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## **THE ROLE OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION**

**Abstract:** Education is one of the key factors on which the quality of society's social and economic life depends. It represents an activity of public interest, and with the strength of its quality, it operates on two levels: the level of personal development of citizens and the level of social development. The development of education contributes to the creation of significant opportunities for the inclusion, participation, and influence of each individual on the community's life.

Through the process of decentralization, the municipalities in the Republic of Macedonia became directly responsible for defining and implementing the education development strategy at the local level (starting from the analysis of the environment, through the creation of strategic documents, to their implementation, evaluation, and control). This gave municipalities the authority to make key strategic decisions for the development of municipal primary and secondary schools.

The role of local self-government in promoting the educational process in the municipality comes to the fore through supporting the cooperation of schools with the public sector, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, and volunteer associations, through the provision of appropriate resources (financial, spatial, material-technical, personnel and other resources) and improvement of the conditions for carrying out the educational process.

Planning the future in education is not a separate process of local self-government, but implies the involvement of all affected parties, especially the involvement of teachers and students as direct participants in the educational process. That is why it is necessary to respect the opinions and educational needs of teachers and students when determining the strategic and programmatic setting of education in the local context and to include them in the creation and development of educational policies at the municipal level.

**Keywords:** Local self-government, Strategy, Education, Teachers, Students

### **Introduction**

Acceptance of the Concept of basic education, changes in the conditions for the implementation of the educational process as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the need for digitization of education, and the need to be included in the existing state, regional and international educational streams, imply the need to redefine educational policies of municipalities following the Education Strategy of the Republic of Macedonia for 2018-2025.

Municipalities, following the legal competencies they have in the field of education and the existing conditions in the educational system, should define their appropriate local education strategy, which will be based on a clear determination of the main challenges in the educational sector and a careful definition of priority areas that should be given attention in the coming period. Analogous to the role that local self-government has in education, local authorities must define appropriate activities to support education, which will be taken into account when drawing up the municipal budget and programming the next phases of educational development in the Municipality, after the development of education in the Republic of North Macedonia.

## Education and Decentralization

The future of the upcoming generations is undoubtedly related to the provision of top-quality education that will keep pace with the frequent changes in the environment.

The analysis of the situation in education showed that one of the key problems in the sphere of education is emphasized centralization. With the centralist arrangement of the educational system, educational institutions were brought into the role of immediate implementers of educational policy, with the impossibility of fulfilling the role of immediate creators of their activity. (National program for the development of education in the Republic of Macedonia 2005, p. 22-23)

Decentralization of education contributes to strengthening responsibility for education, raising the quality of educational services, and efficient use of resources in education. In addition to the transfer of competencies to local self-government units, decentralization also implies strengthening the autonomy of schools.

The process of decentralization in the Republic of Macedonia began on July 1, 2005, and thus local governments assumed responsibility for education. Municipalities have taken ownership of school buildings, their maintenance, and student transportation, for which the Government provides a dedicated subsidy. The decentralization of education was carried out in two phases.

The first phase of decentralization of education included the transfer of ownership of the school building, its maintenance, and student transportation, for which the Government allocates a dedicated subsidy.

The second phase, which began in 2007, includes the municipality's responsibility for teachers, and technical and administrative staff. Competencies for primary and secondary education (including their financing) were in this phase transferred to the local level in all municipalities that entered the second phase of decentralization, by the Law on Financing of Local Self-Government Units. Three levels can be identified within the system of primary and secondary education: the central level of government, the level of local self-government, and the school level. Each level has its rights, obligations, and competencies (Review of decentralization 2008, p. 13).

Decentralization in education implies the participation and coordination of several participants in education, such as Local Self-Government Units, school principals, parents, and students at the local level and the Ministry of Education and its branches at the national level. (Overview of decentralization 2008, p.14).

Through the process of decentralization, Macedonian municipalities became directly responsible for the development of education at the local level, as well as for the implementation of the entire process of strategic management (from environmental analysis, through the creation of strategic documents, to implementation, evaluation, and control). They became managers who should make key strategic decisions for the development of municipal primary and secondary schools.

