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## KNOWLEDGE OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS THROUGH THE EYES OF STUDENT TEACHERS

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***Abstract:** From kindergarten to high school graduation, children study topics related to knowledge of children's rights as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. To a large extent, knowledge about rights is accumulated at every stage of the school period, and its provision is woven into various academic disciplines. Teachers inform about children's rights, as they are obliged by Ordinance No. 13 of 21.09.2016 on civic, health, environmental and intercultural education to form consciousness and virtues in children; to create individuals who understand and uphold common human values.*

*This report presents the results of a survey conducted among 2nd-year students, majoring in Social Pedagogy, Elementary School Pedagogy with a Foreign Language, and Preschool and Elementary School Pedagogy about the motivation for studying the subject Rights of the Child, part of the curriculum for the OKS Bachelor and the need to knowledge of children's rights. Questions related to knowledge received in secondary education, as well as ways of providing it, are discussed.*

***Keywords:** children, child rights, issues, convention.*

### INTRODUCTION

The challenges facing individuals, groups and communities globally and in Europe in particular put human rights to the test. It is noteworthy that human rights, and more specifically children's rights, are violated, given challenges in politics, economy, education, culture, etc. People are subjected to a physical and psycho-emotional test, and this is the reason why young people look to the future with fear and mistrust.

The search for a sustainable life and a better way of living goes through respecting, protecting and appreciating one's own rights and the rights of those standing next to us and around (near) us. When we talk about children, the situation is much more complicated. The reason lies in the fact that family, adults, teachers and community are the ones who introduce the child into society. Most often these are rules, regulations and laws that we are obliged to follow. And is it so and what is the child witnessing!

School and kindergarten are the first public institutions where the child hears and learns about his rights and obligations. In the educational environment created by adults, the child perceives, educates and realizes his commitments and rights, and is in a continuous dilemma of "this can-this cannot".

In this article, we look at students' knowledge of children's rights. The purpose of the research is to establish the knowledge of second-year students related to children's rights, by asking their opinion about the need for knowledge of children related to their rights, as well as the approaches used and specialists needed to explain them.

### EXPOSITION

#### **Knowledge of children's rights**

Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to education and that "Education shall be aimed at the integral development of the human personality and the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It promotes understanding, tolerance and friendship between peoples, racial or religious groups, contributing to the implementation of the United Nations' peacekeeping activities" (Universal

Declaration of Human Rights). Furthermore, Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that "School discipline shall be administered in a manner which respects the dignity of the child. Education must be aimed at the development of children's personality, talents and abilities, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, responsible life in a free society, understanding, tolerance and equality, the development of respect for the natural environment" (Convention on the Rights of the Child) .

According to the Ombudsman, all adults are responsible and need to provide solutions to children's problems, as well as the protection of their rights. "A society's attitude towards children is indicative of its attitude towards the future. The public environment that we want to build for our children must be based on respect, dignity and respect for the difference of each child". of every child of a family and of family support... Also, the national defender believes that it is important for every child to know his rights. "Children's rights are basic human rights, and they have additional protection and care that you need in order to fully grow up and assume your responsibility in society. No matter where you live, what language you speak, what your parents are like, what they do, what their religion is, whether you are a boy or a girl, whether you have special needs or belong to a minority group, you have the same rights as all children and you should not has a different attitude towards you. No one has the right to violate or infringe your rights, and you must learn to respect the rights of others. By studying and understanding your rights, you will acquire the skills and abilities to defend them in a democratic and fair way. This gives you opportunities to develop an attitude towards equality between children, human dignity and tolerance" (Ombudsman of the Republic of Bulgaria. 2017)

Empowerment of children consists in providing greater confidence by increasing their capacities in order to improve their social status, economic, psycho-emotional and moral potential. One source of empowerment is knowledge of the rights described in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is a long and drawn-out process, but understanding and being aware of rights provides self-confidence and security in decision-making, problem-solving, readiness for change and ensuring a better life.

