

The Eurasia Proceedings of Educational & Social Sciences (EPESS), 2024

Volume 39, Pages 128-136

ICOnSE 2024: International Conference on Science and Education

Leisure Time Preferences of High school Students in Slovakia and Opinions of Interest Activities Focusing on Students with Learning Disabilities

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Abstract: Leisure time is the subject of interest for workers in several pedagogical and social professions, because it represents, on the one hand, an opportunity for the personal and social development of youth, on the other hand, it hides considerable risk. The current development of youth's leisure activities is not very positive – rather passivity, consumerism and undemanding activities are deepening. The aim of the article is to outline the issue of leisure and lifestyle. The goal of research was to examine the specifics of spending free time among high school students in Slovakia (N-307). The results showed that the most popular activity among Slovak adolescents is Internet and social networks (73.30%) followed by listening to music (67.10%). The time spent with friends is also important for young people (64.50%). Time spent on the Internet and social networks can also be considered to a certain extent as virtual contact with friends. Sports activities were placed at the bottom of the ranking. Our findings can be a starting point for the creation of an offer of leisure time activities for young people, which will respect their preferences but at the same time will fill insufficient opportunities for sports and artistic activities. When creating an offer, it is also necessary to consider the needs of students with learning difficulties. Students with learning difficulties must try harder than their classmates at secondary school, they devoted more time and energy to learning. Nevertheless, they may be more talented in some aspect. That is why they deserve to adjust to the condition of education so that they can show their talents and choose leisure time activities in which they can manifest their skills.

Keywords: Leisure time, High school students, Interest activities, Adolescents, Learning difficulties

Introduction

For every person, leisure time is a pleasant and relaxing activity, which he/she fills with activities that make him/her happy. We consider free time as a phenomenon that can affect an individual's life at various levels. Areas of interest change along with people's nature and reflect their lifestyle. Thanks to the way we spend our free time, we can get to know the people around us better. We can thus create, for example, new friendships that are united by a common activity or interest. From the presented theory, we know that free time is a free activity of every individual. That's why we focus on getting to know the free time of high school youth in Slovakia. We want to find out how adolescents spend their free time.

Each of us has a certain part of the day that we can label as leisure time. Its precise and professional definition is extremely important in the context of our topic. We need to make a clear distinction between what can be considered leisure and what no longer fulfills the term. Based on the disgusting literature and personal experience, we can confirm that sometimes it is difficult to determine whether a specific activity still falls into the category of free time. The differences are mainly caused by different perceptions of the relativity of time. In ordinary life, such a definition is sufficient. However, in the context of our contribution, for a correct and

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- Selection and peer-review under responsibility of the Organizing Committee of the Conference

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clear understanding of the issue, we decided to mention only some definitions from pedagogical authors who look at the concept of free time differently.

Leisure Time of High School Youth

Author Rose (2016) refers to free time as time that is not aimed at satisfying basic human needs, or people dependent on him. As a result, we can say that free time and its amount is also influenced by caring for children and family among parents, unlike childless individuals. Kratochvílová (2008) claims that the exception to free time is all the time devoted to preparation for school educational facilities. It also included children's school clubs, school dormitories and leisure centers.

According to Hofbauer (2008) we can talk about free time only when a person fulfills all these needs and obligations that result from his life. According to the above-mentioned author, we can use our free time for activities that relate to:

- rest and entertainment,
- development of the sphere of interest,
- improving or increasing qualifications,
- participation in public life.

"These are activities that bring joy and, at the same time, a possible practical benefit (handiwork, DIY, gardening)" Hofbauer, 2008). The author Brindza (2000) divided time into three groups:

- Non-working -includes all activities that serve to satisfy the biological-physiological needs of children.
- Working - includes all activities that relate to school duties. That is why we also include tutoring, interest groups, preparation for classes, travel time to and from school.
- Free - the time available to children for free and voluntary use. This time is available to them only after they fill the content defined in the previous two groups with activities.

The quality and way of spending free time varies from person to person. A certain activity that fulfills an individual and gives it a deeper meaning may be meaningless to someone else. Kratochvílová (2010) defines five main functions, which she considers to be the most important from the point of view of relevance to the issue of free time:

1. Health and hygiene function (relaxation)

An important factor is the very existence of free time, which is extremely desirable and beneficial. For an individual, the absence of enough free time can be harmful and can have a negative impact on his psyche. It is especially important for a child or adolescent to have adequate free time, which he can spend playing, meeting friends or even doing nothing.

