



Milja B. Vujačić¹

Rajka S. Đević

Institute for Educational Research, Belgrade, Republic of Serbia

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Establishing Friendly Relations with Primary School Peers²

Extended summary

Friendly relations with peers represent one of the most important contextual frameworks in which the socialization process takes place. Friendship refers to a close relationship between individuals which involves intimacy and mutual choice and tends to develop over time. Having close, friendly relationships with peers contributes to the overall development of students, has a favourable effect on their functioning in the school context and contributes to achieving better results in the learning process. In our country, there have been few studies focused on the investigation of friendly relations between peers in the school context and, in particular, establishing friendly relations between students with developmental difficulties and their peers in regular primary school classes has rarely been researched. Bearing in mind the importance of this topic, as well as the need to expand scientific knowledge about this phenomenon in our educational context, we carried out research that is a part of a wider study aimed at gaining an insight into the social acceptance of students who have developmental difficulties in the context of inclusive education. Using a part of the data from the sociometric questionnaire, in this research we focused on looking at friendly relations among peers in regular primary school classes. Our goal was to get an insight into the quantity of friendships made between students in regular primary school classes and to determine to what extent the developmental specificities of students (students with developmental difficulties/students without developmental dif-

1 vujacicmilja@gmail.com

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difficulties), gender, age, general school achievement, and the level of the mother's and father's education predict making friendships with peers. The research was carried out during March, April and May of the 2018/2019 school year. in eight primary schools on the territory of the city of Belgrade. A total of 120 students (28 girls and 92 boys) from 36 fourth- and eighth-grade classes participated in the research. A half of the total sample consisted of students with developmental difficulties, and the other half consisted of students without developmental difficulties. Students of different ages (fourth and eighth grade) were included. The sociometric technique of peer nominations was applied, in which the mutual nomination of two students in the question *Name up to three students from the class with whom you would like to be friends* is an indicator of the established friendly relationship. In data processing, in addition to descriptive statistics, a regression model belonging to generalized linear models (Poisson regression) was applied. The results indicate that the number of friendships made by students increases with age, better school performance, and a higher level of parents' education, and that students who do not have developmental disabilities make a greater number of friendships with their peers, compared to students with developmental difficulties. The findings of the regression model confirm that the age and developmental specifics of students statistically significantly predict friendly relations with peers, while this was not confirmed for gender, school performance, and the level of education of the mother and father. Students without developmental disabilities are more likely to form friendships compared to their peers with developmental difficulties. Also, the eighth-graders are more likely to achieve mutual peer selection than the fourth-graders. The main conclusion of our research is that developmental specifics and the age of students are significant predictors of forming friendly relations with peers in the class. Key pedagogical implications refer to the design of various activities within the school that would be aimed at creating a stimulating environment for establishing positive interactions among students, but also those that would contribute to the development of students' social skills necessary for establishing and maintaining positive, friendly relationships with peers. In the following research, it would be useful to focus on examining the quality of friendships made among peers in regular primary school classes, and especially the friendly relationships that students with developmental difficulties have with their peers. Combining quantitative and qualitative research methods, as well as the inclusion of other important actors, such as parents and teachers, would enable a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon.

Keywords: friendly relations, pupils, primary school classes, socio-metric questionnaire, regression model

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