By the new responsibilities in education, which the municipality received through decentralization, there was a need to reform the old school management system and create a local education strategy to improve the management and quality of education in the coming years. Therefore, it is of great importance for the local self-government to create a coherent plan that will unify (integrate) the most important, long-term goals of the municipality, its policy, and programs. With this strategic plan, the local self-government will get a clear picture of the situation in the education sector and will strive in the right direction to improve the quality of teaching, improve the quality of school equipment and improve school premises. (Committee for Education at the Municipality of Tearce with the help of the PLUUM team, 2007, p.3)

Planning the future in education is not a separate process of local self-government, but implies the involvement of all interested parties and respect for the priorities of all participants and interested parties in education, starting from priorities at the national level and down to the smallest unit in educational local government. Strategic planning depends on the priorities of students, teachers, school administration, school board, local community, local government, and the state.

Each of these interested parties has its visions and priorities, and only through their coordination and togetherness is it possible to create conditions for the successful implementation of educational policies and the realization of a quality educational process.

## **Competencies of Municipalities in Education**

In Article 22 of the Law on Local Self-Government from 2002, Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia no. 5, 2002, p. 3), one of the original responsibilities of local self-government units in education. The local self-government should fully recognize and respect the importance and role of education in the development of the municipality and the complexity of the competencies that the municipality has in education. The municipality must recognize the need for quality human, material, and financial resources, on which the quality implementation of this competence depends.

The municipality implements its powers in education through the Department of Education, which monitors work in primary and secondary education in the municipality, analyzes the situation and gives initiatives, proposes measures and activities for their improvement and problem solving, performs planning and financing tasks, and the participation of representatives of the Municipality in governing bodies in primary and secondary schools and student dormitories, proposes measures and activities to raise the level of student standards, and provides information and data on the activities of the Municipality in the field of primary and secondary education.

In carrying out the tasks for which the Department of Education is responsible, the guidelines of the Government Institutions, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Institute for the Development of Education and Training, the Center for Vocational Education, the Center for Adult Education, the State Examination Center, the State Educational Inspection, as well as the guidelines obtained from certain international organizations. The education sector develops and applies mechanisms and tools to implement local strategies, as well as local policies that are in line with the National Education Development Strategy. In this way, through the creation of a development framework, a more complete approach to the management of the extensive matter imposed by education as a field will be enabled. This is necessary, given a large number of schools and a large number of students and teaching staff, that is, the developed network of primary and secondary education in the municipality.

Schools, and thus the Department of Education, plan and implement the content of work according to the guidelines of the Ministry of Education and Science, the Institute for Education Development, and the Center for Higher Vocational Education. The municipality supports the educational process in schools with its powers and the Law on Local Self-Government. Communication between the municipal administration and schools takes place continuously, through various mechanisms: personal visits to the municipal administration, exchange of documents, as well as joint meetings of all schools in the municipality. The municipality respects legal obligations and has appointed representatives to school boards (SB) in all schools. According to their obligations, schools report to the mayor once a year on their work, by submitting annual programs and annual reports.

## **Local Educational Policies in the Function of Supporting Education**

Based on their democratic and autonomous role, as local authorities, municipalities can define their own local goals and priorities in their strategic planning. Each municipality is different and specific to itself. The needs for planning and the capacities they possess are different, so each municipality decides for itself where and to which areas it will focus its attention during planning.

To enable optimal efficiency and successful management of primary and secondary education, which are of great importance to the local community, the Municipality must plan and provide continuous support to primary and secondary schools in the following segments:

- Support educational institutions in the planning and implementation of the Annual programs of school work in classes, outside of classes, and school projects;
- Material and technical equipment of schools;
- Support for students from socially disadvantaged categories;
- Support for students with special educational needs;
- Support for successful individuals and good educational practices

The municipality also supports the work of primary and secondary schools in the area of:

