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## Participation in Decision-making in Class: Opportunities and Student Attitudes in Austria and Slovenia

MONIKA MITHANS\*<sup>1</sup>, MILENA IVANUŠ GRMEK<sup>2</sup> AND BRANKA ČAGRAN<sup>3</sup>

☞ This article focuses on the issue of student involvement in the education process. The study comprised pupils aged 10-11, 13-14 and 16-17; 322 students were attending school in Austria, and 458 students were in Slovenia. The data were collected through a questionnaire and processed on the level of descriptive and inferential statistics. The right to participation is among the four main principles set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child from 1989. However, a study that aimed to identify the areas in which students already have the opportunity to participate in decision-making and areas in which they want more participation showed that they remain insufficiently aware of the right to participation in school. In addition, the study showed that students from Austrian schools have more decision-making opportunities than their peers in Slovenia do. The results also indicate that, despite its proven advantages, legal basis, and the repeated demands for its implementation, participation in the class environment has yet to become common practice.

**Keywords:** effect of student participation, student ability for participation, student desire for participation, student participation in decision-making

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## Možnosti in želje učencev v Avstriji in Sloveniji po soodločanju pri pouku

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☞ V članku predstavljamo problematiko vključevanja učencev v pouk. V raziskavi so sodelovali učenci, stari med 10 in 11 let, med 13 in 14 let ter med 16 in 17 let. 322 učencev obiskuje šole v Avstriji, 458 pa v Sloveniji. Podatki so bili zbrani z vprašalnikom ter obdelani na ravni deskriptivne in inferenčne statistike. Pravica do participacije je v okviru ene izmed štirih glavnih načel zapisana že v Konvenciji o otrokovih pravicah iz leta 1989, a rezultati te raziskave, v kateri smo želeli ugotoviti področja pouka, na katerih učenci že zaznavajo možnosti soodločanja, in področja pouka, na katerih bi si soodločanja še želeli, kažejo, da je pravica do participacije učencev pri pouku še vedno premalo prisotna. Nadalje rezultati raziskave kažejo, da imajo učenci, ki se šolajo v Avstriji, več možnosti soodločanja pri pouku kot njihovi vrstniki v Sloveniji.

**Ključne besede:** učinki soodločanja učencev, sposobnosti učencev za soodločanje, želje učencev po soodločanju, participacija učencev

## Introduction

Participation is a basic characteristic of democracy and one of the elementary human rights of children (e.g. Sturzenhecker, 2005). For this reason, the youth policy in Europe (see EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering, 2009) recognises youth participation as a priority. In a modern school, the teacher is expected to motivate students and create conditions for active learning, with the students taking part in all stages of the education process (Javornik Krečič, 2003). Modern schools differ from traditional ones with respect to the level of democracy; at the same time, modern pedagogical processes are based on a democratic climate and relationships at the level of the school and in class (Kovač Šebart & Krek, 2007). Participation is the objective of general education (e.g. Reith, 2007), because school, as a state and social institution, plays a key role in the development of democratic values among its future citizens.

The notion of student participation, in the case of the present paper, represents active student participation in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of school work (Kovač, Resman, & Rajkovič, 2008, 2010) and provides new opportunities for quality school work (Kovač, 2008; Kovač et al., 2010). This article deals with the participation of pupils in Slovenia and Austria. It aims to present the prospects and student attitudes towards it in each of the two countries. The results acquired do not provide clear answers about the possibilities of students' participation; they indicate the need for further developmental research monitoring of teaching practice and the formation of guidelines for more active student participation in the educational process.

