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## **PUPILS' PERCEPTION OF THE EDUCATIONAL ROLE OF EXCURSIONS IN GEOGRAPHY TEACHING<sup>3</sup>**

**Abstract:** Obviousness in geography teaching is of great importance for the development of geographical thinking and reasoning. Excursions provide a good opportunity to apply the principle of obviousness by enabling experiential learning, development of critical thinking, social skills, personality, motivation, more engagement and better performance. The purpose of the study is to investigate whether pupils recognize the educational role of excursions. The results were obtained through statistical data analysis collected using a survey technique among pupils in the SPSS 26.0 program. A suitable sample consists of fifth to eighth grade pupils from a school in Niš and an elementary school in a rural settlement near Niš. Pupils perceive the educational role of excursions, but the full benefit that excursions can provide as a type of educational activity has not been realized due to the way they are conducted.

**Keywords:** School excursions, geography teaching, experiential learning, holistic development of pupils, learning outcomes

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## INTRODUCTION

Education as a process of learning and discovery should not be limited to schools and textbooks. In formal education, we can distinguish three types of learning environments: (a) the classroom, where the primary source of knowledge is the teacher; (b) the laboratory, where pupils can practice, research, and experiment with objects, materials, and ideas individually or in groups; and (c) outdoor learning environments, where pupils participate in identifying and solving real-world problems (Mandal, 2022).

The subject of geography, both as a science and as a school subject, is geographical space, whether it is all or part of the earth's surface. In order to understand geographical content, it is particularly important that pupils interact with the objects and phenomena they study and draw conclusions based on personal experience. Studying geographical phenomena, processes and objects, observing cause-effect relationships in specific natural and social conditions, promoting interest in the environment and ecological habits, getting to know the way of life and work of people from different regions, developing a positive attitude towards national, cultural and esthetic values and understanding the importance of health and healthy lifestyle are educational goals of geography that can be realized through excursions (Dragović, 2017; Ristanović, Milošević, Popović, Vesović, 2024).

Various definitions of excursions can be found in the didactic and methodological literature, but there is a general consensus that it is a unique form of educational activity or a way of teaching outside school. According to the Regulation on the Organization and Implementation of Outdoor Education and Excursions in Primary School ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 30/2019), an excursion is a form of educational activity that takes place outside of school. School excursions should contribute to the full realization of educational goals, greater integration of educational content, the connection of theoretical knowledge with life, the development of pupils' independence and mutual cooperation, as well as the promotion of interest in knowledge and intrinsic motivation that drives the pursuit of new knowledge (Myers, Jones, 2004; Živković, 2015).

Excursions should be carried out in several phases: preparation, implementation and visit with excursion work and summarizing or follow-up of the excursion. During these three phases, various forms of work and correlations of teaching methods are used, such as oral or written presentations in the form of announcements, explanations, reports, dialogs, demonstrations and work with geographical maps, etc. (Živković, Jovanović, Rudić, 2015).

The object of the research is to investigate pupils' attitudes towards the educational role of excursions in geography teaching. The research objective is to determine whether pupils recognize excursions as a specific type of educational activity aimed at improving their knowledge and skills. Specific research goals include determining whether excursions have an impact on the effectiveness of geography teaching, the development of pupils' personality and social skills, and whether excursions have an educational role for pupils.

In accordance with the defined topic and research goals, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H: Pupils recognize the educational role of excursions in geography teaching;

H<sub>1</sub>: Participating in excursions contributes to effective learning in geography;

H<sub>2</sub>: Pupils develop social skills during excursions;

H<sub>3</sub>: Excursions contribute to the development of pupils' personalities;

H<sub>4</sub>: Excursions have an educational role for pupils.

The independent demographic variables were used to investigate whether there are differences in attitudes towards excursions based on gender, grade level and the type of settlement in which the school is located:

H<sub>5</sub>: There is no difference in pupils' attitudes towards excursions between boys and girls;

H<sub>6</sub>: There is no difference in pupils' attitudes towards excursions between fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth grade pupils;

H<sub>7</sub>: There is no difference in pupils' attitudes towards excursions between pupils attending an urban school and those attending a rural school.

