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ANALYTIC REPORT

Impact of pupils' psychological
wellbeing on learning outcomes



EduPod 4



KEC

Qendra për Arsim e Kosovës
Kosova Education Center

The project Innovating Development for Education Advancement - **IDEA 2022**, is funded by the Office of the European Union in Kosovo (EUOK) and implemented by Kosova Education Center (KEC). With the aim to improve the quality of education, the project seeks to identify core issues in the field of education in Kosovo by expanding opportunities for public debate by means of podcasts as innovative technology. These discussions include key parties involved in the education system, such as students, teachers, parents, policymakers etc. who come together to share their thoughts compare points of view.

The series of podcasts **EduPod** is the first of its kind in Kosovo, as the first podcast that focuses specifically on issues of education in this form. EduPod seeks to expand the outreach of education debate by allowing the voices of all parties to be heard, with special focus on students themselves. These analytical reports contain summaries of the discussions and recommendations from the podcasts.

Design: **envinion**

This report is prepared with the support of the one-year project Innovating Development for Education Advancement - **IDEA 2022**, funded by the Office of the European Office in Kosovo (EUOK) and implemented by Kosova Education Center (KEC), as part of the Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) signed between KEC and EUOK in November 2019. The content of this publication shall not in any way reflect the opinion of the European Union.



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Introduction

“EduPod”, the first podcast with a specific educational/instructional character in Kosovo, was launched on March 23, 2022, under the Innovating Development for Education Advancement – IDEA 2022 project, funded by the Office of the European Union in Kosovo and implemented by the Kosova Education Center, KEC. The IDEA 2022 project seeks to improve the quality of education by employing broad-based public debates to identify and address education issues in Kosovo.

The ‘Impact of pupils’ psychological wellbeing on learning outcomes’ podcast is the fourth in a series of podcasts planned during this program year. This podcast was a continuation of previous topics that focused on educational experiences during the pandemic, inequalities in education, and pupil expectations for quality education, since almost all previous podcasts were dominated by the discussion on the emotional state and mental wellbeing of pupils. The purpose of this podcast was to analyze the psychological aspect of pre-university level pupils in the course of the learning process and in the school environment, as well as its impact on pupil learning outcomes.

The World Health Organization (WHO), in collaboration with UNESCO and UNICEF, in 1995 initiated the idea “Schools as health promoters”, an initiative that puts mental health and the promotion of wellbeing at the forefront of school activities (WHO, n.d.). According to Orhan Z., we must emphasize the fact that emotional skills are the basis for all kinds of lessons and other skills, therefore it is said that success in learning does not depend only on the amount of knowledge that pupils manages to acquire during school years, but also from the acquisition of many other skills of social behavior in general. Also, numerous observations show that weak pupils show deficiencies such as: lack of curiosity and self-confidence, being impatient and inattentive to listening to instructions and asking for help from their teachers or educators, are unable to control many emotional states or antisocial behavior, and cannot express their wishes when socializing with other children.

Furthermore, teaching and learning in schools have strong social, emotional and academic components (Zins, 2004). Pupils usually do not learn alone, but in collaboration with their teachers, in the company of their peers, and with the encouragement of their families. Different emotional states can facilitate or hinder children’s academic engagement, work ethic, engagement, and ultimately their school success. Because relationships and emotional processes affect how and what we learn, schools and families must effectively address these aspects of the educational process for the benefit of all pupils (Elias, 1997).

It is also believed that the wellbeing of children and adolescents, as well as the promotion and improvement of personal and social skills, cannot happen by themselves, but they require that the entire system of educational work in schools, families or organizations and social groups, plan and organize a series of activities and programs that support and foster the transformation, especially of the school and the school environment, into an environment that supports and promotes general psychological wellbeing, which is defined as a state

in which the individual is able to understand their own abilities, can cope with normal stressful life situations, and is able to work productively and make their contribution to the community (DSM-5, 2013). ((2013))

According to various studies, mental health promotion programs in schools play an important role for good mental health, socialization, and learning outcomes. Moreover, the authors Baskaran, Sekar and Kokilavani (2016) emphasize that when pupil concerns and problems are properly addressed, the likelihood of success in school is increased, thus affirming that the promotion of mental health in schools is related to achievement and greater academic competence; reduction in the incidence of problematic behaviors; improvement in the relationships surrounding each child, substantial positive changes in the school and classroom atmosphere. Schools, in practice, have an impact on everyone, including pupils, teachers and staff, and in addition to academic results they can contribute to personal, community and national development.

