



The Management of Student's Virtual Money – Sensibilisation and Learning for Life

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Abstract

The advanced technological age, marketing and society of the abundance in which we live, have a strong influence on the consumption and eating habits of the children. Every day in schools, these little human beings make autonomous choices and their parents, despite seeking to control and know their actions, cannot do it entirely for many reasons. The study was carried out in a group of the fifth grade and their results were subjected to a descriptive and inferential analysis, in which the purpose was to study the relation of some of the variables in question. The conclusions point for example to the parents' lack of knowledge in what concerns the type of consumption and on how their students spend their money. So it can be said that the role of the school in raising responsible citizens in managing their money is a necessary and continuous learning throughout the school life.

Key words: citizenship, consumption, money, health.

Introduction

The development of educational programs for citizenship can prevent phenomena that may have a negative impact on society. It is expected that learning and education for citizenship become a priority. The Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (2010) points out objectives and guiding lines to the member states in formulating their policies, legislation and practices. In this document it is stated that "every person living on their territory should have access to education for citizenship" (p. 3) and also that "the effectiveness of this learning involves mobilizing numerous agents, including those responsible for policy development, educational professionals, learners, parents, educational institutions, educational authorities, officials, youth organizations, media and communities" (p. 3).

The Somosaguas Institute for Educational Studies refers to education for citizenship as "the need to significantly intervene in the socialization process of children and adolescents to enable the development of their ability to perceive, understand, interpret, and act in society" (Aguilar et al., 2002, p. 12). Afonso (2005) also states that "school must be an organization and a space where you build and live daily citizenship" (p. 16).



At school, students are challenged to discover new skills, new experiences, to overcome limits and to confront risks. Physical, mental and social well-being can only be ensured with proper education. Machado (2015) emphasizes the importance of education of young students as:

a shared responsibility that requires the effort of the whole society represented by those who live with him in the family, at school and in the community and should be seen as an investment in the physical, cognitive and socioemotional of young people and in the future of the country (p. 61).

This author believes that although the basic responsibility is the family, this also applies to school and teachers that, in specific circumstances, may even play a leading role in this.

There is no single way to operationalize it together young people, but there is one aspect in which most theorists and researchers agree: it is needed and more than being a trend or novelty, it is a priority of education. In this study we wanted to cover three dimensions of citizenship: consumer education, financial education and health education.

We are all citizens. We are all consumers and school, as a citizenship space, is also a place of consumption. Associated with consumption comes money. Contemporary societies show a high degree of monetization as satisfying a large part of our needs involves the use of a monetary system and access to money. Santos (2015) states that:

life is influenced by money (or by the lack of money). And, as stated in the popular saying that suggests that 'if you cannot beat it ... join it, it is not possible to escape it. It's better to learn to live with (and without) it (p. 16).

The European Central Bank (ECB) (2009) in a publication about money stated that "money is what money does" (p. 17). That is, money is not what is but what it does. Money is therefore defined by what it does, not by what intrinsically it can be. At school students manage their money becoming themselves economic agents. Regardless of whether or not they have access to the School Social Action (socio-educational support measures for students in households with an unfavorable economic situation), the way students manage their money can have a direct interference with their health. At school they acquire goods and services in most cases without the supervision of an adult.

In the Ottawa Charter (1986) it is stated that "health is built when we simultaneous care for ourselves and for the others, having the ability to make decisions and have control over the circumstances of life itself" (p. 4). We believe that having knowledgeable and economically enlightened students, they are more sensitive to the issue of healthy consumption, and this should be the ultimate goal of all countries. We cannot forget that in our country

the major health problems, in terms of population and public health, are related to inadequate habits and lifestyles, and its prevention or correction depends on changing attitudes and behaviors. We can only achieve this goal if we negotiate and present alternatives, and create habits and options for healthy lifestyles, which are an added value and promote an ethical and socially correct attitude (Cordeiro, 2015, p. 100).

Researching on what young people (children and teenagers) know about money and what they do with it is clearly important, as they have an increasing purchasing power. Furnham and Argyle (2000) report that at this level "schools also play a key role in directly educating and shaping economic behavior" (p. 174) so that young people are informed consumers and responsible users of money.

Method

This study combines quantitative and qualitative techniques. The participating class consisted of 14 students of the 5th grade (nine females and five males). Ten students in the class had School Social



Action (ASE) benefit: six with level A benefit (higher financial support) and four with level B benefit. They all used the schools' card that allows them to enter and exit the school gate and to purchase products in the cafeteria, stationery and reprographics. Throughout the school year, we developed 19 awareness sessions with these students, each lasting 50 minutes. In these sessions we held a set of nine tasks. Data collection in this study was made in the school context and it was based on direct observation of sessions and respective tasks performed in class, as well as other classroom documents. At the beginning and at the end of the investigation, a detailed and quantitative data collection was made regarding all the students' individual expenses. These data were imported from GIAE program (School Administration Integrated Management). For all the materials that were made, and so that we could distinguish them, we've created an identification for each student (ID) that consisted of the letter "s" followed by the number that corresponded to the student's position in the class list, for example a1 is the first student in the class list. There were no s9, s11 and s16.