### **Knowledge of children's rights through the discipline of children's rights**

In 2017/18, over 30 students from the "Young Teacher/Social Pedagogy" club worked on the project "Together for the Rights of the Child" together with specialists from the New Bulgarian University and Ruse University.

As a result of the project, a program was created to familiarize children with the rights of the child, which was presented to students in elementary school. The same program became the basis for preparing a curriculum for the "Child's Rights" discipline for OKS Bachelor students, special social pedagogy, primary school pedagogy with a foreign language and preschool and primary school pedagogy.

The proposed topics in the "Child's Rights" discipline are intended to provide didactic conditions for future pedagogues and social pedagogues to understand the nature and specificity of work in the discipline, but also to obtain basic training for organizing a development (program or project) . A special emphasis is on the use of interactive tools and approaches with a view to improving the quality of training on children's rights, increasing motivation for active thinking, as well as developing their creative abilities (Zhelyazkov, D., 2019; Zhelyazkov, D., 2022) and skills for searching and finding non-standard solutions.

For students, future specialists in the pedagogical and socio-pedagogical sphere, it is aimed as a necessity to realize the possibility of the child being educated in rights under the pedagogical guidance of qualified specialists, since their practice is directly related to "Preparing them for a dignified life in a free society, in a spirit of understanding, peace and tolerance." This preparation is indicated as an obligation of education (Article 29, Paragraph 1 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child). We should not forget that training requires professional competence (Radoslavova, L., 2019), involvement in various activities to increase the effectiveness of memorization (Vasileva, V., 2017), respect for rights and dignity; non-discrimination for all

target groups (including adults) (Ilieva, B., D. Spasova, 2020) and flexibility on the part of educators and trainers.

### Methodology and results

At the beginning of the academic year 2022, a survey was conducted among 2nd-year students of Rousseau University "Angel Kanchev" studying the discipline "Children's Rights". Full-time and part-time students from the following majors: Social pedagogy, Primary school pedagogy with a foreign language and Preschool and primary school pedagogy participated in the survey. A specially designed survey was used, in the first part of which information was sought about the knowledge of the students related to children's rights, and in the second part - their opinion on the used approaches and specialists needed to explain them.

At the very beginning, the students were asked about the degree of knowledge of the rights from the material studied at school.

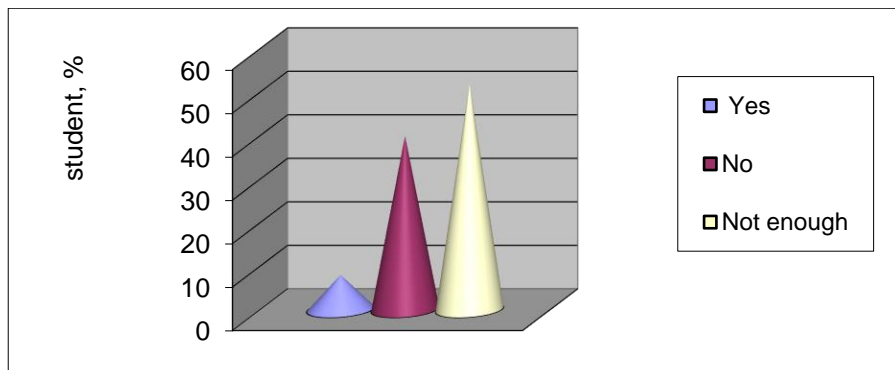


Fig.1. Knowledge of children's rights from the material studied at school

The obtained results are surprising, as a greater part of the students believe that they do not know their rights as children, which can be traced in the graph in Fig. 1. The general answers "No" and "Not enough" represent 90% of the students' answers, and only 10% give a positive answer.

The results of another question asked to the students related to an opportunity to explain to the students the rights recorded in the Constitution for the rights of the child fully correspond with the answers given from the first question. A difficulty for the students was the free-response question, where they were required to indicate a total of 3 specific rights in the survey. The following rights were recorded: Right to vote, right to free vote, right to choose, right to opinion and right to education.