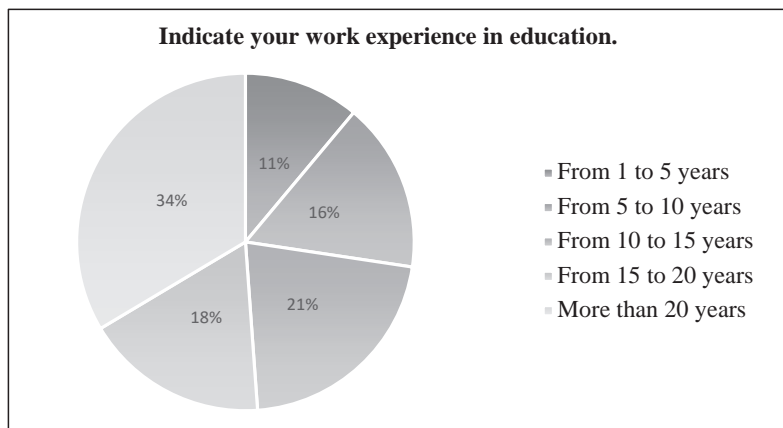
- interethnic integration in education – which consists in supporting the implementation of interethnic integration programs, foreseen in the annual programs of schools in the municipality;
- youth activism – which consists in supporting events, workshops on topics of interest to young people, supporting young people’s ideas for creating a better living environment, etc.;
- health care that includes dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic among young people at the local level, education for health promotion, etc.

To examine the attitudes, opinions, and educational needs of teachers and students of primary and secondary schools in the municipality of Kumanovo regarding the determination of the strategic and programmatic setting of education in the local context and their involvement in the creation and development of the educational system. policy at the municipal level, the research was conducted in 16 primary schools and 5 secondary municipal schools by surveying teachers and students. The subject of the research, in a broader context, is the determination of the inter-institutional connection between local self-government and primary and secondary schools in the area of the municipality of Kumanovo. The survey questionnaire for teachers was answered by 292 teachers who teach in the Macedonian language of instruction and 141 teachers who teach in the Albanian language of instruction, or a total of 433 teachers. The student questionnaire was answered by 557 students who teach in the Macedonian language of instruction and 521 students who attend classes in the Albanian language of instruction, i.e. a total of 1078 students.

Most of the surveyed teachers have more than 20 years of work experience in education (33.6%)

**Chart 1**

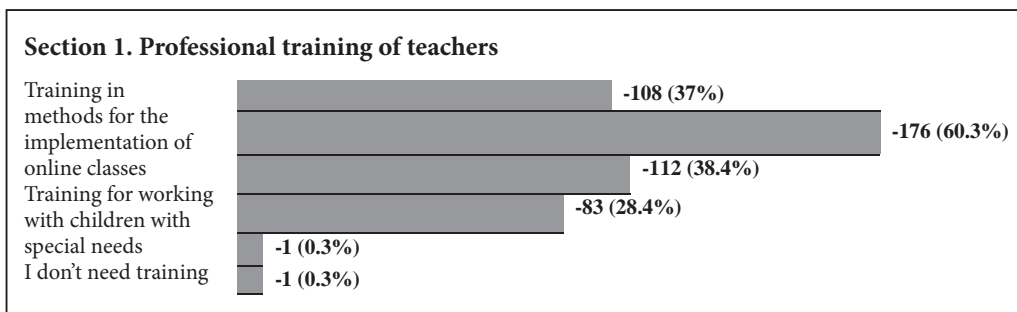
Structure of the sample of surveyed teachers



When asked what kind of training they need, the teachers state that they need the most: training for evaluating students in the conditions of online classes, training for working with children with special needs, and training for methods of conducting online classes.

### Chart 2

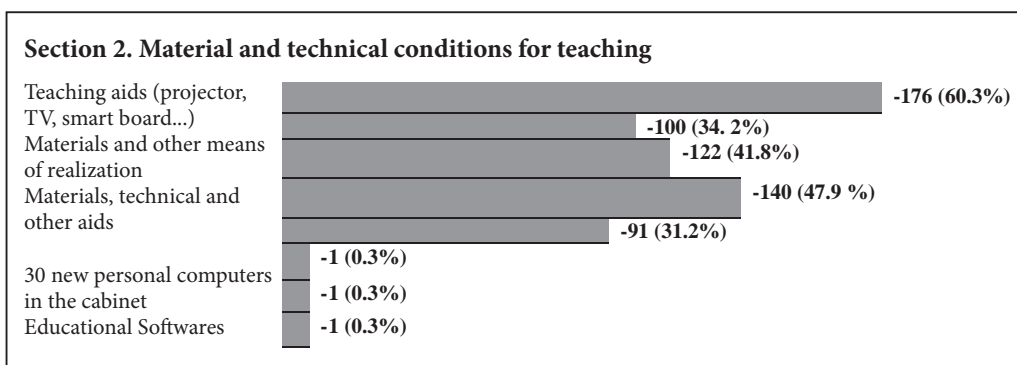
Needs for professional training of teachers