## METHOD

The study included 97 girls and 91 boys. The total sample consists of 188 pupils. Of these, 103 attended an elementary school in an urban area and 85 attended a rural school. One fifth to eighth grade class from each urban school took part in the study, while all fifth to eighth grade pupils in the rural school took part in the study.

A questionnaire survey was carried out to investigate the pupils' attitudes towards excursions. The questionnaire was adapted from previous studies on similar topics (Campbell & Gedat, 2021; Mandal, 2022; Rugaiyah, 2018; Rugaiyah, 2019; Shakil, Faizi, Hafeez, 2011) and modified for the age group of participating pupils by reducing the number of scale items and tailoring it to the research object when translating it into Serbian.

The first part of the questionnaire consists of demographic variables such as gender, grade and the type of settlement in which the school is located. The second part of the questionnaire comprises 11 statements. Pupils' attitudes towards excursions were measured using a five-point Likert scale. For each statement, the pupils indicated their level of agreement on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire only contains positively worded statements, so that reverse scoring was not necessary for statistical data processing.

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the study results. Data processing and analysis were carried out using SPSS 26.0.

After evaluating the pupils' responses, the total points for each pupil were summed and divided by the number of statements to obtain an average score, which simplifies the results analysis and indicates the pupils' attitudes towards excursions. Higher scores indicated a more positive attitude, while

lower scores indicated a more negative attitude. These scores were used to examine the differences between specific groups of pupils categorised by gender, grade level, and type of settlement in which their school is located, as well as to examine the correlation between two variables.

To determine whether there were statistically significant differences in attitudes between specific groups, the t-test and Kruskal-Wallis test (a non-parametric replacement for the Univariate One-Way Analysis of Variance or ANOVA) were used. The relationship between the independent and dependent variables was tested using the Point-biserial correlation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the measurement scale is 0.76, which confirms its reliability. Ideally, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient should be greater than 0.70 (DeVellis, 2003). In this case, the relatively low Cronbach's alpha value may be influenced by the small number of items on the measurement scale.

In the studies from which it was derived, the scale for measuring pupils' attitudes towards excursions was divided into four subscales using factor analysis. The first four statements belong to the subscale that examines the impact of excursions on effective learning in geography. The fifth, sixth and seventh statements belong to the subscale that examines whether pupils develop social skills during excursions. The eighth and ninth statements belong to the subscale that aims to assess whether excursions have an impact on pupils' personal development, while the tenth and eleventh statements belong to the subscale that assesses whether pupils recognize the educational role of excursions (Table 1).

The subscale that examines the extent to which excursions contribute to effective learning in geography has an average attitude score of 3.23 (Figure 1). The first two items of the questionnaire, relating to connecting classroom content to the places pupils visit on excursions and acquiring practical knowledge and skills, have the same mean response value of 3.48 (Table 1). Excursions should provide pupils with experiences that help them connect the theoretical content they learn in class to real life. Learning through sensemaking in the classroom represents a working method known as observational learning (Dragović, 2017). In their research, Nabors et al. claim that pupils improve their observation and perception skills during excursions. For the observation method to be successful, i.e. to lead to the acquisition of long-term knowledge, pupils need to know what to observe, how to observe it and to what end. Observation is only a teaching method if it involves the mental activity of the pupils. Passive observation of natural or anthropogenic objects does not deepen existing knowledge about them (Romelić & Ivanović Bibić, 2015).

Behrendt and Franklin states in their research that pupils who participate in activities during fieldwork have a more positive attitude towards the subject studied in the field. A positive attitude towards a subject also affects pupils' interest in learning the content. (Behrendt & Franklin, 2014). The low mean response value for the statement examining whether interest in learning geography increases during excursions,  $x = 2.54$ , could be due to the passive role that pupils play during excursions (Table 1). According to Anđelković, pupils on excursions are expected to listen, observe, take notes and

follow the guides rather than engage in investigative activities (Anđelković, 2012). Empirical research has shown that adults remember most of the knowledge and skills they acquire on excursions through active participation (Pece & Tesi, 2004).

The mean response value for the statement examining whether pupils can express their individuality is  $x = 3.41$  (Table 1). According to Aggarwal pupils may feel constrained by various rules or limited class time when learning in the classroom, which may result in many of their abilities remaining hidden (Aggarwal, 2009). Investigative activities in excursions allow pupils to express their abilities, learn at their own pace and in their own way, build self-confidence and show emotions, which also plays an important role in acquiring new knowledge or skills. Pupils should have a degree of autonomy in determining the goals and activities they want to achieve on excursions, as this can have a positive impact on their motivation (Đorđević, Živković, Jovanović, 2023).