2. Self-realization function

The task of this function is to bring space into the life of an individual so that he can freely satisfy his own needs, interests and activities. However, we distinguish the fact that such gratification can occur in both positive and negative ways. Positive activities understandably need our support and encouragement. If a person achieves the satisfaction of his needs in beneficial activities, he avoids seeking similar recognition in negative activities.

3. Formative-educational function

It is important to create such conditions for spending free time to create opportunities for active formation, education and development of a person's personality. It is important to create a positive relationship with values and orientation in the individual.

4. Socialization function

The activities that we implement in our free time also create conditions for new social ties to be created between children and youth. The most frequent expansion of social contact occurs in organized events, camps, games, trips, etc. Mostly, these activities reflect the same interests as other participants and thus establishing and strengthening friendships is easier.

5. Preventive function

Leisure activities also fulfill an important function of preventing undesirable socio-pathological phenomena. It is by creating such activities that we can protect health and the positive development of personality, which is easily influenced especially at a younger age. From the findings of the research of Hroncová (1999), it is confirmed that valuable and meaningful spending of free time in the company of peers is a very effective prevention against socio-pathological phenomena.

The world around us is changing and we could certainly discuss the creation of other functions aimed at free time. Kaplan (1960) described five basic functions in the relationship between a person's personality and society as follows:

- enhance the feeling of individuality in an individual,
- increase the feeling of belonging to someone,
- do not allow negative experiences (or create opportunities for positive experiences),
- stimulate a person's creative powers,
- content to be useful to the entire society.

Kaplan (1960) characterized leisure time functions less categorically. In our understanding, due to their concreteness, we would also label them as goals, or sense of free time. The meaning and fulfillment of our lives is different for all of us. How an individual spends their free time can help us get a better idea of their overall lifestyle. Hájek, Hofbauer and Pávková (2008) believe that our free time and how we decide to use it is largely influenced by the following factors:

- a person's value orientation,
- human activity,
- social interaction and family.

We can conclude that free time is an extremely important area of our lives. It shapes us unconsciously from our early childhood, while it can influence not only us but also the lives of people around us. We believe that it is extremely important for a teenager how he decides to spend his free time. Several times we have already expressed the belief that the choice of leisure activities has a significant impact on the formation of personality at a younger age. In leisure activities, people are not restricted by rules, as is the case during school lessons or performing their work. It is therefore necessary for the teacher to be such a person in the life of the pupil/student who will guide him to the effective and meaningful fulfillment of his free time. At a certain stage in the life of each of us, the teacher is an integral part of our life. Consciously or unconsciously, it offers itself to us as a possible role model, shaping and influencing us in the same way as parents. "The basic starting point of pedagogical formation is the knowledge of personality based on knowledge from psychology" (Hájek et al., 2008). In this way, we come to the realization that to properly understand children and youth, we must also know the psychological and physiological aspects of the developmental period in which they currently find themselves. This knowledge can have a significant impact on their overall leisure activity. Kollárová (In Mendelová & Pavličková, 2020) divides the activities of interest into several groups:

- Social science field of interest (linguistic field, history, social and cultural events, etc.),
- Aesthetic-educational area of interest (musical, literary, artistic and dramatic activities),
- Technical area of interest (focused on manual skills),
- Natural science field of interest (interested in non-living and living nature),
- Physical education area of interest (strengthening, exercise, hiking, etc.),
- Defense area of interest (activities related to the protection of human life).

Adolescent youth live their interests and hobbies exceptionally well. Such activity can stimulate them appropriately, lead them to independence or, on the contrary, to cooperation with others.

Defining Adolescence with a Focus on Youth with Learning Disabilities

As we already mentioned, the choice of leisure activities can also be caused by the individual's current developmental period. We can state the fact that the development of human individuality is a continuous process without clear boundaries that would separate individual periods from each other. Nevertheless, there are generally binding factors that we can consider as the transition from one developmental period to another. We can often come across the opinion that adolescents live in their own world, which is characterized by freedom and a higher degree of experimentation. We can also observe a certain distaste for definitive solutions to problems or rejection of experienced traditions. We assume that the manifestations of such behavior are still direct echoes of adolescence. It is natural for adolescents to avoid the same lifestyle as their parents. Vágnerová (2000) believes that such behavior stems from the nascent adult personality, which becomes independent from its parents and surroundings. Hall (1904), who studied the ontogenesis of the individual, also dealt with this issue. He characterizes the adolescent as a person and a contradictory young personality. Conflicting relationships with adults and authority often appear in his life. Relationships thus become the supporting pillar of this period of life. In the past, adolescence was considered a certain period of moratorium, i.e. j. postponement or waiting for adulthood. However, we currently think that this period is understood as a separate and independent period of maturation. To a significant extent, youth culture is built in this period.