When asked about the necessary resources for teaching, the teachers declared that they needed teaching aids (projector, TV, smart boards, maps, etc.) -60.3%, material and other resources for conducting practical lessons and ICT equipment – 47.9%

### Chart 3

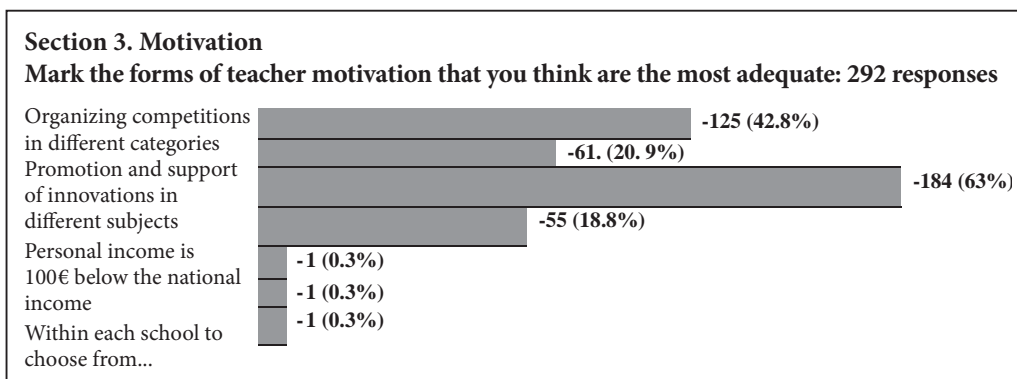
Material and technical needs of teachers



Forms of motivation that, according to teachers, the municipality should support and organize are the promotion and support of innovations in different teaching subjects, and organizing competitions in different categories.

### Chart 4

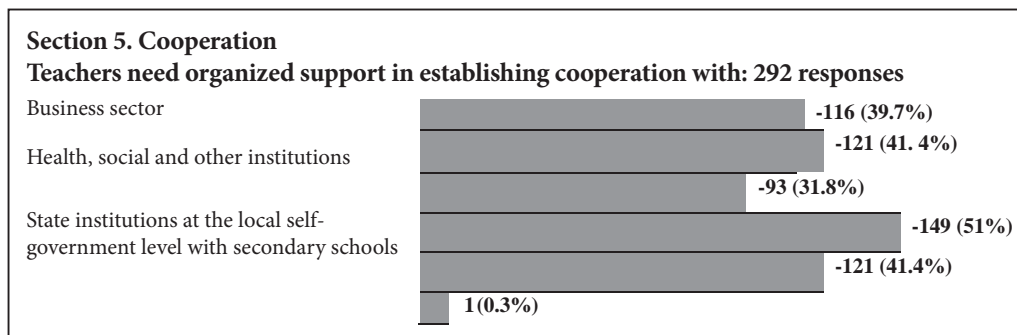
Motivational needs of teachers



According to the research, teachers need organized support and cooperation with state institutions at the level of local self-government, with organs and bodies at the level of local self-government, with the economy, and with health, social and other institutions.

**Chart 5**

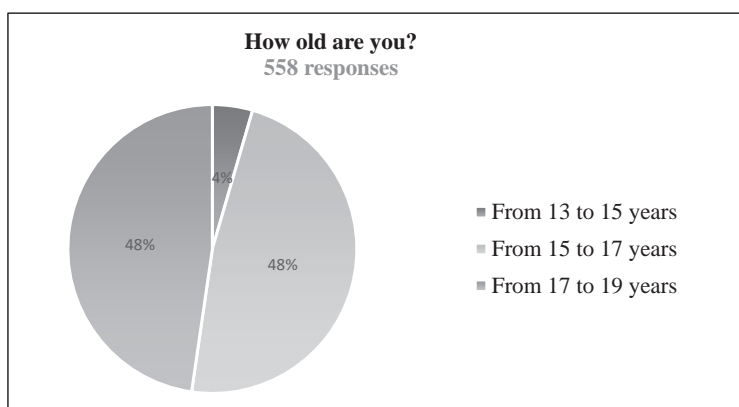
Support needs in cooperation with institutions, etc.