As is known, the first three cannot be counted among the recorded rights regulated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Only 2 students (out of 5 who answered the question) answered correctly, indicating one right instead of the required three.

To the question: Is it necessary to spend time in school to explain the rights? 48% answered "Yes", 52% said "Soon Yes".

A positive answer prevails, that children find it difficult to understand their rights. 73% of the respondents answered with "Yes" and 20% with "Rather Yes", that is, almost all students are of the opinion that children find it difficult to understand their rights.

The second part of the questions in the survey is about how best to inform the children and more specifically what preparation and training materials are needed. A question was asked to the students, which is related to the studied compulsory material, related to topics related to the rights of the child. A part of them are taught in class time, and the other topics related to children's rights can be found in the classes on Environment, Man and Nature, etc. compulsory disciplines. An affirmative answer, representing 86% of students, is of the opinion that rights topics should be an element of compulsory subjects. Even more interesting is the answer using specialized literature for teacher training. More than 90% are of the opinion that there is a lack of aids and

specialized literature, such as supporting materials, and this makes it difficult for teachers to use appropriate interactive methods for their presentation.

Another interesting question for the second part of the survey is related to the person who should teach the rights of the child. To the question: Who needs to teach the material related to children's rights? 61% of students were of the opinion that this should be a trained specialist, compared to 38% of the opinion that it should be the teacher.

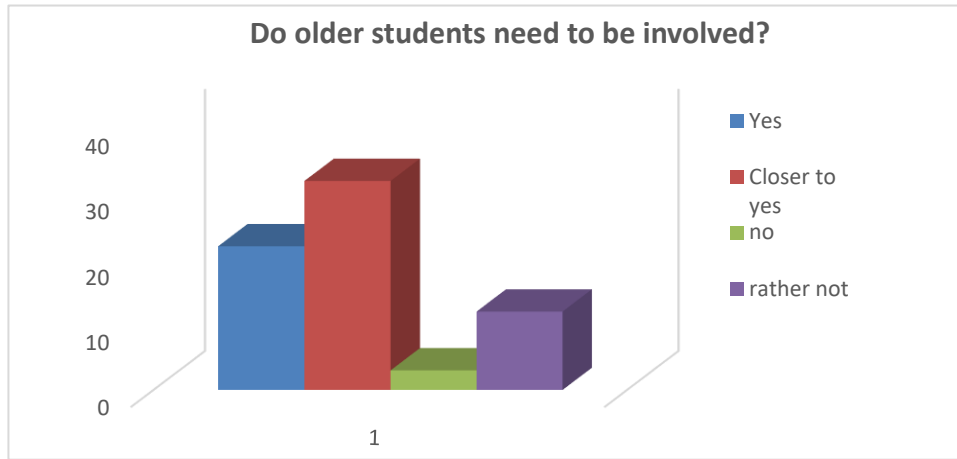


Fig. 2

Students were asked questions about the participation of older students in teaching topics related to children's rights, as well as the participation of students themselves. Here are the answers to Fig. 2 and Fig. 3.