During the 20th century, it became so independent and strong that we could witness a significant increase in commercial targeting of the teenage population and their lifestyle. Furthermore, the authors point out the fact that today's adolescents follow the motto "we only live once" and want to "live their lives to the fullest". "Adolescents are allowed almost everything, but only to a small extent are they required to accept personal responsibility for their own future. Some characteristics and values that are traditionally associated with adolescence (physical strength, attractiveness, non-committal experimentation in various areas of life, discovery of new possibilities) have become very attractive even for the adult age group. The transition between adolescence and adulthood has lost its sharp contours and staying mentally and physically young is a desirable social standard" (Macek & Lacinová, 2017). Modern means of communication and perfect awareness of what is happening in the world are also a significant element of the youth that influences them, also, freedom of speech. We can consider all this as an ideal environment for the healthy development of an individual. However, we must also consider some of the risks that have arisen from these changes over several decades. Kraus (2006) believes that education, even university education, is not a guarantee of youth's success in adult life. Some adolescents do not see a perspective in school and education. Education itself is significantly undervalued in their eyes. Success in today's world is focused on performance and consumption. "The result of this situation is that young people often live from day to day, without long-term goals, without significant spiritual values, without a worthwhile experience of free time. This phenomenon is also perceived by some young people, who so often lose their sense. The goal is to live fully in the present, while such a life loses deeper emotional experiences" (Kraus, 2006). When we talk about the meaningfulness of spending free time of youth, we must agree with the opinion of Kraus. Many researches in the field of free time have pointed to the fact that young people spend their free time passively. We cannot consider watching TV, social media or even listening to music with headphones in bed as actively filling free time. At the same time, music is a very significant element affecting the life of adolescents in various ways. Student with learning disabilities may be less familiar with media and internet use, because of their reading difficulties, and less dependent on them. On the contrary, the use of digital technology and ICT tools for intervention (Vasalou et al., 2017; De Avelar et al., 2015), as a coping mechanism or for compensatory strategies (Zikl et al., 2015) mean that youths with learning disabilities may be equally heavy users of the internet and thus vulnerable to the influences from them. Beacham and Alty (2006), established the effect of digital media on the learning of learners with learning disabilities more than a decade ago. This further supports the idea that the internet and media, which adolescents are familiar with and well-exposed to, can influence individual thoughts and thus decision-making.

"Adolescents spend most of their time in the school environment. They are under pressure to perform well and are fixated on the outcome rather than the process of acquiring knowledge. In addition to emphasizing performance, it is important to support their personality assumptions. Students with learning disabilities must exert much more effort, which can also have an impact on their psychological well-being" (Sender et al., 2024). These students have predispositions to disturbed emotional reactivity, impulsiveness and problems with self-esteem. In adolescence, self-perception changes significantly, students are more unstable and therefore more vulnerable. Learning disability is perceived as a disadvantage and is often related to lower self-confidence and a sense of sufficient self-worth, which is more pronounced and can increase during this challenging period. Students with learning disabilities must try harder than their classmates at high school, they devote more time and energy to learning. Nevertheless, these students may be more talented in some aspects. That is why they deserve to adjust the conditions of education so that they can show their talents and have their hobbies and leisure time activities.

Based on the above knowledge, we can draw the conclusion that today's secondary school youth are characterized by a high degree of individual freedom. However, it carries with it a high level of risks, which we have to assess individually. The specific activities they engage in in their lives can be understood positively and negatively at the same time. Therefore, adolescents must try to find a healthy balance in their lives. Today's generation of adolescents must deal with the pitfalls of the development of information technology, globalization and revisions of traditional values.

Methodology

Research Goal and Research Questions

The goal of our research was to characterize the most popular leisure activities. Based on the goal of our research, we formulated the following research questions:

- Is spending free time with friends an important part of life for adolescents?
- Do adolescents spend their free time more passively or more actively?

- How do adolescents choose their leisure time activities?

