of access to educational space and family responsibilities often cause students with socioeconomic disadvantages to disengage (Sequeira & Dacey, 2020). In such cases, teachers become the main source of support. The current educational practice is full of examples of teachers supporting socioeconomically disadvantaged students (Khlaif et al., 2020). But experience from the pandemic shows that most educational institutions over-rely on the teachers' sense of care for their students to make up the difference for the lack of proper resources necessary to provide safe and effective education during the pandemic (Sequeira & Dacey, 2020). Overloading and over-relying on the teachers seem to be only a consequence of inadequate crisis management in education. Research results show that the ones that are expected to be in charge of teacher professional support (school counsellors) often report that their support of the online teaching processes is missing (Đerić, 2021). Research results indicate that placing additional demands on teachers has a negative impact on the personal and professional well-being of teachers worldwide (Allen et al., 2020; Alves et al., 2020).

Scientific evidence shows a decrease in primary school students' academic and socioemotional performance, along with absenteeism, as consequence of COVID-19 crisis (Santibañez & Guarino, 2021). One of the important protective processes which contributes to the overall well-being and thriving of students, and which can be used for the prevention of these problems during the pandemic is SEL. SEL is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel, and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning – CASEL, 2020). There is a growing interest in the adoption and implementation of the SEL framework in schools worldwide. It identifies five interrelated sets of cognitive, affective, and behavioural competencies – self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (CASEL, 2020). Teachers are generally aware of the importance of developing students' SEC through the learning process and report about applying socioemotional practice. But even teachers themselves tend to minimise the importance of personal teacher SEC (Rodriguez et al., 2020). To identify common teaching practices that promote the students' SEC, Yoder (2014a) reviewed existing literature that focused on the relationship between specific instructional practices, positive learning environments, and student SEC. Yoder (2014a) identified 10 teaching practices that promote social, emotional, and academic skills, which can further be divided into two types of teaching approaches: those

that focus on STP, and those that focus on instructional teaching practices. STP are student-centred discipline, teachers' language, responsibility and choice, and warmth and support. To be effective at student-centred discipline, teachers need to use disciplinary strategies that are developmentally appropriate for their students and that motivate students to want to behave in the classroom (Yoder, 2014a). As most parents worked from home during the pandemic, discipline in the online classroom was frequently controlled with their help. Teachers often briefed the parents before the lesson began, giving them suggestions how to prevent the misbehaviour of their children (Lathifah et al., 2020). Teacher language refers to how the teachers talk to students. Teachers should encourage student effort and work, restating what the student did and what that student needs to do to improve (Yoder, 2014a). During a pandemic, some aspects of non-verbal communication cannot be used (e.g., smiles, high-five), but there are still some that a pandemic cannot take away (e.g., comforting, supportive voice) (Jensen, 2021). Responsibility and choice refer to the degree to which teachers allow students to make responsible decisions about their work in their classroom, in a democratic manner (Yoder, 2014a). Teachers reported difficulties in the distance learning practice during the pandemic related to digital tools, social interaction and motivation, and students' and teachers' workload and compromised well-being (Lepp et al., 2021). Organised peer mentorship practices help students feel responsible in the classroom, building connections and relationship at school (Coyne-Foresi & Nowicki, 2020). Warmth and support refer to the academic and social support that students receive from their teacher and from their peers (Yoder, 2014a). During the pandemic, more self-regulation among teachers is required to distance themselves from job demands, as is communication with educational management, colleagues, students, and their families. Scientific evidence worldwide addresses primary school teacher burnout problems (Amri et al., 2020). Research results show that stress in the classroom is 'contagious'. For example, the levels of stress in teachers correlate with the levels of stress in students (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016). Studies indicate that self- and co-regulative strategies are related to a lower risk of teachers experiencing burnout (Pyhältö et al., 2020). Higher digital competencies in teachers are related to lower job stress levels as well (Košir et al., 2020).

In summary, few studies examine the extent to which primary school teachers implement STPs, especially in the educational context during the pandemic. The present study was designed with the aim to examine the implementation of STPs during the COVID-19 pandemic in primary schools in Serbia. Based on the model of the relationship between teachers' SEL skills and the SEL teaching practices (Yoder, 2014b), we expect that STPs are closely related to teacher SEC. Furthermore, we investigated the flexibility of STPs involving important factors of pandemic education such as satisfaction with the education system in Serbia, the

perception of professional future, and general teaching difficulties as a consequence of the COVID-19 crisis in Serbia. Also, differences in the implementation of STPs were examined in relation to the teachers' gender and age, years of service, education cycle, and teaching modality.

