

Serbia

Country Overview

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Country name

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Introduction

The new Preschool Curriculum Framework, symbolically titled 'Years of Ascent', defines the concept of preschool education in Serbia. Preschool promotes programmes that are created through joint participation, in an environment that is inspiring and provocative for children, and where they can freely explore, play, think, cooperate with others, try out and be immersed in the world around them. Although the new curriculum asserts children's freedom of choice, creativity, initiative and openness, the main principles of this curriculum do not relate primarily to children's social and emotional skills. To our knowledge, there are not many projects implemented in preschool education in Serbia, and the ones we found were not specifically related with social and emotional competencies. In Serbia, the social and emotional learning (SEL) programs still have not been adequately applied in educational institutions, and they are not recognized by the relevant ministry. However, the awareness around this topic is slowly changing, primarily in part due to the work of the nongovernmental sector and local community implemented through the international project.

Development

As in some countries, interventions in Serbia for social and emotional skills are related to specific interventions for children with behavioural problems (Pavlović & Klemenović 2019). Many children with basic socioemotional and behavioural problems, and without formal diagnosis (e.g., disorders of the autistic spectrum) do not necessarily receive any help or intervention, while at the same time they represent a challenge that neither parents nor educators can bear (Pavlović & Klemenović, 2019). Further, the preschool institutions have no unique and obligatory instruments to measure for social and emotional skills (or other developmental skills), as well as no national based intervention and programmes for social and emotional learning. Through international projects, non-government organisations work towards improving the conditions of preschool institutions to provide access to education for all children. Also, there is a lack of evidence-based studies related to interventions and programmes for social and emotional learning of preschool children, and most of them include studies related to the intervention and assessment of children with behaviour disorders.

Assessment

Currently, and to our knowledge, there is no significant evidence-based data at the national level outlining the systematic and unique evaluation of practices related to social and emotional skills of preschool children, nor intervention and social-emotional learning programs in preschool institutions. There is no formative or summative assessment during ECEC programmes. It can be concluded that there is no unique system for assessing and monitoring children's skills in the preschool institution, nor the shortcomings of evidence-based studies related to assessment of social and emotional skills of preschool children.

Intervention

One of the most popular projects related to preschool educational reform is the project “Improvement of preschool education in Serbia-IMPRES”, which lasted from 2011 to 2014. IMPRES is a joint project of the Ministry of Education, and Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia and the European Union. The overall objective of the project is to upgrade the conditions of preschool education for children, especially those from vulnerable groups, most notably Roma, through improvement in the quality of preschool programmes and expansion of the capacities of preschool institutions (<https://internationaler-bund.org>).

In 2014, the Vega Youth Centre launched the project “Koba Yagi Toys” as a social enterprise in which women from vulnerable groups produce toys that encourage creativity, independence and empathy. One of the toys include EnimalZ puppets – toys with storytelling cards for the methodology of emotional learning for children. After that, in 2016, a project called “Be a super emotional hero too” was implemented. Their idea was to start a School for Superheroes, within a series of interdisciplinary workshops that focused on the practical and creative problem solving and the development of 21st century skills needed by children. The project was supported by USAID, Trag Foundation, Group 484 and UniCredit Foundation, and Association of Business Women of Serbia and Smart Collective. No formal institutions from the educational system of the Republic of Serbia supported the project (Marić-Jurišić and Kostović, 2016).

References

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