Research Methods

Since in our research we investigated ways of spending free time among high school youth, we decided to use the questionnaire method to collect relevant information. Švec (2009) defines a questionnaire as a "research (resp. exploratory), development and evaluation (mainly diagnostic) tool for mass and relatively quick securing of information about the knowledge, opinions or attitudes of the interviewed persons to a current or potential fact through written questioning". Ferjenčik (2010) believes that the questionnaire is appropriate to use if we need to ask the same set of questions to a large number of respondents. In our research, we used an anonymous self-produced questionnaire which we divided into four parts. We used open questions with the option to add respondents' own answer, but also closed questions with a specific choice of answer option. The first part consisted of questions focused on gender, age, place of residence, high school and basic information about respondents' free time. We compiled the questions that made up the questionnaire in such a way that the individual answers would give us the best possible idea of the free time of high school youth. In total, 27 questions were asked in the questionnaire. We required mandatory answers from all respondents to 11 questions.

When interpreting the results of our research, we decided to use content analysis. Gavora (2015) believes that content analysis has long been a standard method of pedagogical research. It focuses on evaluating and interpreting the content of texts. The goal of content analysis is to obtain a quantitative description of the selected sample. Through the content distribution of individual areas in the questionnaire, we interpret the results of our research. We have thus created the following categories with the same focus on content:

1. Category frequency of free time

It consists of items that focus on the timing of spending free time during the day or of the week, or to the extent of attending a leisure activity.

2. Sports and other leisure activities category

This category is characterized by items focusing on the differentiation of leisure activities.

3. Category of subjective assessment

This category is made of items in which the respondent subjectively evaluates leisure and sports leisure activities, their quality and method of implementation, as well as satisfaction with their implementation.

4. Category not classified

Items in this category explore additional information to items that focus on open sharing of opinions. Items cannot be unambiguously classified based on their content into one of the previous dimensions.

Research Sample

The research sample consisted of 307 respondents, of which 59 (19.2%) were boys and 248 (80.8%) were girls. More detailed characteristics of the research set can be found in the following tables.

Table 1. Research sample in terms of age

| RS | 15years of age | 16years of age | 17years of age | 18 years of age | 19 years of age |
|--------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Boys | 11 | 4 | 12 | 19 | 13 |
| Girls | 21 | 50 | 77 | 65 | 35 |
| Total | 32 | 54 | 89 | 84 | 48 |

Table 2. Research sample in terms of residence

| Place of residence (N) | Boys | Girls | (%) | |
|------------------------|------|-------|-------|------|
| Village | 146 | 16 | 130 | 52,4 |
| City | 161 | 43 | 118 | 47,6 |
| Spolu | 307 | 59 | 248 | 100 |

Table 3. Research sample from the perspective of schools attended

| Type of High School | (N) | Boys | Girls | (%) |
|-----------------------------|-----|------|-------|------|
| Grammar School | 159 | 41 | 118 | 51,8 |
| Conservatoire | 4 | 1 | 3 | 1,3 |
| Secondary Vocational School | 144 | 17 | 127 | 46,9 |
| Total | 307 | 59 | 248 | 100 |

From the general point of view of residence (Table 2), the research sample is roughly balanced with a slight predominance of adolescents from the city. 161 adolescents live in this area, while 146 respondents come from the village. Most respondents attended grammar school (51.8%), followed by secondary vocational school (46.9%) and conservatoire (1.3%).

Analysis and Interpretation of Research Findings

1. Category Frequency of Free Time

The task of this content category was to find out how much free time adolescents have in general. First, we asked the respondents how much free time they have during the day. Most respondents have 3-5 hours of free time per day. In our opinion, this amount of free time during the day is sufficient for high school students. We rightly expected that this option would be the most widespread among students in terms of answers. We assume that the remaining two groups of respondents may suffer from a lack or excess of free time in the long term if they cannot fill it with quality leisure activities. 23.78% of adolescents have more than 5 hours of free time and 28.34% of respondents have less than 3 hours of free time. Following this question, we asked the respondents how many leisure activities they have during the week.