METHOD

Participants

The research sample consisted of 817 teachers (15.2% male) from public primary schools in Serbia, ages 23 through 64 ($M = 45.56$, $SD = 9.35$). When it comes to their years of working in education, the mean is 18.40 ($SD = 9.83$), with a range between 0 and 40. One third of the teachers (34.8%) teaches within the first education cycle (first to fourth grade), and two thirds (65.6%) teach the second cycle (fifth to eighth grade). When it comes to the modality of classes performed during the first semester of the 2020/2021 school year, 26.8% ($N = 219$) of teachers worked with students in person (out of which 81.6% are teachers of the first education cycle, and 18.6% are teachers of the second), 70.9% ($N = 579$) had the experience of working both in person and online (out of which 16.7% are teachers of the first cycle, and 83.3% of the second), and only 9 participants worked online throughout the whole semester.

Instruments

Social Teaching Practices. The assessment of STP was based on 23 items of the *Self-Assessing Social and Emotional Instruction and Competencies: A Tool for Teachers* (Yoder, 2014b), section "Social Teaching Practices" ($\alpha = .94$, in the present study). It consists of four five-point Likert scales that examine how often and how well teachers implement ST practices: *Student-centred Discipline* (eight items, $\alpha = .89$), *Teacher Language* (three items, $\alpha = .89$, inter-item correlations mean of .72), *Responsibility and Choice* (five items, $\alpha = .86$ and inter-item correlations mean of .56), and *Warmth and Support* (seven items, $\alpha = .86$).

Teachers' Social and Emotional Competencies. Teachers' SEC were evaluated using a scale from *Self-Assessing Social and Emotional Instruction and Competencies: A Tool for Teachers* (Yoder, 2014b), section "Teacher Social and Emotional Competencies" ($\alpha = .92$, in the present study). The instrument comprises 21 items, scored on a four-point Likert scale, that examine teacher's perception of their SEC: *Self-awareness* (five items, $\alpha = .77$, inter-item correlations mean of .40), *Self-management/Emotion Regulation* (four items, $\alpha = .71$, inter-item correlations mean of .40), *Social Awareness* (four items, $\alpha = .74$, inter-item correlations mean of .45), *Relationship/Social Skills* (four items, $\alpha = .83$, in-

ter-item correlations mean of .55), and *Responsible Decision Making* (four items, $\alpha = .81$, inter-item correlations mean of .52).

Satisfaction with the education system. Degree of satisfaction with the education system in the period of the pandemic was measured using the *Satisfaction Scale with the Education System* (SSES; Alves et al., 2021), which consists of seven items (five-point Likert scale) with good reliability in the present study ($\alpha = .80$). SSES explores the support teachers received during the crisis (from the Ministry of Education, school management and their colleagues) and the way classes are organised – whether teachers are satisfied with the amount of time they spend for their classes, the amount of administrative work, the scope of work and the level of student commitment.

Teaching difficulties. Teaching difficulties were assessed through the *Teaching Difficulties Scale*, a part of *Perception Scale of Well-Being within the Professional Situation in Times of Pandemic* (PSWbPSTP; Alves et al., 2021). It consists of three items answered on a five-point Likert scale, and has high reliability in the present study ($\alpha = .83$). This scale explores the difficulties teachers face in implementing distance learning, using digital platforms, and evaluating the teaching process.

Perception of professional future. The teachers' perception of their professional future was assessed with the *Professional Future Perspective Scale* (PFPS; Alves et al., 2021). It consists of a total of six items (five-point Likert scale) divided into two scales measuring positive perceptions (four items, $\alpha = .74$, inter-item correlations mean .43), and negative perceptions (two items, $\alpha = .74$, inter-item correlation .59). Positive perceptions examine the future perspective in relation to achievement, happiness, working conditions and prestige. Negative perceptions are related to the increase in work and bureaucracy.