On the basis of these results, we can accept the first hypothesis ( $H_1$ ). However, it should be emphasized that the excursions must be organized in a way and with objectives defined in the regulations for the organization of excursions and in the methodological literature. The organization of activities before, during and after the excursion could help to develop a more positive attitude of pupils towards the usefulness of excursions for achieving better learning outcomes. It is important to create tasks that allow pupils to develop their skills and express their individuality through solving these tasks and to realize the purpose of acquiring certain theoretical and practical knowledge, which would also increase their motivation to learn.

Based on the mean score of the subscale that examines whether pupils develop their social skills during excursions,  $x = 3.70$ , we can accept the second hypothesis ( $H_2$ ) (Figure 1). The highest mean score is for the statement that examines whether pupils collaborate more with peers on excursions than in the classroom,  $x = 4.26$  (Table 1). During excursions, pupils are always physically together, so more interaction between them is to be expected. The mean score for the statement assessing pupils' attitudes towards whether excursions boost their confidence is 3.23 (Table 1). Rugaiyah states in his research that excursions create a relaxed atmosphere that encourages pupils to express their opinions and ideas more openly and clearly (Rugaiyah, 2018, Rugaiyah, 2019). Pupils also recognize the impact of excursions on the development of their social skills, with the statement examining this having an average response value of 3.60 (Table 1). Setting clear goals for pupils to achieve through group work during excursions could contribute to the development of social skills such as leadership, clarity of expression, alignment of personal goals with group goals, discipline, time management, etc. Excursions have an advantage over classroom teaching when it comes to developing pupils' intellectual, social and interpersonal qualities, as pupils experience them more directly and with more emotions (Đorđević et al, 2023). Shakil and Hafeez emphasize that the development of pupils' social skills on excursions is further enhanced by the large group in which pupils from different social backgrounds interact (Shakil & Hafeez, 2011)

The vast majority of pupils,  $x = 4.07$ , agree that when they visit historical sites and cultural attractions, they recognize their importance and the need to preserve them (Table 1). This shows how

important real-life encounters with objects are for understanding and appreciating their value. Instead of just being passive guardians of cultural heritage, some museums in Serbia are transforming into educational spaces where extracurricular education takes place. Many museums now have educational curators and are developing programs that engage pupils cognitively, affectively, socially and physically. Pupils who are motivated by engaging activities such as pottery are more receptive to new information and retain it better (Bogdanović, 2018). In modern museums around the world, as well as in zoos, botanical gardens and other facilities that can be included in excursion programs, visitors can participate in various activities, such as virtual simulations of events or eras. These activities are not only highly motivating, but also foster creativity, problem-solving skills and critical thinking by combining old and new knowledge (Ristanović et al, 2024).

The authors Stanić Jovanović and Cvetković examined educational excursions as a means of developing sustainable tourism in Đerdap National Park and concluded that participants retain educational content on environmental protection in their memory through adventure and practical experiences and remain in their consciousness for a long time. They also believe that there is interest and demand on the tourism market for such excursions in the area of Đerdap National Park. Serbia is rich in natural resources with different levels of protection, where educational trips can be organized by professionals from travel agencies, enabling pupils to acquire various educational content, especially in geography, biology and history. The inclusion of such trips in Serbia's tourist offer would facilitate the planning process for educational institutions that organize excursions (Stanić Jovanović & Cvetković, 2016). Excursions often include visits to one or more nature reserves, where pupils can learn about specific problems of environmental degradation and the measures taken to preserve and improve them (Đorđević et al, 2023).

Colfid defined school excursions as a trip or activity outside school with the clear aim of promoting pupil learning (Schmidinger, Molin, Brandt, 2014). The relatively low average response rate,  $x = 2.69$ , of pupils to the question of whether excursions help them achieve better learning outcomes suggests that excursions do not fulfil this defined purpose (Table 1). However, the mean score of the third subscale, which examines whether excursions have an impact on pupils' general personal development, is 3.84, so we can partially accept the third hypothesis ( $H_3$ ) (Figure 1). Well-organised excursions can positively shape the personality of pupils and influence the development of proper values and responsibility towards nature and the society in which they live (Trnavac & Đorđević, 2010).