The majority of respondents stated that they have 1-2 activities per week (48.53%). From our point of view, this corresponds to the answers in the previous question about the amount of free time. 28.34% of high school students answered that they have 3-4 activities per week. 6.19% of respondents said that they do 5-6 activities per week. Only 3.91% of high school students said that they have more than 6 leisure activities per week. We expected that a significant part of the respondents representing this answer ticked the possibility that they have more than 5 hours of free time per day in the previous answer. This assumption turned out to be wrong. On the contrary, 13.03% of respondents said that they have no leisure activity during the week. The last question we included in this factor was supposed to provide an answer to the question about how long adolescents have been attending organized leisure activities. Out of a total of 307 respondents, 38.76% stated that they do not attend organized leisure activities. 27.36% of high school students answered that they have been engaged in such activities since childhood. 15.31% of respondents have been engaged in it for more than 2 years and another 9.12% have been engaged in such activity for 1-2 years. Less than a year, 9.45% of high school students devote themselves to such leisure activities.

2. Sports and other leisure activities category

The previous content category provided us with answers to questions about the amount of free time of high school youth in Slovakia. As another factor, we decided to examine what adolescents fill this time with. In our questionnaire, we asked questions focused on the content of free time. In all questions, they could choose multiple answers. We also specifically asked about the sports activities of the respondents. When choosing the other option, we allowed the respondent to add activities of their own choice. We divided the answers in the other option into the following categories: physical and sports activities, animal care, part-time job, artistic and musical activities, baking and cooking, education. The part-time job as the cause of less free time occurred quite often. We assume that this is due to the fact that adolescents are at an age when they already want to have their own financial means and also through them to fulfill their leisure interests. It gives them more freedom in choosing their leisure activities because they are financed by the money they earn. At the same time, we assume that some adolescents also consider part-time job as a leisure activity, because in their opinion school is a more serious duty than work.

The most popular leisure activity among adolescents is the Internet and social media. This activity reached over 70%. Listening to music was equally popular in both groups. We also attribute the popularity of this activity to the fact that it can take place simultaneously with another type of activity. From an overall view of leisure activities, we see that the individual order does not change. It is an interesting finding for us that playing video games ranks last in every view of leisure activity. We expected this activity to become much more popular with the spread of smartphones. Most of our respondents were girls, who don't like playing video games as much as boys, so that could be the main reason. We were positively surprised that our research sample prefers reading books to this activity.

We incorrectly assumed that this activity would be of marginal interest to adolescents. We also asked the respondents what their other most common leisure activities are. We asked about more demanding activities.

In the long term, there were activities that could also be an incentive to visit a leisure club and non-formal education. We can put their additional answers into the following categories: care about animals, reading books and writing own texts, art and music, volunteering, acting and modeling, baking and cooking, spending time with friends and family and part-time job. Based on the answers to this question, we can see that the part-time job is a fixed part of high school life and interferes with their free time.

A complete look at the overall results of the answers to this question shows that up to 44.7% of adolescents do not engage in any leisure activity. The second most popular activity was playing a musical instrument (27.44%), followed by other options (20.22%). 19.3% of respondents are engaged in dancing and 13% in singing. Model making (1.44%) remained the least popular activity. In addition to the above-mentioned activities, we also asked the respondents about their interest in sports activities, which we consider very important in the period of adolescence. These activities contribute to healthy physical and mental development. We classified their additional answers into the following categories of sports: martial arts, darts, table tennis, swimming, running and skating, cycling, ballroom dancing, winter sports, hiking, climbing, shooting. If we look at sports leisure activities we find that the most popular physical activity is fitness, which is preferred by up to 38.28% of adolescents. This finding also coincides with the theory that the cult of the body is currently a popular vision of adolescents and is also related to their popularity on social networks. This is followed by the group that does not attend any sports leisure activities (31.35%). More than 30% of respondents chose the other option. In the results, we further see that volleyball (13.86%) is more popular than floorball (8%) and football (7.92%), which reached almost the same number of percentages. Hockey (1.98%) and archery (0.99%) are on the margins of youth interest.

3. Category of subjective assessment

The last content category that we focused on in terms of our research was the subjective evaluation of the respondents' free time. In our questionnaire, we devoted several questions to this assessment. We asked respondents whether they think they have enough free time. From the percentages we can see that the majority of adolescents are satisfied with having enough free time. The option "rather yes" reached over 30% in each group. From an overall perspective, we can assess that more than half of all respondents (58.6%) rate their free time as sufficient. 36.2% of adolescents have reservations about having enough free time, and 5.20% of students cannot objectively evaluate their free time. The last question that we included in this category was related to the justification of the choice of leisure activities. The results of the answers to this question were quite clear. Most respondents choose leisure activities according to their own interest and initiative. From the overall perspective of the respondents, 90.6% of the youth choose their leisure activities in this way.