## Positive Effects of Pupil Participation

School is the space where children should encounter a democratic way of life and learn democracy directly through their experience (see Pereira, Mouraz, & Figueiredo, 2014). Participation is the key to independent learning. In the long run, the involvement of students results in greater motivation for learning and better learning outcomes (Reith, 2007). The positive effect of participation on school work outcomes and personal traits are also emphasised by Eder (1998), who is convinced that children exposed to a democratic education style that allows them more frequent participation in decision-making develop personal characteristics, such as openness, activity, self-assurance and independence, and encounter new challenges self-confidently and with curiosity (e.g. Kirby, Lanyon, Cronin & Sinclair, 2003). Additionally, participation prepares young people for active engagement in social life and enables them to

develop organisational skills and the skills to respond rapidly to social change (Baumkirher, Bakovnik, Beočanin, & Džidič, 2011; Pereira et al., 2014). Participation also has a positive effect on school life and the learning process. Various studies on school climate and quality have proven that the satisfaction of students with school and the quality of school work improve if students encounter various opportunities for participation at school and can consider themselves as serious discussion partners (see Baacke & Brücher, 1982; Grundmann et al., 1998; Kötters et al. 2001; Kovač, 2008; Pereira et al., 2014). Participating students feel better in class and at school; they enjoy going to school more and experience less frustration than their peers do. They also more frequently discover things at school that they like and thus have better motivation (Baacke & Brücher, 1982; Kovač, 2008; Kötters et al., 2001). Hart (1992) emphasises that youth participation must increase with their age and maturity and spread from the private to public spheres because this enables young people to find their position in society and develop their competences in a responsible way.

### **Children's capacity to participate and formal grounds for its implementation in decision-making**

Portmann and Student (2005) warn that children are relatively independent personalities, and their psychological development allows them to participate in the decision-making processes pertaining to them at the age of six years (i.e. Fatke and Schneider, 2008; Sünker, Swiderek, & Richter, 2005; Portmann & Student, 2005). Fatke and Schneider (2008) also emphasise that children possess all the necessary participation competencies and can thus participate (in a manner appropriate to their age) in decision-making in various areas of their life. It is up to adults to make it possible for children to participate in the implementation of their rights and to accept them as serious partners and provide them with the opportunity to acquire the necessary competencies (Baacke & Brücher, 1982; Bundesjugendkuratorium, 2009). Another important fact for the implementation of participation is that children not only can participate in decision making but they want to do so and are willing to participate – so long as adults provide them with sufficient opportunities and follow their suggestions (Portmann & Student, 2005). It is thus up to the adults to adapt the content and methodological side of participation to the developmental stage of children (Fatke & Schneider, 2008). In addition to the issue of capacity, legal means are also needed for implementing the right to participation in decision-making. By adopting UNICEF's Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), both Slovenia and Austria accepted their obligation to protect the fundamental

rights of children, including participation in decision-making. In Europe, regulation on the participation of students is more common at the higher levels of education. Thus, more student participation mechanisms exist at the higher secondary level (ISCED 3) than at the lower secondary level (ISCED 2), and the fewest at the primary level (ISCED 1) (Citizenship Education in Europe, 2012). The situation in Austria and Slovenia is comparable. Participation in decision-making is stipulated by law (see Citizenship Education in Europe, 2012); however, according to Bock (2010), the exercising of this right in pedagogical reality depends mostly on teacher orientation, and the orientation of school administrations.

### **Opportunities and Pupils' Preferences about Participating in Decision-Making**

Grundmann and Kramer (2001) found that participation in school is not equally possible in all areas. Many opportunities for participation in decision-making exist in areas that do not have a direct impact on the life and functioning of the school. In contrast, the potential for participation in decision-making is limited when it comes to making decisions about school rules, norms and teaching.

Study results from Grundmann et al. (1998) show that students have the most opportunities for participation in decision-making regarding school life; while students see the fewest opportunities for participation in decision-making that concern grading, as well as adopting or changing school rules and regulations. Their answers showed that teachers do allow pupils to participate in decision-making related to teaching; however, this right usually ends when it comes to grading, because as many as 77.4% of the pupils stated that teachers do not include them in knowledge-assessment processes (see also Fatke & Schneider, 2008; Kovač, 2008). A study by Fatke and Schneider (2005) confirmed previous findings that students most frequently participate in setting up the seating arrangement and arranging the school premises. Only rarely do they participate in areas regarding teachers' professional work (grading, setting exam dates, choosing topics, defining the class structure, etc.).

