

Azerbaijan

Country Overview

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Country name

Azerbaijan

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Introduction

Our literature review provides information regarding attempts to establish educational practises for promoting the improvement of social and emotional competences in young children in Azerbaijan. Together with UNICEF, the Azerbaijan government implemented the Basic Life Skills program, which is a well structured curriculum for teaching life changing skills to children. There is also the Strategy of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Children for 2020-2030, where children's rights are prioritised, shifting the focus to fostering the children's ability to express themselves independently, increase social activity, improve leadership qualities and address issues openly (Information on the report to be prepared by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on children's rights at the High-Level Political Forum in 2021, 2021).

As a whole, it is clear that Azerbaijan has a level of awareness on how important it is to teach social and emotional skills from early childhood. This is the focus across various projects and with different strategies.

Development

There is the Strategy of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Children for 2020-2030, where children's rights are prioritised and the focus shifts to ensuring they have the ability to express themselves independently, increase social activity, improve leadership qualities and address issues openly (Information on the report to be prepared by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on children's rights at the High-Level Political Forum in 2021, 2021).

There have been a lot of projects for training teachers established in order to provide psychological support to children, adolescents and their families. Together with UNICEF, the Azerbaijan government has implemented the Basic Life Skills Curriculum. It is a well structured curriculum for teaching life changing skills to children. Through a partnership between UNICEF and the Ministry of Education, and approved by the Azerbaijan Institute of Education (with the financial support of the United Kingdom), an initiative was launched in schools. The project idea consisted of school-based support provided by teachers and psychologists for coping with stressful circumstances, building resilience and developing social and emotional skills. The training is provided through various courses, including strengthening of social and emotional skills, social-emotional learning (Social and emotional skills teachers supported, 2019). The project idea is called Education for all. Some of the topics from the list are: making decisions, managing emotions, developing children's personality, talents and mental abilities; learning to know oneself and others, making effective decisions to live harmonically; evaluating conflict situations, etc. The project uses models and practical methods on how to build life skills for capacity development and quality life.

The National Alliance on Early Childhood Development (a programme developed in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Labour and Social protection of

Populations) has developed a national strategic plan of action and new standards for the early learning and development of children. These standards add value to the preschool agenda. They have reformed the way caregivers work with kids under 6 years of age and provide structure on what and how to offer uniform indicators of physical, mental and social development for children (Republic of Azerbaijan. SABER Country Report, 2018). The strategic plan was developed for a seven year-period (from 2018 to 2025) and is divided in four sectors:

- 1) Social and child protection (Promotion of parent-child relationship for vulnerable families);
- 2) Health (Parenting programs; home visiting programs);
- 3) Nutrition (Breastfeeding promotion), and
- 4) Education (Parent engagement; family-based early childhood education and care (ECEC).

So far, many resources are invested in covering the first three sectors with activities such as – home visit consultations, activities for preschool enrolment, improve access to health and nutrition interventions for families, better accommodation for marginalised children, including children from low socioeconomic background, children in more remote areas, and children with special needs.

The Assembly of Children's Ambassadors was established by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The aim is to develop children's ability to express themselves independently, improve leadership qualities, increase social activity, guiding children in the spirit of active citizenship and the rule of law. It is a group of people and associations (including schools) who meet, discuss and exchange opinions on different topics related to kids' wellbeing. Conferences are organised with the idea to raise awareness and exchange good practices with other countries. Children, together with teachers and parents, can participate and discuss/listen to important topics as violence, social protection, trust, social adaptation, etc. (Information on the report to be prepared by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on children's rights at the High-Level Political Forum in 2021, 2021).

Assessment

As a part of the Schools for Health in Europe Network Foundation (SHE), Azerbaijan has to implement various guidelines, tools, standards or indicators to support schools in becoming a Health Promoting School (HPS). Some tools shared by SHE, such as the SHE rapid assessment tool and the SHE school action planner, are used by the schools in this country (Bessems, et al., 2020). A survey was conducted in 2020 based on existing questionnaires and information sources including the SHE Mapping Survey 2019, the SHE Rapid Assessment Tool and the fifth SHE Factsheet. This is the latest report found. It shows that over 25% of preschools have a Health Promotion programme. The programme consists of 6 components: 1) healthy school policies, 2) the school's physical environment, 3) the school's social environment, 4) individual health skills and action competencies, 5) community links, and 6) health services (Bessems, et al., 2020). We are interested in points 3 and 4. Some of the assessment elements in them are:

Spaces in the canteen, playground, classrooms and corridors are organised to promote student socialisation and wellbeing;

Health education and health promoting activities are included in after-school programs;

Educational professionals (e.g. pedagogists) are available to pupils, parents and teachers to optimise education for example by mapping the support needs of pupils and translate these into action-oriented advice for teachers;

Teaching/learning methods that enhance mental health and wellbeing are part of daily life in schools;

Health literacy and action competence are integral parts of the schools' policies;

E-learning methods are used to promote health skills and action competences of students.

The social element is the observable one – when and how the children behave.

Intervention

UNICEF has supported the implementation of the Additional training designed for school psychologists on Psychological First Aid. It is approved by the Institute of Education as an in-service training programme. Some of the key strategies and tools covered by the training include psychological diagnostics, rehabilitation, information sharing with parents and other techniques for identifying roadblocks and supporting the development of emotional and social skills (Social and emotional skills teachers supported, 2019).

Centre for Innovations in Education (CIE) is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) that works to provide all children access to quality education and social support. Their first initiative is to manage the early childhood education program, Step by Step (SbS), and the teaching methodology and professional development programme, Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking (RWCT). According to the organisation, both programmes have become critical tools for reform and debate in education in Azerbaijan. It is a member of Network of Education Policy Centres (NEPC). Currently the network is a part of the HAND in HAND project, "Social and Emotional Skills for Tolerant and Non-discriminative Societies (A Whole School Approach)", co-funded by the Erasmus+ Key Action 3 Programme of the European Union and the Government of the Republic of Croatia.

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Citation

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