Procedure

Data was collected on a voluntary basis through an online survey. Teachers were contacted through the e-mail addresses of schools, and they were sent an invitation letter with information about the study, and the link to the online questionnaire. No personal data was collected (not even e-mail addresses). Researcher's contacts were given alongside the invitation, so the participants had the chance to contact the research team for assistance or questions about the survey. No such requests were made. All public elementary schools in Serbia were contacted this way with the aim of soliciting their teachers' participation in the study. Data was collected in the period between February and April 2021. The average time needed to fill out the survey was 40 minutes.

Statistical Analyses

Data was collected through Google forms and stored in an online excel sheet, then imported to SPSS, version 20. Reliability assessment was conducted with Cronbach's alpha coefficient and inter-item correlation analysis. The relationships between research constructs were tested through the t-test for independent samples, calculations of effect size, two-way ANOVA, Pearson's correlation, and partial correlation.

RESULTS

The results show that the correlation between STPs and teachers' SEC is moderate positive. Thus, teachers with higher SEC implement more STPs. The connection is strongest in *Warmth and Support*, whereas Pearson's correlation coefficient reaches a values above .50 in *Social Awareness* and *Responsible Decision Making*. On the other hand, *Self-awareness* is the competence with the weakest (but still moderate) correlation with all STPs. *Teaching Difficulties* have a significant low negative correlation with all STPs. *Satisfaction with the Education System*, and *Positive Perception of Professional Future* have a significant low positive correlation with all examined practices. *Negative Perception* is the only scale with only one significant, but still low, correlation with one STP – *Responsibility and Choice*. These results suggest that those teachers who have less teaching difficulties, and who are more satisfied with the education system and more optimistic about their professional future implement more STPs. The results of the correlation analysis, done through Pearson's correlation coefficient, are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Correlations between STP, SEC, teaching difficulties, satisfaction with the education system, and perception of professional future

STP	SEC					TD	SES	Professional future	
	SEA	SM	SOA	RSS	RDM			PPF	NPF
SCD	.374***	.450***	.428***	.468***	.467***	-.230***	.258***	.251***	-.056
TL	.373***	.434***	.443***	.408***	.454***	-.146***	.163***	.181***	.008
RC	.367***	.435***	.431***	.458***	.465***	-.193***	.225***	.239***	-.072*
WS	.432***	.482***	.510***	.481***	.505***	-.165***	.165***	.176***	.004

Note. SCD = Student-centered Discipline; TL = Teacher Language;
 RC = Responsibility and Choice; WS = Warmth and Support; SEA = Self-awareness;
 SM = Self-management/Emotion Regulation; SOA = Social Awareness;
 RSS = Relationship/Social Skills; RDM = Responsible Decision Making;
 TD = Teaching Difficulties; SES = Satisfaction with the Education System;
 PPF = Positive Perception of Professional Future;
 NPF = Negative Perception of Professional Future.

* $p < .05$; *** $p < .001$.

Years of working in education, as well as age, do not show any significant connections with STPs. Gender differences are significant when it comes to *Teacher Language* ($t(799) = -2.89, p < .01$) and *Warmth and Support* ($t(785) = -1.96, p < .05$), where women reach slightly higher average scores. The effect size for gender influence is very small, with reaching eta squared of 0.01 in *Teacher Language* and 0.004 for *Warmth and Support*. Teachers of the first education cycle have significantly, but just slightly higher scores on all four scales of STP compared to teachers of the second cycle. Differences are strongest with *Warmth and Support* ($t(787) = 3.77, p < .001$, eta squared 0.03), followed by *Student-centered Discipline* ($t(778) = 4.52, p < .001$, eta squared 0.03), *Teacher Language* ($t(793) = 4.19, p < .001$, eta squared 0.02), and *Responsibility and Choice* ($t(787) = 3.77, p < .001$, eta squared 0.02).