The average score for the subscale that assesses whether pupils recognize the educational aspect of excursions is 2.69 (Figure 1). Although this subscale has the lowest average score, we can accept the fourth hypothesis ( $H_4$ ) on this basis. The educational nature of excursions is not sufficiently recognized by the pupils and it is up to the teachers to emphasize it. Most pupils disagreed with the statement that they have the opportunity to participate in the planning of the excursion itinerary. This is the only statement on the scale with an average score below 2.00 (Table 1). The planning of the route and the didactic structuring of the excursions should be the responsibility of the teachers. Teachers should select geographical areas that help to combine theoretical knowledge with new practical experiences and achieve educational goals (Romelić & Ivanović Bibić, 2015). Finchum suggests that when

planning the route, teachers could consider asking pupils what they would like to visit on the excursion, as long as it is related to the content being covered in the current class. This approach could increase the impact of the excursion on pupils, as they appreciate being able to take an active role in their education, making this a valuable opportunity for engagement (Finchum, 2013).

A small number of pupils agree with the statement that they should write a report after the excursion. This is probably the result of individual cases where a particular teacher gives pupils the task of writing a report on the excursion, but it is not an established rule that all pupils recognize. Post-excursion activities in the form of reports on the excursion conducted would enhance pupils' observation and writing skills (Rugaiyah, 2018). In addition to writing reports about the excursion, pupils can also create presentations, posters, brochures or videos that summarize the knowledge gained during the excursion or process and analyze the data collected in the field. According to Weeden's research, pupils enjoy learning when they engage in activities such as watching videos, drawing maps and diagrams, working on projects, discussions, creating posters, etc., and they must be given the opportunity to engage in such activities whenever possible (Weeden, 2007). Post-excursion work provides the opportunity to combine different working methods, teaching tools and materials that should be used to develop pupils' knowledge, skills and motivation.

The T-test revealed no statistically significant difference between boys and girls in their overall attitude towards outings ( $p > 0.05$ ). This means that the fifth hypothesis ( $H_5$ ), that girls have a more positive attitude towards outings than boys, was rejected. A statistically significant difference was found between the attitudes of pupils attending a school in a city and pupils attending a school in a village ( $p = 0.000$ ). The mean value of the attitude of pupils attending a urban school is  $x = 3.00$ , while it is  $x = 3.35$  for pupils attending a rural school. The mean attitude score for pupils attending urban schools is  $x = 3.00$ , while for pupils attending rural schools it is  $x = 3.35$ , which leads to the rejection of the seventh hypothesis ( $H_7$ ) stating that there is no difference in attitudes toward excursions between urban and rural pupils.

The Point-biserial correlation was used to investigate whether there is a correlation between the type of settlement in which the school is located and the pupils' general attitude towards excursions. The analysis revealed a weak correlation between these variables ( $p = 0.000$ ,  $r_{pb} = 0.30$ ), suggesting that pupils attending rural schools are more likely to have a positive attitude towards excursions. The more positive attitude of rural pupils towards excursions could be due to their lifestyle and greater experience with outdoor activities, but also to the smaller number of pupils per class, so that more attention can be paid to sharing excursion experiences at school, which is often very limited in urban schools with a large pupil population.

Due to the lack of a normal distribution in all categories of the grade variable, the Kruskal-Wallis test was used to examine the differences between the categories of this variable, which serves as a non-parametric alternative to ANOVA. No statistically significant difference was found between pupils of different grade levels in their overall attitude toward excursions ( $p > 0.05$ ). On this basis, we accept the sixth hypothesis of the study ( $H_6$ ) that fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grade pupils do not dif-

fer in their attitudes toward excursions. Taking excursions is approached in the same way for all grades within a school, suggesting the absence of differences in attitudes between pupils in different grades.