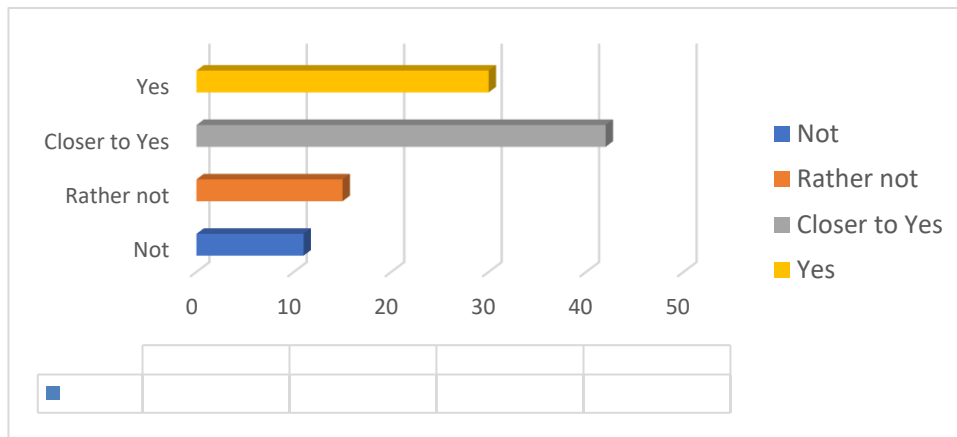


Fig. 3. Is it necessary to include older students?

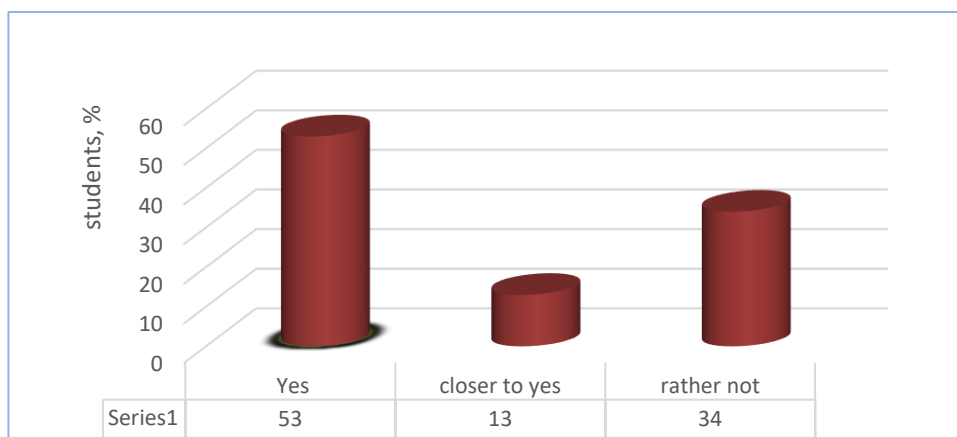


Fig.4. Is it necessary to include classmates in the topics of children's rights?

A final question to the second part of the survey is related to whether knowledge of children's rights will influence children's behavior and make them better?

78% of the students are categorical and give a positive answer (Yes-67%, Rather Yes-11), the skeptics are 22% with an opinion.

Knowledge and education in children's rights among children and young people is a long and continuous stage. It takes effort from the family, the school and the community to make it happen. The three institutions play an important role in the upbringing of the child, in the formation of values, in compliance with the laws and norms of the country, and "cannot fail to manifest themselves and color the school life in all its segments and forms, as well as the opposite - the constructed at school cannot but flow into society and the nation and influence them" (Dimitrov, 2010).

The three institutions are those that create situations and activities aimed at children, subject to principles, including respect for the individual (Tselova, A, 2019), friendliness, understanding towards all peoples, racial and religious groups, stimulation of internal and external resources for overcoming difficulties (Staneva, Ya, 2017).

Great emphasis is placed on the training of the teaching staff, on their ability to use appropriate interactive role-playing methods and approaches. Creating such situations for students from elementary school age to high school graduation will create an opportunity for dialogue-oriented learning and partnerships aimed at enriching personal experiences and effective child-child and child-teacher interactions.

Let's not forget that the teacher is the one who contributes to increasing children's knowledge, conveys basic general cultural values, looks for ways and approaches for each student to find his own space in the multicultural society (Totseva, Ya., 2009).

Child rights education is not the responsibility of educational institutions, youth organizations or the NGO sector alone. It is the state's commitment to acquaint children with their rights. It is her duty to determine the way and the approach, to organize the whole process, using formal or informal education on children's rights, since human rights are not only protected by normative documents. Knowledge WITH, FOR and THROUGH human rights is needed to ensure that they are understood, protected and supported by all.

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