Following the findings about the connection of the education cycle with STP, partial correlation analysis was conducted with controlling the *education cycle* variable. The results of partial correlation analysis confirm the achieved values of Pearson's coefficient. The values of the correlation coefficient drop slightly only when it comes to the correlation of the STP and *Satisfaction with the Education System*, and the margin is even lesser in the relationship of STP and SEC, but none of these differences in the correlation coefficient are statistically significant. Since there is a high percentage of teachers of the first education cycle that performed classes only in person, and a high percentage of teachers of the second cycle that performed classes both in person and online, two-way ANOVA was implemented to eliminate the possibility of interaction between these factors in relation to the STPs. The results of the analysis show that there is no significant interaction between these variables when it comes to all four teaching practices. In the analysis of the connections of modality of the classes teachers performed during the first semester of the 2020/2021 school year, the nine teachers who only performed classes online were excluded from the analysis due to small category size. Those teachers that performed their classes only in person achieved slightly, but significantly, higher scores on all STPs. These differences range from $t(788) = 2.10, p < .05$ (for Teacher language) to $t(773) = 2.67, p < .01$ (for *Warmth and Support*), with very small effect sizes (eta squared ranges from 0.005 to 0.009).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Our research findings confirm that, as expected, STPs significantly correlates with all aspects of the SEC framework, even in the pandemic context. In addition, the flexibility of STPs is related to general teaching difficulties teachers faced, their satisfaction with the education system, as well as their perception of their professional future. Differences in STPs

regarding teachers' gender, education cycle and teaching modalities were also found.

Firstly, our research results go in line with the above presented model of the relationship between teacher SEL skills and the SEL teaching practices (Yoder, 2014b), and with the sequences of the other models involving SEL, e.g., the proposed models of teacher SEC and classroom and student outcomes – the prosocial classroom model (Jennings & Greenberg, 2012), the model of socioemotional education implementation framework (Cefai et al., 2018), the model of systemic SEL in educational settings (Weissberg et al., 2015), etc. STPs facilitate the development of the students' socioemotional and academic skills. Teachers' SEC, including teachers' well-being, are considered to be the key factor of SEL. Developing proper teacher SEC assessment is necessary to understand influences on the quality of social teaching practices and the implementation of specific SEL-based programmes. Research results indicate that highly socioemotional competent teachers implement STP more successfully. As expected, STPs correlate significantly with all aspects of the SEC framework. For example, by practicing student-centred discipline, teachers show compliance with SEL and positive discipline (e.g., school-wide positive behavioural interventions and supports - SWPBIS), as complementary and compatible approaches (Gueldner et al., 2020). Through the development of consistent and logical rules and consequences, students begin to learn how to regulate their own behaviour and problem-solve difficult situations that arise in the classroom. Research evidence supports student-centred discipline tools integrated with online teaching too (Gulo, 2020; Cho et al., 2020). SEL competent teachers communicate with students with warmer and caring behaviour. Despite scientific papers about teachers who were 'acting like robots' during the pandemic, teaching based on students' experience can also be found (Literat, 2021), and most evidence shows that they promoted caring behaviour and compassion (Miller, 2021; Searles, 2020). With the pandemic in mind, it is important to know that, as is the case with students, teachers cannot develop their social and emotional skills in isolation. Research results show that adopting co-regulative strategies seems to be more helpful than self-regulated strategies in burnout prevention, and decreasing the risk of experiencing exhaustion and inadequacy during teacher-student interactions. Furthermore, strong self-regulation combined with low levels of co-regulation was related to an increased risk of experiencing cynicism (Pyhältö et al., 2020). Teachers can use check-in questions before starting virtual classes to connect with students too. Students can pick a particular emoji that represents their emotions and post it in a chat box, or students can simply draw a picture of an emoji face, or pick a GIF or a song instead of an emoji. A quick survey tool might be used to check their feelings. When it is necessary, teachers can meet with the student privately in a separate

online session, or connect students with the school counsellor (Kamei & Harriott, 2021). Teachers showed their flexibility in the practice of encouraging students to achieve their maximum academic and prosocial engagement. Researchers of the online teaching setting highly recommend video feedbacks that, contrary to textual feedback, communicates tone and voice, facial expressions, and body language, and represents a more personalised and supportive style of communication (Ryan, 2021). Research evidence shows that video feedback works the best for moderate-to-high achievers who perform poorly on an assessment task (Ryan, 2021). The online setting does not have to be an obstacle, for example, to creating age-appropriate class jobs and responsibilities for students during online lessons or on virtual learning platforms that enhance their sense of ownership and responsibilities. These jobs can be small tasks such as being a timekeeper or discussion facilitator (Kamei & Harriott, 2021).

