

REIMAGINING EDUCATION: STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF AN IDEAL SCHOOL

Nikolina Kenig

Violeta Petroska-Beška

Institute of Psychology

Faculty of Philosophy, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje

Abstract

In response to the need for transformative changes in education, this research delves into the concept of an ideal school, exploring the perspectives of students and the meta-perspectives of their teachers.

The sample for the quantitative study consisted of 4909 students from the last two grades (51.9% girls) who study in Macedonian (61.4%), Albanian (33.9%), or Turkish (4.7%) language of instruction, as well as 4783 teachers (72% females) who teach in grades 4-9 in Macedonian (61.9%), Albanian (36.9%), or Turkish (1.2%), from 119 different primary schools in the country. Additionally, 93 students from 9 selected schools, whose language of instruction is Macedonian (78.5%) or Albanian (22.5%), participated in focus groups, thus providing data for in-depth qualitative analysis.

The results from the quantitative analysis emphasize students' priorities, such as clean toilets, internet access, and a reduced number of subjects in the curricula. The findings from the focus group discussions, on the other hand, highlight students' desire for a more engaging and practical curriculum, emphasizing their need for skill development over theoretical knowledge. The study also uncovers students' dissatisfaction with the prevailing teaching methods, advocating for more interactive and enjoyable learning experiences. Generally, teachers are well informed on students' preferences and expectations.

The findings align with key educational theories and contemporary discussions on student-centered, engaging, and inclusive learning environments. The research sheds light on students' perspectives and aspirations, providing valuable insights for educators and policymakers aiming to create a more inclusive and student-centric educational system.

Keywords: *ideal school, student's perspective, mixed-methods*

Introduction

As we are facing the growing need for more radical changes in the realm of education, the concept of the ideal school emerges as a compelling subject of interest for research. The term “ideal” goes way beyond the physical infrastructure or the curriculum, and it encompasses the overall feeling of well-being and connectedness to the school.

Although child-centered pedagogical activities such as collaborative learning, participation, and active involvement are promoted and supported by all relevant policy documents, the actual conditions of learning environments may not always effectively uphold these concepts. Students' perspectives on this matter are often overlooked, even as their behaviors within the school setting are consistently monitored. This attitude towards their thoughts and needs contributes to the ongoing alienation of students from the school and a disconnection from the values of the educational system. In a decade when formal schooling is encountering significant challenges- stemming from the redefinition of educational delivery after the COVID period and the proliferation of high-tech devices that provide access to vast amounts of information- it is crucial to enhance the appeal and relevance of the traditional school setting.

In line to improve the overall school setting, this research is focused on identifying children's views of an ideal learning environment in the light of the specified research questions, i.e., one that focuses on their physical, educational, and socio-emotional welfare. It aims to shed light not only on the perspectives of students on how schools could be transformed so that it catalyzes nurturing creativity, critical thinking, and social responsibility but at the same time, to find whether their teachers are familiar with the respective ideas and the needs of their students. The ultimate rationale of this endeavor is to inform officials and policymakers, thereby helping them to create and implement changes in curricula, methods, and physical environments that would help effective learning and development.

As we navigate through this exploration, we will consider diverse perspectives, drawing on educational theories, empirical studies, and the experiences of educators and students. The theoretical framework for understanding the components of an ideal school can be synthesized from several key educational and psychological theories.

Following the sociocultural theory relies on Vygotsky's ideas that emphasize the social context of learning and the importance of socio-emotional support (Rieber & Carton, 1987; Vygotsky, 1978), in an ideal school, fostering collaborative learning environments where students actively construct knowledge through interaction and dialogue is of utmost importance.

Further, Maslow's framework (Maslow, 1962) suggests that individuals must satisfy their fundamental requirements before progressing to more advanced ones. A well-designed educational institution should establish a setting that addresses students' basic needs, such as physiological well-being, safety, a sense of belonging, and esteem. This approach facilitates the exploration of self-actualization through the educational experience.

Another important view that had a huge impact on educational policies is David Kolb's model (Kolb, 1984). It highlights the cyclical nature of learning through concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. An ideal school should incorporate experiential learning methods, encouraging hands-on exploration and reflection.

One of the most recent theories that shed light on what an optimal educational environment consists of is Seligman's theory on aspects of well-being (Seligman, 2011). According to this view, schools should give precedence to the emotional welfare of students by nurturing positive emotions, fostering meaningful connections, and cultivating a sense of accomplishment.

