



**Goran D. Pljakić<sup>1</sup>**

Academy of Educational and Medical Vocational Studies,  
Kruševac, Serbia

**Aleksandar S. Tadić**

University of Belgrade, Faculty of Philosophy,  
Department of Pedagogy and Andragogy, Belgrade, Serbia

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## ***School Age as a Predictor of the Quality of Group Decision-Making of Students - the Perspective of Teachers***

### **Extended summary**

The concept of an educational institution as a school of life, a laboratory, and a community of thinkers and researchers, has been developed within the framework of the progressive pedagogical orientation. Learning is viewed as a process enabled and encouraged by students' engagement in individual and group projects, research, and problem solving. The concept of the progressive school is based on students' active participation at all levels of teaching process and on interactive learning. It affirms interactive teaching and learning methods in the classroom, teacher-student dialogue, as well as the dialogue among students. A lot of attention is paid to developing cooperative relationships in the classroom in the phase of preparation and conceptualization of teaching situations that will encourage students' active participation. The forms of organization supporting social interaction are favored in the pedagogical and didactical models of work of educational institutions of progressive orientation. Interaction between students during work in small groups is viewed as a significant factor in enabling them for a quality decision-making in the process of interactive work.

The above stated concepts have created a significant research problem in terms of students' decision-making in the classroom, especially during work in small groups, which is one of the less researched areas. In this paper, decision-making during the work of students in small groups is related to a situation in which two or more people agree on discovering the problem,

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<sup>1</sup> [goran.p@vaspks.edu.rs](mailto:goran.p@vaspks.edu.rs)

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determining the nature of the problem, generating possible solutions, evaluating potential solutions, or formulating a strategy for implementing solutions. Numerous studies conducted around the world have shown that the interaction between students in classes organized according to the model of cooperative learning achieves various positive effects, among which those in the domain of creative problem solving, critical thinking and better reasoning can be singled out. There is still no research dealing with the issue of the relationship between school age and the quality of students' decision-making during work in small groups.

The aim of the paper was to investigate whether, from teachers' perspective, the age of students is a significant predictor of the quality of decision - making during work in small groups. The attitudes of 162 teachers towards the quality of decisions that students make while working in small groups were examined by using the KDO-MG scale (Pljakić, 2013). The respondents expressed their level of agreement/disagreement with the statements in line with the instructions and on the five-level scale which consisted of 20 items. The paper investigated the justification for encompassing all the items under the unique component of the KDO-MG scale, namely, whether the items of this instrument can be classified using factorization under one component which would therefore explain the quality of students' decision-making while working in small groups. The research confirmed that the results, apart from a partial interpretation within certain factors, can also be interpreted using a single-factor solution. The assumption that there is a tendency for the quality of decision-making to increase with the progression of students' age was verified by using a single linear regression analysis.

The results confirmed that, according to teachers, the age of students can be considered a predictor of the quality of decision-making during work in small groups. The teachers identify in their students the indicators pointing to the fact that students' age produces a relatively weak, positive, but stable effect on the quality of decision-making during work in small groups. This result is important, given that there is a general belief among the theoreticians that teaching based on interactive forms of learning yields positive effects in all age groups. The results of the conducted research are compatible with this statement, but one should bear in mind that they can influence its more precise formulation. According to the teachers, there is an indisputable positive effect of the work of students in small groups in the field of better decision-making in the teaching process. However, we should keep in mind that this effect is slightly determined by students' age, so that as the age of students increases, so does the quality of decision-making during their work in small groups. The fact that there is a linear tendency to increase the quality of group decision-making in relation to students' age indicates a potential positive effect of the process of maturing and social interaction on the development of the social competencies of students and their skills for a good quality decision-making. The results of the research are especially significant because they open many questions for future research. It is especially important to examine how much the maturity process contributes to the development of the social competencies necessary for a successful group decision-making.

As the success in this area depends on the professional application of students' work in small groups, the paper emphasizes the need to include in the professional development of teachers the contents and activities related to creating the conditions necessary for a successful organization of this form of work. A continuous application of these organizational solu-

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tions in teaching practice would contribute to the development of students' ability to successfully make group decisions.

**Keywords:** social interaction, small groups, quality of decision making, school age of students

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