WHO's publication "Making Every School a School for Health Promotion - Global Standards and Indicators" provides valuable resources for education systems seeking to promote and improve pupil health and well-being through improved governance. According to the World Health Organization, no education system can be effective unless it promotes the health and wellbeing of its pupils, teachers and community (WHO, n.d.). In this publication, based on a large body of evidence, eight global standards are proposed, together with detailed guidelines in 13 implementation areas, as well as accompanying strategies and a process that will allow for country-specific adaptation. Furthermore, the case studies show how health promotion in schools is implemented in both high-income and low- and middle-income countries (WHO, n.d.). Implementing these global standards can improve the health and wellbeing of 1.9 billion school-age children, adolescents and teachers worldwide, yielding a triple dividend for pupils today, adults tomorrow, and future generations of children.

Seeing the importance of this aspect, Edupod 4 elaborated on the topic "Impact of pupils' psychological wellbeing on learning outcomes". The guests in this discussion were specialists of the education sector and experts in the field of psychology and related aspects. The participants mainly discussed the current situation with psychologists in Kosovo schools, sharing personal experiences, referring to existing sources and statistics that highlight the causes and reasons of the current situation, emerging problems and challenges encountered, as well as offering recommendations for concrete solutions.



The participants in the discussion were:

Valdet Plakolli, School Psychologist, and

Arian Musliu, Assistant at the Faculty of Education.

The content of the discussion during EduPod 4 was drafted in close collaboration between the expert engaged as a consultant to realize this podcast and the IDEA 2022 project manager. Initially, the content was prepared based on the defined topic, and was broken down into questions that were addressed to the guests, who previously met and discussed the prepared content, giving their contribution in compiling clear and concise questions so that the discussion would develop naturally by describing the current situation, with special emphasis on the wellbeing of pupils and the impact on school performance.



EduPod 4

was livestreamed on the Facebook page of the Kosovo Education Center (KEC), and by November 3, 2022, reached



1145
viewers



many of whom reacted and/or commented and forwarded or shared the post.

The recording of the podcast in audio and video version was published on the KEC YouTube channel, and the recording in audio (mp3) version was sent for broadcast on Radio Kosova.



Also, the audio version of this podcast has been posted on the electronic platform of the National portal. You can listen to EduPod 4 at any time by clicking on the following links:



KEC Facebook Page:

<https://www.facebook.com/QendraperArsimeKosoves/videos/806305027245117>



KEC official YouTube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4kPvtmjCgyg>



On the National portal:

The results identified from this podcast will be analyzed and addressed by the be pre-university education SCOs network, in order to take joint action by network representatives and launch advocacy initiatives in the field of education.

Discussions

Saranda Rexha, the moderator of the discussion, in her opening remarks introduced the panelists and highlighted their considerable experience and expertise in the topic to be discussed. To start the discussion, **Saranda Rexha** highlighted the World Health Organization's definition of mental health, where it is emphasized that mental health is defined as a state of wellbeing in which each individual develops his or her potential, copes with the stresses of everyday life, works productively and fruitfully and is able to contribute to his/her community. **Saranda Rexha** also pointed out that mental health is also an important component of general health and wellbeing, because it helps us make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in. Moreover, it is a fundamental human right, and is essential for personal, community and socio-economic development. Also in the introduction to the discussion, it was cited that promoting the mental health of children and adolescents is another priority, and it can be achieved through policies and laws that promote and protect mental health, implementing school-based programs and improving the quality of the community. Social and emotional learning programs in schools are among the most effective strategies for promoting the mental wellbeing of children/pupils.

Affirming the aforementioned definition, **Mr. Valdet Plakolli** emphasized that good mental health is more complex and more general, having an impact on many areas of the child's development, in this case of pupils. Also, **Valdet Plakolli** stated that according to global statistics, about 10% of children can potentially have various psychological concerns, and according to him, this data is also relevant in our society. **Valdet** also shared his personal experience as a school psychologist, from the moment when the child's first contacts are made with the school environment and the initial relationships with the teacher, emphasizing that while children are generally healthy and socialized, it must always be remembered that they bring with themselves a family construct that is constantly displayed at school. **Valdet** also indicated that the role of the school psychologist focuses more on identifying and counseling to help children/pupils overcome difficulties, improve behavior and relationships with others, cope with emotionally charged situations that affect their performance at school, in social, behavioral and emotional aspects. School psychologists must work closely with families, teachers, school personnel, and other professionals, to create safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments that strengthen connections between family, school, and community.

According to **Mr. Arian Musliu**, the participation in this podcast organized by KEC and the discussion on the topic, help as a kind of psycho-education, showing that until recently mental health has not been given due importance compared to physical health and that the wellbeing of an individual it is a totality of both systems and we cannot talk about them as separate issues. According to Arian, the role of parents in identifying and dealing with concerns, to ensure that children have adequate social and emotional support, is extremely important and contributes to the mental health of children/pupils, but there is a stigma when discussing pupils' problems, and there is a significant need for awareness and fair information, as well as increased participation in awareness-building activities. However, on a positive note, it was discussed that, compared to previous periods, there is a clear improvement and parents are willing to cooperate. Regarding

the role of the school in the psychological wellbeing of pupils, despite the fact that the school is considered the most suitable institution for children and that it should serve as an effective platform for providing universal programs for all pupils, this is considered a challenge that requires the engagement of everyone to make it happen. Our schools are significantly better than in the past, but there is still room for improvement and increased awareness. Speakers also highlighted the lack of psychologists in schools, multidisciplinary teams and appropriate spaces where pupils can discuss and talk freely, whether about relationships with their peers or teachers.