Results and Discussion

Based on quantitative research, which we conducted through a questionnaire on a sample of 307 respondents, we obtained results that we can evaluate. We divided the individual answers into categories so that we could answer the research questions that we set at the beginning of our research.

- Is spending free time with friends an important part of life for adolescents staying in a dormitory?
The results of our research have shown that friendships are an important part of life in a school. This finding was reflected in two answers, where friends played a more important role for students than individual activities.
- How do adolescents choose their leisure activities?

The results of our research showed that adolescents choose their leisure activities according to their own interest and initiative. The results of our research also confirmed the previous theoretical knowledge. Free time is a unique activity that is accompanied by the individual's free will. His needs and interests are fulfilled. Our results showed that listening to music is one of the most popular leisure activities. The popularity of social media and the Internet also confirms to us that modern means of communication are a significant element that influences today's adolescents, and in the future, we should expect that this influence may tend to increase. We can consider the popularity of sports activities as a natural consequence of important physical changes during adolescence and the associated need for physical activity. At the same time, it can also function as a valve in case of excess energy. Based on the results of our research, we can compile a table with the most popular activities of high school youth.

Table 4. The most popular leisure activities of adolescents

| Type of leisure activity | % |
|-------------------------------|--------|
| 1. Internet and Social Media | 73,30% |
| 2. Listening to Music | 67,10% |
| 3. Spending time with friends | 64,50% |
| 4. Watching movies | 50,20% |
| 5. Reading books | 44% |
| 6. Fitness | 38,28% |
| 7. Playing an instrument | 27,44% |
| 8. Playing videogames | 19,20% |
| 9. Dancing | 19,13% |
| 10. Volleyball | 13,86% |
| 11. Singing | 13% |
| 12. Floorball | 8% |
| 13. Football | 7,92% |

From the table presented, we can see that the most popular activity among Slovak young people is the Internet and social media (73.30%), followed by listening to music (67.10%). For high school youths, time spent with friends is also important (64.50%). Time spent on the Internet and social media can also be considered to a certain extent as virtual contact with friends. The first sports activities appear in the table at a level below 50%. The most popular sports activity is fitness (38.28%), volleyball (13.86%) and at the end of the table we can also see floorball (8%) and football (7.92%). Based on these results, we should work to increase the popularity of sports activities among all adolescents in the near future.

Conclusion

Based on our research findings, we can say that Slovak adolescents know how to fill their free time in an active and positive way. In some cases, however, it is appropriate to help adolescents improve their leisure habits. From an overall view of the leisure activities of Slovak high school youth, we found that the most popular activities are the Internet and social media, listening to music and spending time with friends. We also attribute the popularity of these activities to the fact that adolescents can perform all these activities at the same time. We have formulated some recommendations for professionals working with high school students:

- Find out the leisure time preferences of your students and adjust the offer of leisure clubs accordingly. As in the case of boarding schools and dormitories, we recommend giving the questionnaire to students at the beginning of the school year.
- Organize discussions aimed at open sharing of interests or leisure activities among classmates. The implementation could be similar to the dormitories.
- To increase students' awareness of the beneficial effects of sports on individual health.
- Look for ways to attract more adolescents to organized leisure activities.
- To encourage adolescents to plan their free time and thus increase the possibility of its active fulfillment and use.

We believe that the recommendations could find application in practice. By gradually putting them into practice, they could contribute to increasing the quality of secondary school boarding schools and dormitories. Finally, they could influence the emergence of positive habits of adolescents towards free time. When planning these activities, it is also necessary to consider the needs of students with learning disabilities. They usually have talent in art, music or some sports but the activities must be adjusted according to their special needs. It is recommended to consult this adjustment with school special educators.

Scientific Ethics Declaration

The authors declare that the scientific ethical and legal responsibility of this article published in EPESS Journal belongs to the authors.

Acknowledgements or Notes

* This article was presented as an oral presentation at the International Conference on Science and Education (www.iconse.net) held in Antalya/Turkey on November 13-16, 2024

* This article was published with financial support of project no. KEGA 011UKF-4/2023 - Artefiletic Support Program for High School Students with Learning Disabilities.

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To cite this article:

Sender, B., & Pavlickova, A. (2024). Leisure time preferences of high school students in Slovakia and opinions of interest activities focusing on students with learning disabilities. *The Eurasia Proceedings of Educational and Social Sciences (EPESS)*, 39, 128-136.