In addition to teachers, students aged 13 to 19 were also surveyed.

**Chart 6**

Structure of the sample of surveyed teachers



To successfully follow the lessons, the students stated that they most needed materials and other resources for conducting practical lessons and ICT equipment.

According to the students' statements in the survey, different student activities should be organized at the municipal level, and the students believe that the following are the most necessary:

1. Cultural and entertainment activities
2. Free professional IT training and
3. Research and innovation in various fields

For the realization of these student activities, according to the opinion of 88.05% of the surveyed students, the Municipality should establish and support the Secondary school Municipal Center. Through the Secondary school Municipal Center, students could organize with the support of the Municipality: public municipal competitions and contests; workshops/lectures in the field of theater, film, music, and fine arts; discussions; forums and meetings with authors, football

players, doctors, professors and other experts from various fields; research from different fields; presentation/exhibition of any good work or project; creation of educational pages and portals for young people; cultural and entertainment activities; sports activities and competitions; street performances for young talented artists; literary clubs; canteen, etc.

## Conclusion

The role of local self-government in the development of education is expressed through the support that the Municipality provides to primary and secondary schools in the implementation of the educational process, in the implementation of project activities, education and support of student activism, support in the local connection of schools for the development of the local community, and the promotion and support of successful school practices and individuals from education.

According to the conducted research, the support that the municipality of Kumanovo should provide to municipal primary and secondary schools should be based on the following conclusions from the research:

- teachers from primary and secondary schools need additional appropriate material and technical means and conditions for teaching, including in pandemic conditions;
- teachers should attend seminars and training on various topics to strengthen their professional development and improve their motivation to work;
- secondary school students need the additional resources they need to successfully attend classes;
- secondary school students need involvement in youth activities organized by the Municipality;
- by the Department for Education of the local self-government of the municipality of Kumanovo, there is a need to promote proposals, requests, and interests of young people;

Forms of support for education and models of cooperation between the Department of Education of the local self-government and competent educational institutions should be included in the municipal Education Strategy.

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## **IS MACEDONIAN SOCIETY READY TO MEET THE NEEDS OF PEOPLE WITH DYSLEXIA?**

**Abstract:** This paper aims to investigate the problem of dyslexia in the Republic of N. Macedonia, in relation to the awareness of the population about this condition, the need for this condition to be treated from an educational point of view and the involvement of the state authorities in the creation of inclusive living conditions for persons with dyslexia, with special focus on education. People with dyslexia are invisible to the institutions in charge of education policy in our country. Evidence for this is the inadequate educational policies and the lack of a precise legal framework that will regulate dyslexia as a specific learning difficulty. There is a big lack of dyslexia professionals and experts in our country. In addition, we are faced with a lack of standardized instruments for the detection of dyslexia. The most devastating fact in our society is the treatment of dyslexia with medication, especially the one where antipsychotic medication is prescribed. Macedonian faculties offer “poor” study programs about dyslexia. The teachers do not study dyslexia during their studies and therefore they are facing problems in recognizing the students with dyslexia. The teaching staff constantly appeals to the institutions to provide quality training to enable them as teachers to know how to recognize and help students with dyslexia. The awareness of the population about this condition today is significantly higher than in 2013, when the term dyslexia was almost unknown. Our society may be slowly but surely moving up with world trends about this condition.

**Keywords:** Dyslexia, Inclusion, Law legislation, Education

### **Introduction**

Dyslexia is a condition in which the brain processes written or spoken language differently. One in ten people on the planet has dyslexia, and the Republic of North Macedonia enters this average as well. Dyslexia can best be described as a combination of abilities and difficulties related to learning processes in several areas, such as reading, writing, spelling, and sometimes mathematics.

For the institutions in charge of creating educational policies in our country, people with dyslexia are invisible. Evidence of this is the unadjusted education policies and the lack of a precise legal framework that will regulate dyslexia as a specific condition that causes learning difficulties.

Dyslexia was the prerogative of medicine until the mid-20th century, but this concept began shifting and dyslexia was treated as an educational problem. Since North Macedonia is more than half a century behind other developed countries, this condition is still treated from a medical point of view, instead of as a learning difficulty.