The mean value describing pupils' attitudes towards excursions is 3.16 (Table 2). This indicates that pupils recognize some of the positive effects that excursions should have on achieving desired learning outcomes and on personal and social development, but that their educational potential is not fully exploited. Based on this mean, we can accept the initial hypothesis of the study (H). As the authors Anđelković, Dedanski and Pejić state in their research, such a result may be a consequence of the current quality of excursion implementation and the neglect of their educational role (Anđelković, Dedanski, Pejić, 2018)

Past experience has shown that the organization of excursions deviates from modern didactic-methodological norms and is predominantly seen as a fun-recreational activity. Schools should prescribe the organization of excursions according to programs that are based on methodological-didactic standards, while travel agencies should act as external factors that facilitate the technical process of excursions (Romelić & Ivanović Bibić, 2015).

Ristanović and colleagues (2024) investigated whether geography teachers use excursions to implement and deliver the curriculum. Only twelve out of one hundred surveyed geography teachers use field research and excursions in their work. These teachers are mostly younger and use the knowledge they acquired during their college education as part of the teaching program, especially from courses that address the application of field research and excursions in the classroom. Although conducting excursions is a complex task, they emphasize that it is the most interesting part of their job and that they enjoy doing it because of its positive impact on their pupils' above-average performance. The rest of the surveyed geography teachers mentioned limiting factors such as lack of time, organizational problems, the long distance of suitable places, material costs and the impossibility of obtaining permission for such methods as obstacles to the use of excursions in their lessons.

The didactic-methodical planning of excursions is a task for teachers. The lack of time as a limiting factor can be overcome through the use of artificial intelligence (AI), whose integration into the educational process is gaining momentum and becoming a topic for many researchers and practitioners. With the help of various AI-supported tools, teachers can improve the organization of teaching and learning as well as the monitoring of results. By using artificial intelligence to create excursion plans and assignments tailored to pupils' individual abilities, needs and interests, time optimization is achieved. Pupils who are motivated by content adapted to their interests achieve greater engagement and better learning outcomes (Majkić & Vranješ, 2024). Mandić, Miščević and Bujišić conclude in their study of fourth-year students at the Faculty of Teacher Education that the use of ChatGPT, a language software model based on artificial intelligence, can improve the quality of students work. However, the authors note that only a small number of students are aware of the pathways and opportunities offered by AI-based software and that the information available to them is sporadic and non-institutional, pointing to the need to modify existing course programs (Mandić, Miščević, Bujišić, 2024).

## CONCLUSION

Pupils' attitudes towards excursions suggest that they have some impact on their development and achievement, although the full potential of excursions as a pedagogical activity in geography education has not yet been realized. Most pupils have a positive attitude towards the impact of excursions on the development of social skills, self-awareness and understanding of cultural and historical values. In addition, pupils believe that excursions promote collaboration among pupils and the expression of individuality. However, the current practice of conducting excursions has certain shortcomings. For example, the results show that the places pupils visit on excursions are not always related to geographical content, nor do they always promote the acquisition of practical knowledge and skills. Pupils often have to recognize the connection between the geographic topics they learn in class and the topics they learn about on excursions themselves, rather than the teacher emphasizing this connection. As a result, few pupils think about the impact of excursions on increasing their interest in the study of geography and their academic performance. Teachers should pay more attention to integrating excursion programs into their lesson plans so that pupils can learn or reinforce certain parts of the curriculum based on experience. The academic training of future geography teachers must provide them with the knowledge and skills to incorporate excursions and field research into their teaching practice in order to achieve the educational objectives. This can be further refined through various seminars and the exchange of practical examples.

The results regarding differences in attitudes towards excursions show no significant difference between boys and girls, nor between fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth grade pupils. This excludes gender and grade level as factors in pupils' attitudes towards excursions. However, differences were found in the attitudes of pupils from rural and urban areas, which could indicate that factors such as lifestyle or contact with nature could influence pupils' attitudes towards excursions.

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## PERCEPCIJA UČENIKA O OBRAZOVNOJ ULOZI EKSKURZIJA U NASTAVI GEOGRAFIJE

**Sažetak:** Očiglednost u nastavi geografije od velikog je značaja za razvijanje geografskog načina razmišljanja i zaključivanja. Ekskurzije predstavljaju adekvatnu priliku za primenu principa očiglednosti, koja bi učenicima omogućila iskustveno učenje, razvoj kritičkog mišljenja, socijalnih veština, ličnosti, motivacije, povećanje angažovanja i bolja postignuća. Cilj istraživanja je ispitati da li učenici prepoznaju obrazovnu ulogu ekskurzija. Rezultati su dobijeni statističkom obradom podataka, prikupljenih tehnikom anketiranja učenika, u programu SPSS 26.0. Prigodan uzorak čine učenici od petog do osmog razreda iz jedne niške škole i osnovne škole koja se nalazi u seoskom naselju u blizini Niša. Učenici uviđaju obrazovni karakter ekskurzija, ali puni benefiti ekskurzija, koje one mogu da pruže kao vrsta nastavne aktivnosti, nisu ostvareni zbog načina na koji se realizuju.