Results show that female teachers implement more STPs related to warmth and support, and teacher language. This finding is in line with research that identifies warmth as a key factor for understanding gender bias in the caregiving profession (Halper et al., 2019). Another explanation might consider that females were found to be more resilient during the pandemic (Fernández-Prados et al., 2021). Teachers of the first cycle reported more STPs than the ones teaching within the second cycle. One explanation for this might be found in the prioritisation of the conventional aspects of teacher preparation (e.g., subject matter teaching) over SEC during the pre-service education of teachers of the second cycle (Pavin et al., 2005) Furthermore, higher grades need more SEL competent teachers, as students are expected to achieve a higher standard in current SEC (e.g., after the fourth grade, students have to use strategies to manage their own emotions and be self-reflective, and have to understand their impact on others and find community resources to help them self-manage by grade 12) (Yoder, 2014a).

The current study supports research results that state teachers who report greater educational management support are more SEL competent, and manage to implement STPs more successfully (Alves, Lopes, & Precioso, 2021). Researchers have already recognised the COVID-19 crisis as extreme situation of the VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) world (Hadar et al., 2020). Researchers and educators are working on adopting educational technology in circumstances of the VUCA world (Reeves, T.C. & Reeves, P.M., 2015). Nevertheless, regardless of the level of development, educational systems worldwide had difficulties in the teaching process during the pandemic (Aladrović, Slovaček & Matković, 2020; Bergdahl & Nouri, 2020; Đerić, 2021; Khlaif et al., 2020; Leep et al., 2021). Difficulties in the learning process can be classified as technical difficulties, difficulties related to communication and engagement with students and their parents, and difficulties regarding teachers' and

students' well-being (Leep et al., 2021). Research results indicate that teachers who suddenly have to manage problems related to digital teaching tools and the evaluation process find less room for the adoption of pedagogical teaching tools (Leep et al., 2021). This finding is in line with the consideration that, while problems in education in socioeconomically poor countries involve technical and pedagogical problems, richer countries focus on the improvement of the pedagogical aspects of teaching (Bergdahl & Nouri, 2020; Khlaif et al., 2020; Leep et al., 2021). In other words, education must first be available to all students, and only then should it offer socioemotional and other advantages. Conversely, it might be said that SEL competent teachers positively perceived actual external support because they needed it less, and were more optimistic about their professional future. Problems in the professional support of online teaching were especially recognised in city schools (Đerić, 2021). Almost a year later, it seems as though teachers showed great adaptability and flexibility in relation to their teaching practice during the pandemic, regardless of whether they received greater support in the meantime or relied on their own internal capacities to a greater extent. The more teachers were optimistic about their professional future (e.g., perceiving that it will be more valued), the more STPs were implemented. Future social recognition of the teaching profession might positively affect teacher's motivation and higher engagement. Research results suggests that teachers felt more valued during the pandemic than ever before, especially by students' parents (Asbury & Kim, 2020).

In general, the COVID-19 pandemic raised the need for teachers' flexibility and adaptability during current educational changes. Luckily, teachers' tendencies to care have not been lost during the transition from traditional education to education during and after the pandemic. Research findings implicate the importance of raising the teachers' ability to successfully implement SEL teaching practices and promote SEC in their classrooms. It would be significant for education in the post-pandemic era to introduce more opportunities for teachers to master STPs. European Union policy-makers suggest that teacher education programmes should include SEC frameworks, including the development of the teachers' own SEC (Cefai et al., 2018). Research results suggest the need to address SEC at the pre-service level, and possibly with a curriculum that develops throughout their years of training and across their curricula (Hadar et al., 2020). This approach acknowledges the importance of this domain being included throughout the professional development continuum. Authors note that professional development programmes in Serbia rarely include a socioemotional component (Tošić Radev & Pešikan, 2017). Nevertheless, research results indicate that primary school teachers in Serbia showed the capability to adopt socioemotional practices even in turbulent and complicated times of crisis. However, this does not mean that they do not need further support in personal socioemotional development and teach-

ing practices involving SEL. Based on the model of the relationship between teacher SEL skills and SEL teaching practices, authors bring an SEL coaching toolkit for coaches and administrators to support teachers in the development of social and emotional skills in their classrooms (Yoder & Gurke, 2017). Experiences in Indiana, North Carolina, Ohio, and Oregon, among other places, may serve as examples of good STPs during the pandemic (Yoder et al., 2020). The idea is that, at times of crisis like the one caused by the pandemic of COVID-19, building teachers' own competencies and related STPs is still equally or even more important for facilitating SEL. This implies incorporating practices such as mindfulness and stress management techniques, which have been shown to successfully contribute to the development of SEC in teachers (e.g., Matiz et al., 2020), as is the case with the general public (e.g., Kozina et al., 2021). Sporadic evidence about the implementation of RULER – an SEL evidence-based approach to social and emotional learning (SEL) developed at the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence – during the pandemic is given (Dutmer & Academies, 2020).