Grundmann and Kramer (2001) found that pupils are divided regarding participation in decision-making that involves teaching. On the one hand, there are students who see teaching as a tightly regulated process; on the other, there are those who nevertheless see a number of opportunities to participate in decision-making about it. It is also necessary to mention the results of a study conducted by Kötters et al. (2001) because the pupils taking part in it were divided on the

issue of participation opportunities with regard to teaching. 38.8% agreed with the option that students can participate in decision-making about teaching; 11.8% completely agreed with that. In contrast, 35.0% disagreed, and 14.4% completely disagreed that they were being given the chance to affect teaching decisions.

On the basis of the results of these studies, it is possible to conclude that despite the formal foundations the opportunities for the pupils to participate in decision-making remains very limited in practice. Fatke and Schneider (2005) say that children can participate in decisions in areas that are not directly linked with the interests of adults. Students can thus participate in decision-making about issues that do not relate directly to teaching and the teacher's professional and pedagogical authority; thus, participation occurs least often with regard to knowledge assessment and grading (*ibid.*, p. 17).

In the studies cited so far, pupils had the opportunity to participate in decision-making from their own perspective. However, what are the areas in which students want to participate in decision-making? Eder (1998) provides a few answers to this question. In his study about democracy in Austrian secondary schools, he found that participation was uncommon. When researching students' preferences for participation, it was shown that students wanted to participate particularly in the area of school life: e.g. planning school trips and school events, the seating arrangement, organising breaks, etc. The desire to participate in decision-making regarding class topics and the teachers who should be teaching them were less pronounced. Unfortunately, Eder (1998) did not examine student preferences regarding participation in decision-making in the areas of knowledge assessment and class implementation. The school principals that were included in the study by Grundmann et al. (1998) claim that students do have opportunities for participation; however, students either do not use these or use them very seldom. Grundmann and Kramer (2001), studying the readiness of pupils to take responsibility in school, also came to the same conclusion.

#### *Study aims and research questions*

These results are part of an extensive study whose main aim was to establish how students and teachers perceive the opportunities for participation and its influence on student motivation and the class climate. The study attempts to answer the following main research questions:

- What are the areas in which students already see an opportunity to participate, and where would they like to participate more in decision-making?
- What are the differences regarding the country (Slovenia, Austria)?

## Method

### *Sample*

The study sample comprises students from Slovenia ( $n = 458$ ) and Austria ( $n = 322$ ), aged 10-11 (5<sup>th</sup> grade); aged 13-14 (8<sup>th</sup> grade) and 16-17-year-olds (2<sup>nd</sup> year of secondary school) and their teachers from Slovenian urban, suburban and countryside schools that border Austria, and from the Austrian federal states of Styria and Carinthia, which border Slovenia in its southern part and have a resident Slovenian national minority. The collected sample of pupils is a non-random purposive sample, which is defined as a simple random sample from an accessible population on the level of inferential statistics.

### *Instrument*

A questionnaire was prepared for this research, which was divided into five sections (basic research sample data, frequency of introducing open forms of class, possibility to participate in decision-making in school and during class, possibility to contribute to school climate and familiarity with possible participation in decision-making, as well as the possibility and desire of the students to participate in decision-making). All questions are close-ended with verbal and ascending answers. The *validity* of the questionnaire was ensured by considering all previous studies, experiment reviews and probing use. The *reliability* is confirmed by the calculated Cronbach alpha coefficient ( $\alpha = 0.832$ ). Its *objectivity* is ensured with detailed instructions and evaluation of answers without subjective judgement. This article will focus on the section of questions pertaining to possibilities and the desire of students to participate in decision making during class.

### *Data processing procedure*

The data were processed with SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Frequency distributions ( $f$ ,  $f\%$ ) and  $\chi^2$  – test of differences per country were used.



## Results and discussion

The questionnaire listed various areas of decision-making in class, in order to establish what opportunities and preferences students had regarding participation; the pupils had to decide whether they were allowed to participate in decision-making in this area; if not, whether they would want to. We wanted to establish how the students perceived opportunities for participation and what preferences they expressed regarding class topics, teaching methodology, knowledge assessment, and grading.

