



Slavoljub S. Jovanović¹, Ljiljana S. Živković
University of Belgrade, Faculty of Geography

Original paper

Tendencies in the Development of the Pro-Environmental Behavior of Students²

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Extended summary

The tendencies regarding the pro-environmental behaviour of the primary and high school students are the topic of this paper. The aim of the paper is to identify the level of the pro-environmental behaviour of students, and to determine whether there are differences in this respect among the students at different levels of education as well as of different sex. Pro-environmental behaviour was included in the research because forming students' pro-environmental habits is the ultimate goal of environmental education and the young are the key agents of the future social changes with regard to the protection of the environment. Individuals can be stimulated efficiently to act pro-environmentally, if specific social and psychological factors are fully understood: habits and pro-environmental intentions, personal capacities, value, responsibility, and contextual conditions. The five-level Likert scale was applied in the survey of 252 students of Belgrade primary and secondary schools. An adequate sample was formed, given the fact that the research could be conducted only with the prior consent of the schools, which many schools had refused to give. The survey was the technique used for data collection. After the preliminary questioning, a final, 13-item scale of pro-environmental behaviour was constructed. The discriminative features and reliability of the scale were proved by applying the statistical method. According to the results of the research, students do not behave adequately towards the environment in some situations (treatment of waste, rational use of water and energy at home, pro-environmental consumption). The poorly developed habit of consuming ecologically standardised products can be explained by the fact that such products are still not offered in satisfactory amounts on our market and they are expensive. In addition,

1 sjovanovic@gef.bg.ac.rs

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many students are not fully aware of the importance, both in terms of personal benefit and environmentally, of buying ecological products. The reason for insufficient saving of water and energy in households may lie in the lack of awareness about the purpose of the rational use of these resources in everyday life, and about the negative effects of such behaviour on the environment. To make the students begin to save water and energy at home, they should be offered concrete proof that, in the time of general environmental crisis, their actions and attitudes will help alleviate the existing problems and prevent the new ones. Our assumption is that, due to the relative lack of motivating conditions in the environment in Serbia (a small number of containers for waste sorting in the streets and schools; insufficient influence of formal and informal education; inadequate penalising and the lack of economic incentives), the majority of the respondents still do not realise the importance of waste sorting, and do not feel a moral obligation to do that in their everyday life. The results of the survey also show that there are no statistically significant differences among the students at different levels of education and of different sex regarding the pro-environmental behaviour. In some other studies, the sex of students was also not a variable directly influencing pro-environmental behaviour. The result referring to the level of education can be explained by the fact that modern curricula of the school subjects dealing with the protection of the environment (geography, biology, chemistry, physics) are primarily oriented, in terms of their content and objectives, towards the development of environmental knowledge, and much less towards the development of ethical, affective and behavioural components of students' personality. As such concept of teaching is prevalent in both primary and secondary education, pro-environmental habits cannot be developed in students at higher levels of education. In this concept of environmental education, and at higher levels of education, the knowledge about environmental issues can potentially be developed and improved. However, the current and previous research studies indicate that the knowledge about environmental issues does not have a statistically significant direct influence on developing pro-environmental behaviour. The findings of this research may serve as guidelines for improving our formal education in terms of development of environmental awareness and pro-environmental habits among the young people in Serbia.

Key words: environmental awareness, pro-environmental behaviour, environmental education.

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