Findings

From the data collected, it was possible to perceive some of the students' trends in terms of money expenditures and parental monitoring that were fundamental to the preparation of the awareness sessions. Thus, with respect to the money spent by the students, we found that most of the money spent by the class was at the school bar, followed by the cafeteria, stationery and reprography (see Figure 1).

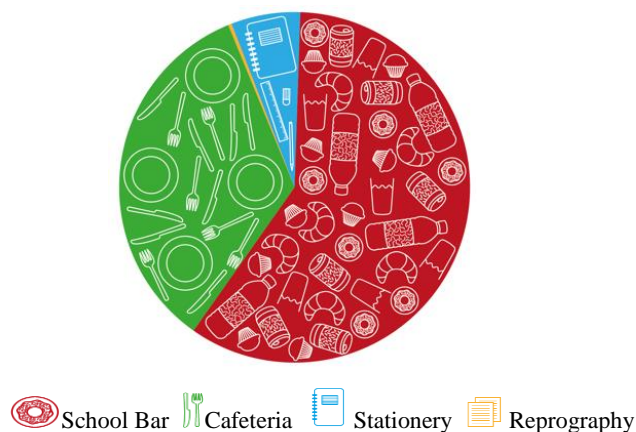


Figure 1. Distribution of student expenditures by sectors

At the school bar, the snack choices that students make are not very healthy and water consumption is low. In Figure 2 are represented the foods consumed by a student over the first term (September to December – 13 weeks) by color. With red color are entirely unhealthy foods (stuffed croissants, cakes, chocolates, sweets, ice cream), with yellow color are less healthy foods (croissant with cheese, butter, ham or mixed, snacks, juices) and with green color are healthy foods (ham and cheese sandwich, milk, yogurt and plain bread, with butter, cheese or ham). The color blue represents the water consumed. This representation has 13 lines, corresponding to the 13 weeks of the first term. Thus the first line corresponds to week 1, the second to week 2 and so on, from the top down to the last line to which week 13 corresponds. As we can see in the picture, this student in the second week (second line) consumed 24 foods. Of these, 11 were entirely unhealthy, seven were less healthy and five were healthy. There is only record of one bottle of water consumed during this week. By the thirteenth week, he had only consumed five foods. In a total of 198 foods consumed, 102 were entirely unhealthy (51.51%), 57 were less healthy (28.79%), 21 were healthy (10.61%) and 18 bottles of water (9.09%) were consumed. The red and yellow colors occupy approximately 80% of the students' consumption, which is a worrying result.

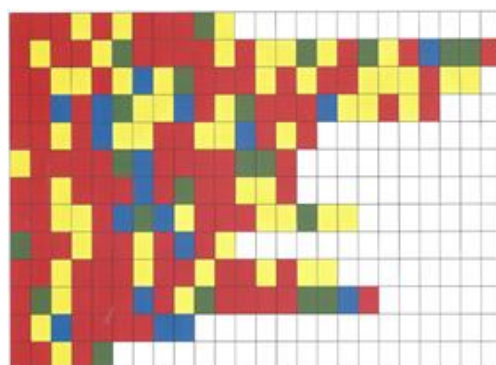


Figure 2. Representation of the foods consumed by a student of the class at the school bar

Another interesting fact that could be observed was the absence of a positive correlation between the financial possibilities of the students' families and their money management. It was expected that students with more financial possibilities would have more expenses, which was not the case. In Figure 3 we present a more detailed analysis of the expenditure performed at the school bar, through which we wanted to understand if there was any relationship between the ASE benefit and the consumption made at the bar. By analyzing the Figure 3 box plot regarding the expenditures of families with or without ASE benefit at the bar, we can see that: (1) the minimum spending values of students with level A benefit are higher than those of students without any ASE benefit, as also the maximum spending values are much higher than those who have level B benefit or no ASE benefit; (2) 25% of students with a level A benefit spends on average more than 25% compared to students without ASE benefit; and (3) 25% of students with level A benefit spend more than any of the students with level B benefit or no ASE benefit.

Given that the ASE benefit is assigned to students from deprived households, it was expected a reduction in terms of spending by these students, but the mismanagement of money is also undoubtedly a matter of family culture.