There are a few limitations to this study that should be noted. Research results might have been quite different if data was collected at the beginning of the pandemic in Serbia. It would be interesting for researchers to explore the process of the teachers' adaptation to the changes caused by the pandemic (or another future crisis related to changes), including the relevant psychological and social factors. It seems that teachers had time to adapt to and re-connect with academic and socioemotional educational goals. Another limitation refers to our choice of including only STP variables given by the model of the relationship between teacher SEC and the SEL teaching practices (Yoder, 2014b), even though we are deeply aware of the importance of instructional teaching practices for students' academic and socioemotional development as well. Since research results indicate that the connections with the explored factors were not strong, which means that there are also other possible relevant variables that correlate with teachers' STPs during the pandemic, future research should include a wider range of factors. In addition, it would be significant to explore the whole SEL framework during times of crisis, including the exploration of students' SEC, and parental support in the distance learning process. This could be valuable for a greater understanding of the process of socioemotional learning and its outcomes related to academic achievements, positive development, and students' well-being.

In conclusion, the present study confirms the importance of the relationship between STPs and teachers' SEC, and provides insights into some factors that contribute to the successful implementation of STPs in situations of continuous crisis. Our research findings can serve as a basis for planning professional development programmes which focus on enhancing the teachers' use of STPs, as well as for planning practical support activities for their work in times of crisis.

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ГДЕ ИМА ВОЉЕ, ИМА И НАЧИНА: СОЦИЈАЛНЕ НАСТАВНЕ ПРАКСЕ НАСТАВНИКА У ОСНОВНИМ ШКОЛАМА ТОКОМ ПАНДЕМИЈЕ КОВИД-19

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Резиме

Функционисање образовног система током пандемије вируса КОВИД-19 произвело је бројне изазове за наставнике у основним школама, захтевајући од њих да буду флексибилни, да се прилагоде и да превазиђу препреке у остваривању образовних циљева ученика. Социјално-емоционално учење један је од важних заштитних процеса, који може допринети општем благостању и напредовању ученика у условима пандемијског образовања. Оно се односи на процес путем којег деца и одрасли стичу и ефективно примењују знања, ставове и вештине потребне за разумевање и управљање емоцијама, постављање и постижање позитивних циљева, исказивање емпатије, успостављање и очување позитивних односа, и доношење одговорних одлука. Истраживање је усмерено ка процени могућности коришћења социјалних наставних пракси (СНП) које промовишу социјалне, емоционалне и образовне вештине ученика у условима пандемијског образовања. На узорку од 817 наставника основних школа испитана је флексибилност социјалних наставних пракси у вези са социоемоционалним компетенцијама (СЕК) наставника, генералним тешкоћама извођења наставе током пандемије, задовољством наставника образовањем у време пандемије и перцепцијом будућности професије. Резултати истраживања упућују на то да социоемоционално компетентнији наставници, наставници задовољнији функционисањем образовног система у време пандемије, као и наставници оптимистичнији у вези са својом професионалном будућношћу примењују више СНП. Откривене су разлике у примени социјалних наставних пракси у односу на пол, образовни циклус и модалитет наставе. Може се закључити да су наставници основних школа у Србији показали способност да усвоје социоемоционалне праксе чак и у турбулентном и компликованом друштвеном тренутку који је произвела пандемијска криза. Треба свакако истаћи да резултати истраживања упућују на то да примена социјалних наставних пракси у кризним временима може бити унапређена различитим могућностима подршке у склопу професионалног развоја наставника. Стога, налази реализоване студије могу послужити као основа за планирање програма стручног усавршавања са фокусом на унапређење употребе СНП од стране наставника, као и за планирање активности практичне подршке њиховом раду у сличним ванредним ситуацијама.