Table 1 indicates the opportunity and preferences regarding participation in the decision-making process regarding knowledge assessment. Individual statements are sequenced from those for which the pupils are detecting the most opportunities to participate in decision-making to those for which the pupils detect the least opportunities to participate in decision-making.

Table 1

*χ<sup>2</sup> - test result for statements by students about participation opportunities and preferences in decision-making on the knowledge assessment regarding country*

Statement	Students from Slovenia		Students from Austria		TOTAL		χ <sup>2</sup> - test results
	f	f%	f	f%	f	f%	
Setting oral exam dates	<u>I can participate</u> in my school	187	40.8	169	52.5	356	45.6
	<u>I cannot participate</u> in decision-making in my school, but <u>I want to</u>	178	38.9	111	34.5	289	37.1
	<u>I neither can participate</u> in decision-making in my school <u>nor do I want to</u>	93	20.3	42	13.0	135	17.3
Setting written exam dates	<u>I can participate</u> in my school	167	36.5	147	45.7	314	40.3
	<u>I cannot participate</u> in decision-making in my school but <u>I want to</u>	191	41.7	117	36.3	308	39.5
	<u>I neither can participate</u> in decision-making in my school <u>nor do I want to</u>	100	21.8	58	18	158	20.3
Decisions about make-up exams	<u>I can participate</u> in my school	143	31.2	159	49.4	302	38.7
	<u>I cannot participate</u> in decision-making in my school but <u>I want to</u>	214	46.7	137	42.5	351	45.0
	<u>I neither can participate</u> in decision-making in my school <u>nor do I want to</u>	101	22.1	26	8.1	127	16.3
Decisions about type of exam (written, oral etc.).	<u>I can participate</u> in my school	101	22.1	99	30.7	200	25.6
	<u>I cannot participate</u> in decision-making in my school but <u>I want to</u>	233	50.9	153	47.5	386	49.5
	<u>I neither can participate</u> in decision-making in my school <u>nor do I want to</u>	123	26.9	70	21.7	193	24.7

Statement	Students from Slovenia		Students from Austria		TOTAL		$\chi^2$ -test results
	f	f%	f	f%	f	f%	
Decisions about exam topics.	<u>I can participate</u> in my school	75	16.4	117	36.3	192	24.6
	<u>I cannot participate</u> in decision-making in my school but <u>I want to</u>	253	55.2	151	46.9	404	51.8
	<u>I neither can participate</u> in decision-making in my school <u>nor do I want to</u>	130	28.4	54	16.8	184	23.6
Decisions about grading criteria.	<u>I can participate</u> in my school	61	13.3	52	16.1	113	14.5
	<u>I cannot participate</u> in decision-making in my school but <u>I want to</u>	241	52.6	185	57.5	426	54.6
	<u>I neither can participate</u> in decision-making in my school <u>nor do I want to</u>	156	34.1	85	26.4	241	30.9

Assessment of knowledge is an area that is often problematic for the pupils, and that is why their active participation in this field is especially important (Kovač, 2008). In the field of testing and knowledge assessment, the pupils in our research stated that they are given the most opportunities to participate in the decision-making process when establishing the dates for oral examinations and knowledge assessments; 45.6% of participants detect the opportunity to participate in decision-making, while 40.3% detect the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process when establishing the dates for written tests and knowledge assessments. The pupils are very rarely included in defining the knowledge assessment criteria, since only 14.5% of the participants can participate in this field.

We believe that these results are the result of the fact that testing and knowledge assessment is a field of the teacher's professional autonomy and that pupils, therefore, cannot be equally included in the decision-making process or that they cannot impact the assessment itself (Kodela & Lesar, 2015), while they have the right to be aware of the dates of knowledge assessment pursuant to the law (Rules on testing and knowledge assessment and advancement of pupils in a primary school, 2013; Rules on knowledge assessment in secondary schools, 2010; Decision on Testing and Assessment, 1974).

