

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES PROMOTING THE STUDENT'S HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract: The professional services in primary schools increasingly take the primacy of an expert core which should and must be promoting effective and efficient teaching. In circumstances as the following: modernization of teaching; introduction of innovative, new approaches in learning / teaching; implementation of "rapid" and sometimes "radical reforms"; occurrence of widespread fluctuation of the teaching personnel; insufficient training for recently employed teachers; the practice of total inclusion of students with special educational needs; occurrences of peer violence and a number of other circumstances greatly complicate the work of the professional services, but at the same time outline the need for them to be put in focus as a highly important unifying and professional element between students, teachers, parents and the entire social community. That is why, by conducting our research, we want to find out if and to what extent the professional services in elementary schools in our country can respond to these crucial challenges. The research includes analysis of accredited study programs at the faculties in the Republic of North Macedonia that depict appropriate profiles of professional associates (undergraduate studies). Furthermore, we focus on the existing personnel of professional services in primary schools in our country, according to the representation of the various profiles of professional collaborators: pedagogue, psychologist, social worker, sociologist, librarian, special educator and rehabilitator; the ratio of the number of professional associates to the number of students in the school; the number of professional associates in relation to the inclusion of students with special educational needs, etc. The survey covered 10% of primary schools, that is, 34 primary schools throughout the country, while the representation of schools where teaching is conducted in different teaching languages and schools from urban and rural environments was observed. By analysing the most significant indicators, we hope to find out if and to what extent/quality, the existing professional services can realize the given scope of work and influence the efficiency and effectiveness of teaching. The conclusions and recommendations should benefit the educational policy makers: the Ministry of Education and Science, the Bureau for Development of Education, the local self-government and more during the conceptualization and implementation of systemic changes (reforms) in primary education, as well as during planning for the professional and career development of this profile of employees in primary schools. The results will be of particular benefit to the faculties that produce personnel who should work in the professional services of primary schools and certainly for the primary schools themselves.

Keywords: primary upbringing and education, professional services, efficiency and effectiveness in working, research

1. INTRODUCTION

Creating a concept of elementary upbringing and education that provides a quality, stimulating environment should meet the modern European standards that are based on respect for the principle of decentralization, initiating equal educational opportunities, quality, transparency, integration and civic responsibility for everyone. A modern primary school should aim at developing a commitment to learning, inspired by quality teaching, which continuously improves the individual potential of students and prepares them for participating in the social life according to the principle of lifelong learning. At the same time, elementary upbringing and education strives to mould individuals with self-confidence, tolerance, moral and ethical values. For over 70% of children in the Republic of North Macedonia, the primary school represents the first significant social context, outside the family, where responsibility, work habits, attitude towards learning and education are acquired and where social competences and social values are built, which is particularly important in a multi-ethnic context. Hence, elementary upbringing and education as the first, mandatory segment of the educational system in our country is a prerequisite and foundation of learning and preparation for a productive and fulfilling life and it is necessary to ensure the holistic and harmonious development of students: a cognitive, emotional, social, morally ethical, psychomotor plan, in accordance with their potential, through:

- Developing students' awareness of their own individuality, encouraging self-confidence and responsibility for their own actions;
- Teaching them the values of respecting human rights, gender equality and basic freedoms for living in a democratic society, behavior and methods that support and embody these values;

- Developing communication skills, critical thinking and creativity;
- Developing abilities to recognize one's own feelings and understand the feelings of others;
- Promoting the importance of learning and work;
- Enabling students to value their own achievements;
- Enabling students to adopt a system of knowledge and skills for independent, efficient and creative existing in the social and natural environment, through building and developing key competencies, in accordance with the European standards and requirements;
- Acquisition of general, applicable and permanent knowledge in the field of language, nature and science, society and man;
- Encouraging intellectual curiosity, sense of beauty and research enthusiasm among students;
- Encouraging creativity and the ability to express oneself in the area of music, visual arts and other arts;
- Acquisition of functional digital and media literacy;
- Developing civic awareness among students and nurturing their own national and cultural identity in terms of respect for people, regardless of their social, cultural, gender and religious affiliation and physical and mental abilities;
- Developing students' abilities to understand, inform and express themselves in their native language (Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish, Serbian) and in a foreign language (English, German, French, etc.)
- Familiarizing themselves with the past and cultural traditions of the Macedonian and Albanian people;
- Promoting the principles of equality between people, regardless of their origins or affiliations;
- Developing competencies for coexistence, tolerance and non-violent conflict resolution and acquiring skills for communication, teamwork, building self-confidence, breaking stereotypes and prejudices, encouraging inter-ethnic interaction and socialization, as well as learning the language of other communities;
- Developing awareness and care among students for their own health and the importance of a healthy environment through: promoting healthy lifestyles and choices and educating students to become accountable for their personal well-being and for the protection of the environment and nature;
- Generating a favorable school atmosphere and conditions for the physical and psychological safety of the student in the school;