According to **Arian**, one of the key aspects is the inclusion of multidisciplinary teams within schools, including the restructuring of the manner of work, in order to address the social determinants of health, by developing the norms and socio-emotional skills of peers, through their empowerment in avoiding of harmful and abusive behavior, as well as through initiatives based on children's rights and inclusive education. The inclusion of such teams would allow us to focus on the general wellbeing of children/pupils and not only on academic performance, which also needs improvement. The discussion further deepened into how schools should be for pupils, including infrastructure, inventory, teachers, friendly atmosphere and collaborative climate, while providing safe and accessible environments for all, where children would feel better than in their homes.

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Continuing the discussion on the role of teachers and comparing the teacher training system in the past with the reforms that have taken place in the Faculty of Education, **Arian** asserted that teachers have much more psychological subjects in their preparatory courses and are also prepared to identify problems or atypical behavior that can be referred to a psychologist. According to the speakers, the role of teachers in identification is key and facilitates the psychologist's work, otherwise it is very challenging for school psychologists to deal with all the issues and problems of pupils, as we know that there are about 200 psychologists, while there are over 1300 schools in our country. Among the other challenges of the work of school psychologists, the most sensitive is the issue of referral, since there is no clear system, and even in cases where referral is made, one of the pathways goes through the Child Psychiatry Ward at the UCK, but this creates another problem, which is the length of time it takes to receive the service. However, some issues are regulated and in some municipalities, multidisciplinary municipal teams for the identification of children with special needs are functional and cooperate well with schools, but this is only for a certain group and is not available for all.

Valdet also mentioned his experience during the study visit to Slovenia, where every primary and secondary school has a school counseling office with a mental health professional (psychologist, social worker, or (social) pedagogue). They focus on learning issues and preventive services in the school setting, as well as counseling and referral for children, adolescents and parents. As a result of the discussion, it was emphasized that multidisciplinary teams should be created within the schools, although this may take some time. Another recommendation that needs to be addressed immediately is to change the administrative guidelines for school psychologists, as well as provide space for professionals to contribute, offering toolkits and different trainings so that we can achieve what everyone wants and which is the wellbeing of children.

Conclusions

The participants in Edupod 4 had a very meaningful conversation, and optimistically stated that until the realization of what everyone wants to see in schools, high consistency and great commitment of everyone is required, and the recommendations from this discussion will guide us towards expanding the discussion in meetings or other activities focused on the wellbeing and mental health of pupils. Some of the recommendations provided by this discussion on Edupod, and which should be considered as top priority, are:

- Amendment of the Administrative Instruction issued in 2013, in support of the Law on pre-university education in the Republic of Kosovo, specifically Article 37 paragraph 1 and 2: Selection of employees for the provision of professional services in pre-university educational institutions. (MASHT, n.d.). Article 4 of this Administrative Instruction, in defining the job duties and role of the psychologist, more precisely point 2.4(MASHT, n.d.) on performing other tasks assigned by the director of the institution, creates ambiguity and opportunities for different adaptations that often do not coincide with the role and responsibilities of the psychologist, which is recommended to be clarified by clearly defining the role, tasks and responsibilities.
- Creating inclusive, safe and attractive environments within the school, is another recommendation that emerged from the discussion. A school that contributes to all areas of child/pupil wellbeing must constantly strengthen its capacity to provide a healthy environment for learning, living and working.
- In mental health services for children it is recommended to include the school as an institution and its role in the identification, counseling, referral and follow-up of children/pupils with mental problems, due to the fact that pupils, during and after receiving professional treatment, will return and are part of the school, and the school's role in providing mental health services should be integrative rather than exclusionary.
- The inclusion of multidisciplinary teams is recommended - teams composed of specialists from several fields, such as doctors, nurses, psychologists, social workers, psycho-social counselors, occupational therapists, speech therapists, developmental therapists, or other professionals, who act in a coordinated manner, according to protocols related to maintaining and improving children's mental health.
- It is recommended that tool kits tailored to specific country needs be provided (APA, n.d.), e.g., by providing appropriate, quality instruments, while providing support training for professionals which would enable their ethical and appropriate use.
- It is recommended to provide training for teachers in order to facilitate the identification of concerns and possible problems of children/pupils. Raising awareness of the importance and promotion of the psychologist's role in providing professional support to children/pupils, should be awarded particular importance by all parties involved in the education system in our country.

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