The pupils that do not have the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process wish they could do so. More than half wish they could participate in the decision-making process regarding the content and knowledge assessment criteria. Slightly less than half (49.5%) wish to participate in the decision-making process regarding the method of testing and knowledge assessment or methods of improving a poor grade (45.0%).

Some students do not want to participate in the decision-making process. Specifically, 30.9% of the participants do not want to participate in the decision-making process regarding the knowledge assessment criteria; 24.7%

do not wish to participate in determining the testing and knowledge assessment method; 23.7% do not wish to participate in determining the testing and knowledge assessment content, and 20.3% do not want to participate in establishing the dates for written exams and knowledge assessment.

The results of the  $\chi^2$  test show that there is a statistically significant difference between the pupils in Slovenia and pupils in Austria in detecting the opportunity and desire to participate in the decision-making process for all statements except for the statement that pertains to defining the criteria for knowledge assessment. Pupils attending schools in Austria have an advantage in all indicated opportunities for participating in the decision-making process in testing and knowledge assessment.

We were also interested in the possible desire for pupil participation in the selection of in-class student grouping and use of tools and media in class. The results are indicated in Table 2.

Table 2

*$\chi^2$  - test result for statements by students about participation opportunities and preferences in decision-making on the within-class student grouping and use of tools/media in class regarding country*

Statement		Students from Slovenia		Students from Austria		TOTAL		$\chi^2$ - test results
		f	f%	f	f%	f	f%	
Decisions about within-class student grouping (individual, with friends in a group, etc.)	<u>I can participate</u> in my school	125	27.3	123	38.2	248	31.8	$\chi^2 = 17.832$ P = .000
	<u>I cannot participate</u> in decision-making in my school but <u>I want to</u>	235	51.3	162	50.3	397	50.9	
	<u>I neither can participate</u> in decision-making in my school <u>nor do I want to</u>	98	21.4	37	11.5	135	17.3	
Which tools/media I want to use in class (textbook, books, computer, internet, TV).	<u>I can participate</u> in my school	91	19.9	84	26.1	175	22.4	$\chi^2 = 6.794$ P = .033
	<u>I cannot participate</u> in decision-making in my school but <u>I want to</u>	252	55.0	178	55.3	430	55.1	
	<u>I neither can participate</u> in decision-making in my school <u>nor do I want to</u>	115	25.1	60	18.6	175	22.4	

When selecting the in-class student grouping and use of tools and media in class, 31.8% of the participants are able to participate in the decision-making process on whether they will work individually or in a group during class. When selecting tools and media that they wish to use during class, 22.4% said that they had the opportunity to participate in decision-making.

Pupils who do not have the opportunity to participate in the decision-making regarding the in-class student grouping and use of tools and media in

class wish that they could. More than half of the participants stated that they wish to participate in the selection of tools and media used during class, as well as whether they will work individually or in a group; 22.4% of the participants stated that they do not wish to participate in the decision-making regarding the selection of tools or media used during class, while 17.3% of the participants do not want to participate in the decision-making regarding whether they should work individually or in a group during class.

There is also a significant statistical difference in this field in detecting the opportunity and the desire to participate in the decision-making process. Pupils attending schools in Austria perceive more options to participate in the decision-making process. This result is congruent with the option to participate in the decision-making process provided to pupils by Austrian school legislation, because the School Act (1986) specifies that a pupil has the right to participate in class management and the selection of teaching tools within his capacity, and he also has the right to be heard and to express his suggestions and opinions.

Furthermore, we wished to review the opportunities and desire to participate in the decision-making process regarding the selection of teaching content and amount of homework. The results are indicated in Table 3.