The basic role of each teacher and professional associate - individually, and of the school as a whole - is to respect, i.e. adhere to the basic principles and goals during the implementation of the curricula, in the mutual relationship with the students during extracurricular activities and etc. For that purpose, they will have the obligation to prepare thoroughly for teaching, to help the students in different situations and to monitor their individual development. On the other hand, the school has the role of providing the best possible conditions for meeting the needs and interests of the students, that is, for obeying the set principles. The efficiency of the educational activity and the quality of the achievements of the primary school will be greater if the students get to know and accept the goals and contents of the teaching as something necessary for the present and future life. Therefore, teachers and professional associates will have the role, by establishing the program goals, to act as convincingly as possible as people who respect and protect the dignity of students.

Teachers and professional collaborators are obliged to harmonize their educational activity among themselves and to be ready to consider their educational behavior and influence. They should consider themselves as role models and examples of behavior. Open educational questions and special problematic situations that may occur with individual students or entire classes will be resolved together with students, parents and the professional service at the school. The school has the obligation to respect the constitutional rights of parents to participate in the upbringing and education of their own children. Parents, students, teachers and professional collaborators are obliged to work together with mutual trust.

2. METHODOLOGY

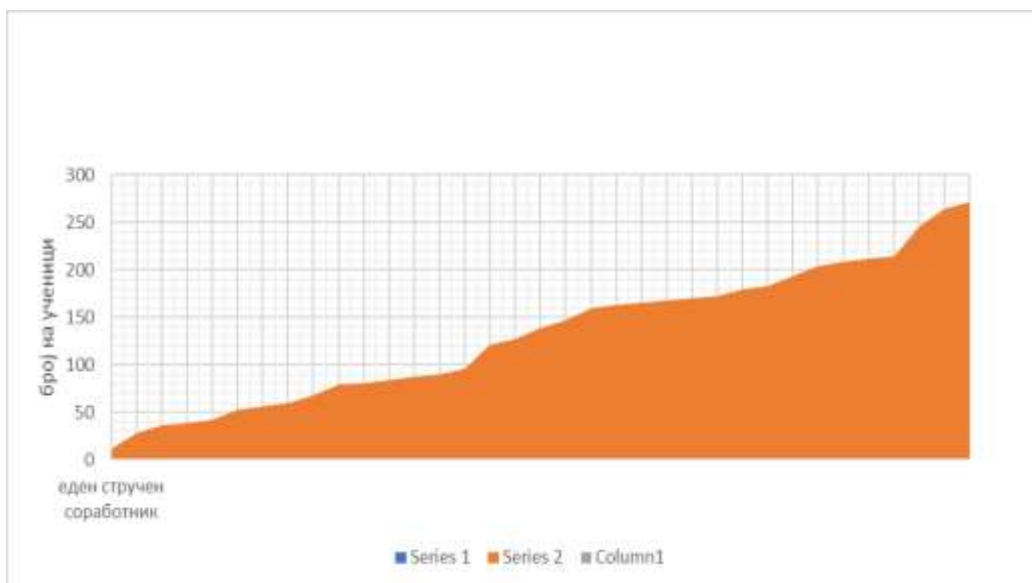
Bearing in mind the complexity and importance of the work of the professional services in primary schools, with our research we analyze the personnel-related conditions of the professional services in terms of the total number of employees and the structure of the various profiles of professional associates, defined by the law (pedagogue, psychologist, social worker, sociologist, special educator and rehabilitator, librarian). In order for professional services in primary schools to work effectively and efficiently, we need to see the ratio of the number of professional associates in schools and the number of students. These indicators will help us to comprehend the bigger picture of the possibility / impossibility of optimal fulfillment of the work goals of the employees in the professional services, and especially their influence in the successful / unsuccessful implementation of systemic changes (reforms) in primary education. The main goal of the overall research effort is, through the analysis of the most significant indicators, to see if and to what extent / quality, the existing professional services can realize the defined scope of

work and influence the efficiency and effectiveness of teaching. Because of the exploratory nature of the research, the research hypotheses are of a differential type, consequently based on the structure of the measuring instrument (survey questionnaire, conducted within the framework of the research project and on the planned crossings of obtained data). Our research is descriptive with prognostic elements and should support / disprove the following main hypothesis: "Adequate personnel in the professional services in primary schools affects the efficiency and effectiveness of teaching". The research sample covers 10% of the primary schools in our country, that is, 34 schools, while the representation of schools where teaching is conducted in different teaching languages and schools from urban and rural environments is observed. A survey questionnaire was used for the professional services in the school.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