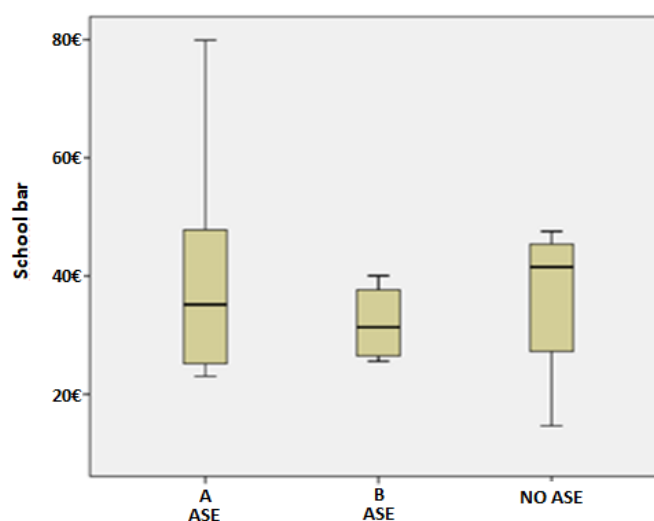


Figure 3. Analysis of students' expenses with and without ASE benefit

After analyzing the data collected with the students, the development of this project was started. The students accepted the challenge of reflecting on their consumption, recognizing the benefits that it would bring them: more health and less expenses. As it can be seen in Figure 4, from the moment the project



began at week 9, the consumption of the class began to decrease. This decrease was more abrupt between week 9 and week 10 than in the following ones, involving a rate of decrease of about 20€ in the first week mentioned and of 11€ in the following ones.

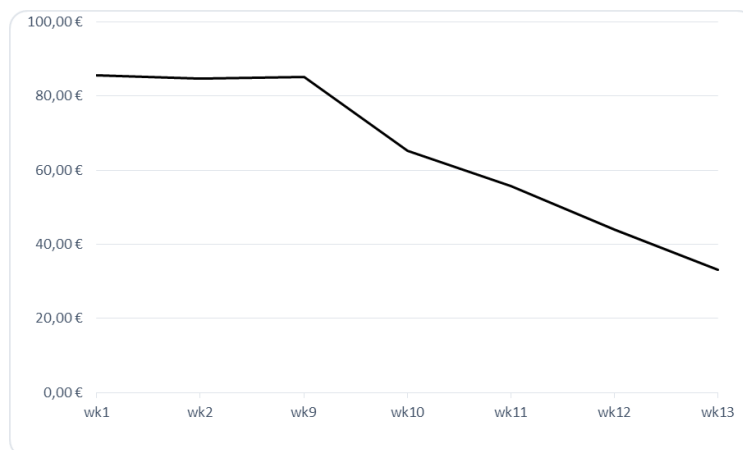


Figure 4. Money spent weekly by the class

In fact students began to consume less and better and also to spend less. Table 1 shows the percentages of foods consumed of each of the colours: red (Red), yellow (Ye), green (Gr) and Blue (Bl), by students in the first term of the school year (named with a 0, for example, Red0 is food with a red colour in the first term) and then third term (named with a 1, for example, Red1 is food with a red colour in the third term). The students are identified by s1, s2, ... For example by observing the first line of the Table 1, we found that the student s1 consumed too much unhealthy foods (45%) in the first term (Red0) but in the third term (Red1) the consumption of the same kind of food dropped significantly rising to 11%.

Table 1. Type of food consumed

ID	% Red0	% Red1	% Ye0	% Ye1	% Gr0	% Gr1	% Bl0	% Bl1
s1	45	11	31	52	16	22	8	15
s2	15	15	18	15	58	60	10	10
s3	11	0	10	10	73	90	6	0
s4	14	34	23	21	58	28	5	17
s5	23	25	29	25	44	25	5	25
s6	38	0	38	33	5	67	19	0
s7	35	25	9	0	33	50	23	25
s8	21	14	34	71	38	14	8	0
s10	39	0	32	20	19	60	10	20
s12	22	0	13	0	35	60	31	40
s13	43	11	46	33	8	56	3	0
s14	52	44	29	28	11	17	9	11
s15	24	7	29	20	30	67	17	7
s17	33	6	20	6	36	81	11	6
Average	29	14	26	24	33	50	12	13

In average the consumption of unhealthy foods by the students decreased 16% (Red) and the consumption of less healthy foods (Yellow) also decreased by 2%. The consumption of healthy food (Green) increased from 33% to 50% and water consumption (Blue) increased by 1%.



In what concerns the students' average daily expenses, Figure 5 shows the variation of the same ones during the school year: on the first term (september to december), second term (january to april) and third term (may and june). As we can see, all the students spent less on the second term comparing to the first term, excepting one student (s2) who increased his daily expenses and another student (s5) that maintained the same expenses. Comparing the second and the third term, we noticed a slight rise within five students, one of them maintained the same expenses, and eight of the students kept spending even less money. The five students who increased their expenses, three of them (s7, s10, s14), kept their expenses lower regarding the first term, one of the students equaled the average spending of the first term (s15) and only the student s1 who, in the second term, had managed to reduce expenses, in the third term spent more money with an average higher value comparing the first term. In general, we considered these results to be very satisfactory and they reflect the positive effect of the tasks developed among the students throughout the school year.