Table 3

$\chi^2$  - test result for statements by students about participation opportunities and preferences in decision-making on the selection of teaching content and the amount of homework regarding country

Statement	Students from Slovenia		Students from Austria		TOTAL		$\chi^2$ - test results
	f	f%	f	f%	f	f%	
Choosing seminar paper topics.	<u>I can participate</u> in my school	239	52.2	203	63.0	442	56.7
	<u>I cannot participate</u> in decision-making in my school but <u>I want to</u>	150	32.8	90	28.0	240	30.8
	<u>I neither can participate</u> in decision-making in my school <u>nor do I want to</u>	69	15.1	29	9.0	98	12.6
Decisions about the amount of homework.	<u>I can participate</u> in my school	76	16.6	67	20.8	143	18.3
	<u>I cannot participate</u> in decision-making in my school but <u>I want to</u>	275	60.0	213	66.1	488	62.6
	<u>I neither can participate</u> in decision-making in my school <u>nor do I want to</u>	107	23.4	42	13.0	149	19.1
Decisions about what will be taught in class.	<u>I can participate</u> in my school	55	12	50	15.5	105	13.5
	<u>I cannot participate</u> in decision-making in my school but <u>I want to</u>	225	49.1	196	60.9	421	54.0
	<u>I neither can participate</u> in decision-making in my school <u>nor do I want to</u>	178	38.9	76	23.6	254	32.6

The pupils stated that teachers are giving them more opportunities to participate when selecting themes for written papers; 56.7% of the participants observed participation. The pupils perceived fewer options in regard to the amount of homework (18.3%). The possibility of being included in the decision-making process in regard to the topic treated during class is even lower: this is perceived by only 13.5% of the participants. The reasons for such a low percentage of inclusion of pupils in the selection of topics can be found in specifically determined curricula, in which the majority of the content is compulsory (i.e. Schmidt, 2001).

Likewise, the pupils that do not have the option to participate in the decision-making process wish that they did: 62.6% of the participants wish to participate in the decision-making regarding the amount of homework. More than half (54.0%) wish to participate in the decision-making process regarding the treated topics, and 30.8% when determining written paper topics.

Again, there are pupils that do not wish to participate in this type of decision-making. Specifically, 32.6% of the participants do not want to be involved in the decision-making regarding the selection of topics treated during class. Less than 20% wish to participate in the remaining two topics.

The results of the  $\chi^2$ -test show that there is a significant statistical difference between the pupils from Slovenia and Austria regarding all three statements. Pupils who are attending schools in Austria have more opportunities to participate in the decision-making here as well, which can be, in our opinion, attributed to more opportunities to participate in the decision-making, which is granted to the pupils in this field by the Austrian legislation (School Act, 1986).

Table 4 indicates the results of testing the participation opportunities and preferences in the decision-making on the seating arrangement and the classroom rules.

Table 4

$\chi^2$  - test result for statements by students about participation opportunities and preferences in decision-making on the seating arrangement and the classroom rules regarding country

Statement	Students from Slovenia		Students from Austria		TOTAL		$\chi^2$ - test results
	f	f%	f	f%	f	f%	
	<u>I can participate</u> in my school						
	167	36.5	204	63.4	371	47.6	
Setting the seating arrangement	<u>I cannot participate</u> in decision-making in my school but <u>I want to</u>						
	185	40.4	92	28.6	277	35.5	$\chi^2 = 61.557$ P = .000
	<u>I neither can participate</u> in decision-making in my school <u>nor do I want to</u>						
	106	23.1	26	8.1	132	16.9	
Setting classroom rules	<u>I can participate</u> in my school						
	94	20.5	81	25.2	175	22.4	
	<u>I cannot participate</u> in decision-making in my school but <u>I want to</u>						
	204	44.5	181	56.2	385	49.4	$\chi^2 = 24.837$ P = .000
<u>I neither can participate</u> in decision-making in my school <u>nor do I want to</u>							
	160	34.9	60	18.6	220	28.2	

The pupils stated that 47.6% of them can influence the seating arrangement, while 22.4% of the participants can participate in decision-making in regard to the classroom rules.

The majority of the pupils that do not have the opportunity to participate wish that they could; 49.4% of the participants wish to have the opportunity to be involved in the decision-making process in regard to the classroom rules, while 35.5% wish to be involved with the seating arrangement.