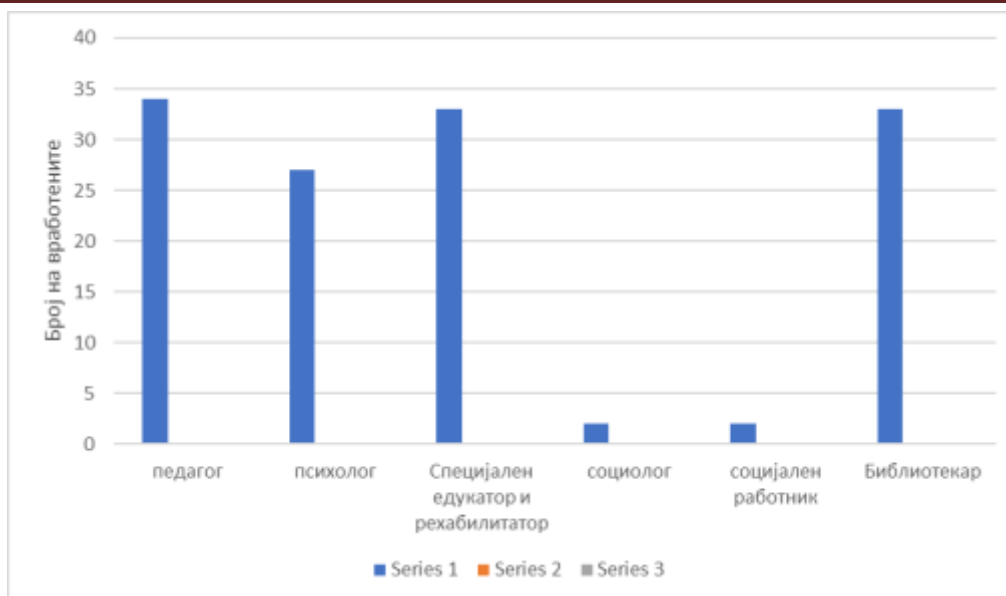
From the analysis of the study programs offered by the state and private universities in the Republic of North Macedonia, we can conclude that there is an adequate representation of the offer of appropriate study programs for appropriate profiles of professional associates by geographic region and by language of teaching. At the University "St. Cyril and Methodius" in Skopje, the Faculty of Philosophy offers study programs that profile: pedagogues, psychologists, sociologists, social workers, special educator and rehabilitator, in Macedonian. At the Faculty of Pedagogy "St. Kliment Ohridski", at the University "St. Cyril and Methodius" librarian personnel is profiled in Macedonian.

At the "Goce Delchev" University in Shtip, at the Faculty of Educational Sciences, personnel is being profiled for pedagogues in Macedonian. At the State University in Tetovo, at the Faculty of Philosophy, personnel is being profiled for: pedagogues, social workers, sociologists, psychologists and a special educator and rehabilitator in Albanian. At the University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in Bitola, at the Faculty of Education, personnel is being profiled for special educators and rehabilitators, in Macedonian. At the "Gavrilo Romanovich-Derzhavin" International University in Sveti Nikole, the Faculty of Psychology is profiling personnel for psychologists in Macedonian. With the survey questionnaire delivered to the elementary schools from the sample, we sought to obtain data on the total number of students from the first to the ninth grade, in the language of teaching, as well as the number and structure of employees in the professional services. The data was necessary in order to be able to see the range of students that one professional associate works with, and of course to analyze the structure of the professional associates in schools so that we can determine whether the conditions for the realization of the specific scope of work of each of the profiles of professional associates are met. From the data obtained from the schools, we realized that in more than 70% of the cases with the professional associates, one expert associate is entrusted with 100 to 270 students.



If we look at:

1. The table for the representation of the profiles of professional associates by primary school



4. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

The results of our research showed that a comprehensive, educational, normative and professional framework has been created for professional associates in the primary schools in the Republic of North Macedonia. At the universities, there are adequate, accredited study programs that profile suitable personnel. There are prescribed professional protocols for the work of professional services and programs for accreditation of topics and trainings for the professional development of employees in professional services. Our final recommendation is to standardize the number and structure of employees in the professional services, considering the number of students in the primary school and the language of teaching. We appreciate that the standard of categorization of schools in terms of size (number of students/number of classes) should also be applied in the dimensioning of professional services in schools. The conclusions and recommendations should benefit the educational policy makers: the Ministry of Education and Science, the Education Development Bureau, the local self-government and others during the conceptualization and implementation of systemic changes (reforms) in the primary education, as well as during planning for the professional and career development of this profile of employees in primary schools. The results will be of particular benefit to the faculties that produce academic personnel who should work in the professional services of primary schools and of course for the primary schools themselves.

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