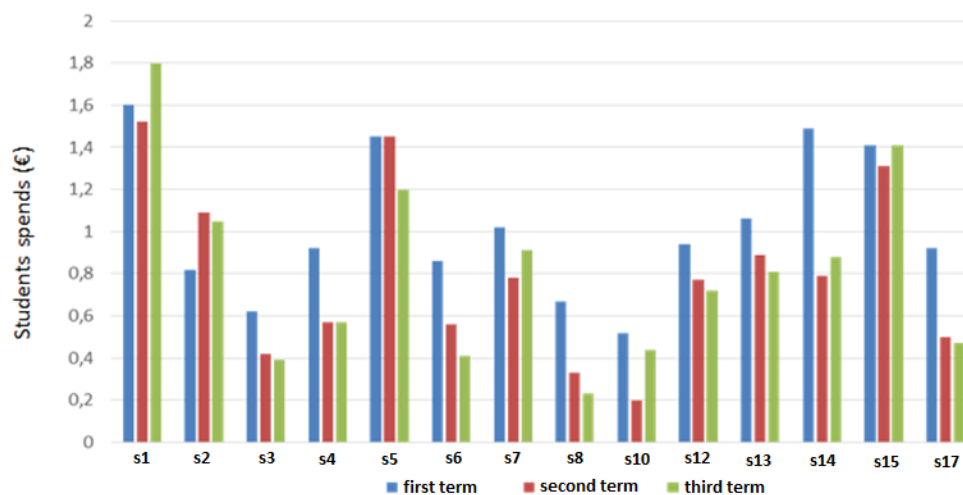


Figure 5. Students' average daily expenses

Regarding the loading of students' cards¹, we tried to understand if there was any relation between the money the students had on the card and their expenses, that is, if towards any of the types of loading categorized, the students showed a better money management. We named by category 1, all the loadings less than 5€; Category 2 the loadings with the exact amount of 5€; Category 3 for loadings of values higher than 5€ and less than 10€; Category 4 exact amounts of 10€ and lastly category 5 for loadings higher than 10€. Table 2 shows the average amount of money spent by days in each category.

Table 2. Average amount of money spent by categories

	<i>Categories</i>				
	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>
Average €/d	0.61	1.01	2.46	1.44	1.46

The most efficient loading category, until week 13, for the students, that is the week in which they spent less, was the first week showing amounts below 5€. In this category the students spent an average of 0.61€ per day (see Table 2). Category 1 follows category 2 and then category 4. Finally, in this order

¹ In school students have a student card that is like a bank card with money for purchases in school.



comes category 5 with loadings higher than € 10 and category 3, with loadings between 5€ and 10€ with a daily average of 2.46€.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In view of the characteristics and mainly all the weaknesses presented, we conclude that all the concerns about citizenship education made in the literature review are justified. Education for consumption, health and the use of money by pupils in schools is required. Younger people need to learn to use money, to possess it, to spend it and to spare it.

In this regard educators should promote awareness and reflection on the use of money with their students. These are able to change students' behavior and attitudes towards consumption, saving money and health. Knowing how to think about your consumption, your health, your expenses, knowing the reasons for them and getting them to know your needs and those of others, it's crucial.

It is recommended that children do not have a lot of money on virtual cards to avoid getting accustomed to spending it unreasonably. When they have more than they need, they easily spend it on superfluous consumptions.

It is good to get the student to plan and to know what they eat and what they spend in school. Knowing how to choose what they need, what is healthier. Teach them to take care of their health, to prepare for the future, for life.

Helping them to live with daily self-discipline is essential.

The capacity for self-control allows the human being to own himself, but in order to achieve it he has to train, to learn in the most ordinary things of daily-life, including his expenses in school.

It is imperative that parents, guardians (primary caregivers) develop criteria to support their learners to use money properly and to save it.

Getting children to think about why they spend and getting them to know their real needs is critical for the younger ones. Students have to learn how to manage the small amounts they receive. Knowledge implies practice. If we want the younger ones to know how to manage money, they have to practice it, this knowledge has to be taught through experience.

It is advisable to take every opportunity so that the student understands the value of money, what is the money for, how much it costs parents and caregivers to earn it.

Thus, from an early age, parents have to involve their children in the family budget and request their collaboration in their management. Money does not fall from the sky, and realizing that your gain implies effort and work is critical for the young. At school, students should not have too much money to avoid getting used to wasting it. It is vital to save the money that parents give them.

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