There are also pupils that do not wish to be involved in the decision-making process in regard to determining the classroom rules (28.2%) and determining the seating arrangement (28.2%).

The results of the  $\chi^2$ -test show that there is a statistically significant difference between the pupils in Slovenia and the pupils in Austria.

The frequencies show that students from our study see fewer opportunities for participation in decision-making in comparison with students from other similar studies (see Grundmann et al., 1998; Grundmann & Kramer, 2001; Fatke & Schneider, 2005; Kurth-Buchholz, 2011). Fatke and Schneider (2005) found that 76.4% of students participated in decision-making about the seating arrangement (47.6% in our study); 51.0% of students participated in decision-making about the choice of topics (13.5% in our study); 50.9% of pupils could participate in setting classroom rules (22.4% in our study); and students from this study also perceived more opportunities (49.0%) for setting written exam dates (40.3% in our study).

The  $\chi^2$  - test results show a statistically significant difference between students in Slovenia and Austria in the perception of opportunities to participate and the desire to do so in all statements of the research area, apart from the statement regarding the definition of knowledge assessment criteria.

Students attending schools in Austria are ahead in terms of all the given opportunities for participation in decision-making. Such a result is somewhat surprising since the ICCS results (2009) show that Slovenian students attribute greater significance to participation than their Austrian peers do, as well as taking part in various activities within school more frequently (see Schulz, Ainley, Fraillion, Kerr, & Losito, 2010). One of the factors that has a positive impact on the opportunities to participate in the decision-making for pupils who are attending schools in Austria is the legislative foundation for participation since formal presentation or pupil participation in decision-making is regulated better in Austria. At the same time, the Austrian legislation directly emphasises or ensures the right for the pupils to participate in the class management and selection of teaching methods according to their abilities, as well as for them to be heard and be able to express their opinion. Likewise, the Austrian legislation prescribes to the management that it needs to support all forms of pupil representation.

It should also be emphasised that students from Slovenian schools are less interested in participation than their peers in Austria are.

In our opinion, students in Slovenia show such low preparedness for participation because they have lacked sufficient opportunities for participation in decision-making, which is why they never developed the skills needed for it (e.g. Baacke & Brücher, 1982).

## Conclusion

The findings of our study suggest that student participation remains a difficult goal to achieve since more than half of the participants only participate in decision-making related to defining seminar themes. Many authors (Bock, 2010; Kurth-Buchholz, 2011; Reith, 2007) state that student participation greatly depends on the teachers and there is a lot of unused potential in their preparedness and capability to enable participation. The question is, whether the teachers want pupils who actively co-create the teaching process, since Elke Kurth Buchholz (2011) proved in her study that students want more opportunities in class than their teachers think.

The literature mentions that students do not wish to participate. Therefore, Reichenbach (2006) states that many students do not feel the need to

participate in decision-making. Our study reached different conclusions, since more students are opting for participation in decision-making in all defined areas than there are students who do not feel the need to participate.

The study's findings suggest that students attending schools in Austria have more options to participate in decision-making, which does not coincide with the ICCS (2009) determinations.

In regard to the results acquired from students attending school in Slovenia, the majority does not wish to participate in decision-making. In our opinion, the reasons for such low preparedness to participate in decision-making among students in Slovenia could be explained by the fact that they were not given enough opportunities to develop their innate participation competences (see Baacke & Brücher, 1982).

It needs to be emphasised that the participation of students in class depends on the opportunities given to them by the teachers and on the preparedness of the students to take advantage of them. If we want student participation to become a permanent teaching practice, teachers need to have quality education and training. The teachers who allow students to participate in decision-making in class need to understand what participation is, and not only the theory. They need a deeper understanding of the concepts and teaching methods that contribute to successful involvement of students. Only deeper understanding of this field will allow the teachers to trust their own knowledge and capabilities needed for student involvement. Trained teachers will give the student the option to participate in decision-making and provide the conditions to develop participation competences in order to feel competent when taking on participation related responsibilities.

We believe that student participation can be improved mainly with planned training and teacher empowerment in this field.

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