**Ključne reči:** Školske ekskurzije, nastava geografije, iskustveno učenje, holistički razvoj učenika, ishodi učenja

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## APPENDIX

Table 1: *Mean value and frequency of responses for each examined item in the measurement scale*

No.	Item	x	F				
			Strongly disagree	Disagre	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	Sites on excursions are connected to geographical content	3.48	10	12	70	69	27
2	I acquire practical geographical knowledge and skills on excursions	3.48	7	19	68	64	30
3	During excursions, my interest in learning geography increases	2.54	47	55	40	29	17
4	I can express my individuality on excursions	3.41	8	33	60	48	39
5	On excursions, I collaborate with my peers more than in the classroom	4.26	4	8	27	46	103
6	Participating in excursions increase my confidence	3.23	18	31	59	49	31
7	Participating in excursions develops my social skills	3.60	14	14	49	67	44
8	During excursions, I recognize the importance of historical localities and cultural heritage	4.07	2	11	35	64	76
9	Participating in excursions helps me achieve better results in my studies	2.69	36	49	58	28	17
10	Pupils can participate in the design of excursion routes	1.73	94	50	44	0	0
11	One of the pupils' tasks is to write a report on the conducted excursion	2.26	73	45	35	19	16

x – mean value, F – frequency

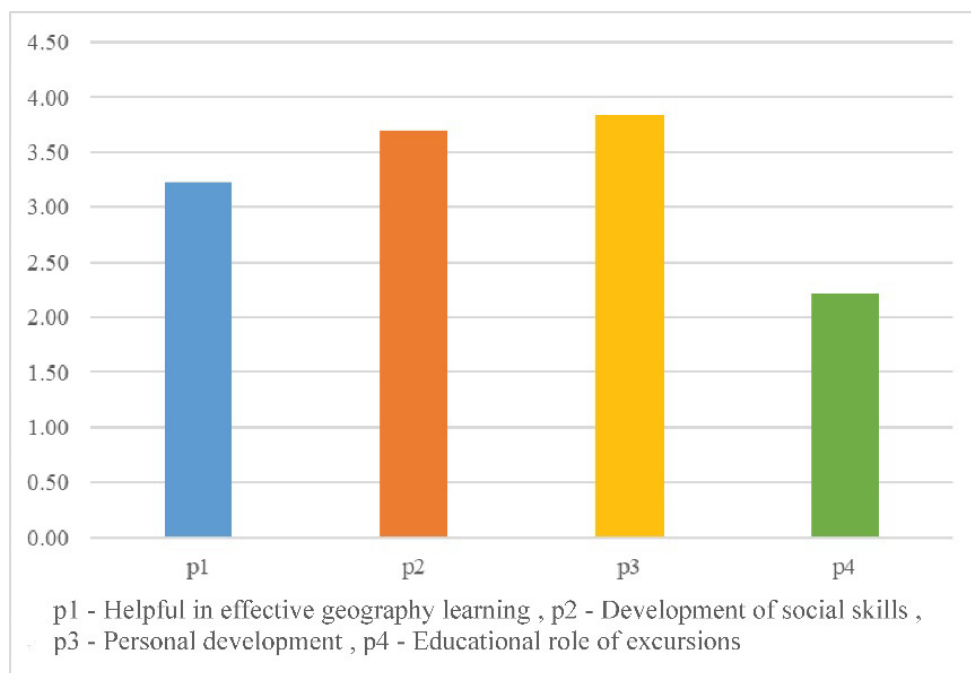


Figure 1: *Mean values of the selected subscales*

Table 2: *Mean value, standard deviation, minimum and maximum value of the pupils' overall attitude about excursions*

x	SD	min	Max
3.16	0.59	1.55	4.55

x – mean value, SD – standard deviation, min – minimum value, max – maximum value