There is a growing body of literature that reveals the characteristics of an "ideal school" for children based on experts' opinions rather than on descriptions of children's opinions on the most optimal learning environment from their perspective. For example, Flutter & Rudduck (2006) reminded policymakers of the importance of consulting students in the process of improving the physical environment of the school, whereas Könings et al. (2005) advocated for the relevance of mutual participation of both students and teachers in designing a good learning environment. Many studies (Flutter, 2006; Kangas, 2010; Önce et al., 2022; Martin & Murtagh, 2015; Piispanen, 2008; Ridgers et al., 2012) also highlighted the importance of the physical spaces of the school for children's physical activity needs such as play and sports.

Empirical data on what ideal school means for students reveal that cross-culturally, they have rather homogenous ideas on this concept. According to the meta-analytical study carried out by Roorda et al. (2011), the most important feature of an ideal school, especially for younger students and for girls, is the positive teacher-student relationships. Another important feature of the ideal school, from the perspective of students is that schools should be a fun and happy environment and a place where they should socialize while learning new things (Calp, 2020; Sezer & Can, 2020). Students believe that such an atmosphere will contribute to their enthusiasm to study and will result in effective learning.

Although it has been found that teachers, much more than students tend to stress the importance of teaching methods for schools to become ideal (Piispanen, 2008), according to several studies (eg. Alnajdawi, 2019; Cropley, 2004;

Kangas, 2010), students prefer collaborative, engaging and interesting teaching methods in comparison to traditional teaching. Students believe that the provision of a variety of activities to enable the avoidance of routine would motivate the children to learn. Additionally, they expect that the subjects in curricula must be various, interesting, and relatable to everyday challenges that they face (Alnadjawi, 2019; Saljo, 2004).

An important characteristic of students' envisions of an ideal school is that they can be classified into different perspectives: fantasy and creativity, critical and emphatic imagination (Bland, 2012). In many studies, students expressed themselves beyond the limits of realistic expectations. When asked about their ideas of an ideal school, students expressed two kinds of fantasies: those based on fulfilling gaps in their needs (better playground, more or better learning materials, and approaches) and those that are creative and beyond basic needs. Examples of such ideas are schools open for animals, an opportunity to learn without effort, or be equipped with hi-tech devices (Ince et al., 2022; Kangas, 2010).

Method

The research was based on a mixed methods approach. While the questionnaires with close-ended questions enabled us to compare and generalize the results, we also aimed to hear students' authentic voices on their visions of how they envisage an "ideal" school and to contextualize the responses gained by the structured questions.

Participants

The research sample was drawn from 119 primary schools from 56 different municipalities, which represents 34.7% of the total number of primary schools in the country. One-quarter of them (26.1%) were schools with two or more languages of instruction whereas 43% of them were located countryside.

A total number of 4909 students from the last two grades (51.9% girls) who study in Macedonian (61.4%), Albanian (33.9%), or Turkish (4.7%) in the included primary schools and a total number of 4783 teachers (72% females) who teach in grades 4-9 in Macedonian (61.9%), Albanian (36.9%), or Turkish (1.2%) in the same schools participated as respondents of the survey.

The qualitative data was gathered from 93 students (56% girls) from 9 different schools (8 located in urban areas). They study either in Macedonian (77.5%) or Albanian language (22.5%), and all of them previously participated in the quantitative study.

Instruments

The questionnaire administered to students consisted of 9 main close-ended questions. Depending on the number of alternatives offered, students had the opportunity to choose two or three answers.

The corresponding questionnaire for teachers contained the same 9 questions, formulated to identify teachers' perspective on their students' view and one more on what teachers themselves consider to be the most important change that is needed so that schools could change towards being "ideal". Although it is not exactly the original meaning of the term, we labeled their view as 'meta-perspective'.

Both questionnaires also included several relevant demographic questions and were prepared in Macedonian, Albanian, and Turkish languages.

The focus group discussions were based on a semi-structured protocol and it consisted of ten open-ended main questions, parallel in meaning to those asked in the questionnaire through a closed format.

Procedure

The instruments were uploaded to Google Forms as separate versions for the students and teachers of the respective languages of instruction. The questionnaires were answered electronically, via mobile phones or on school computers, anonymously, and during classes. The collection of both quantitative and qualitative data took place during November and December 2023.

Data analysis

Given the study objectives and the large number of included participants, we presented the quantitative results by direct comparison of percentages. When the comparisons were made across different languages of instruction, the group of students and teachers who responded in Turkish should be considered only as an additional illustration due to their disproportionally smaller size within the overall sample.

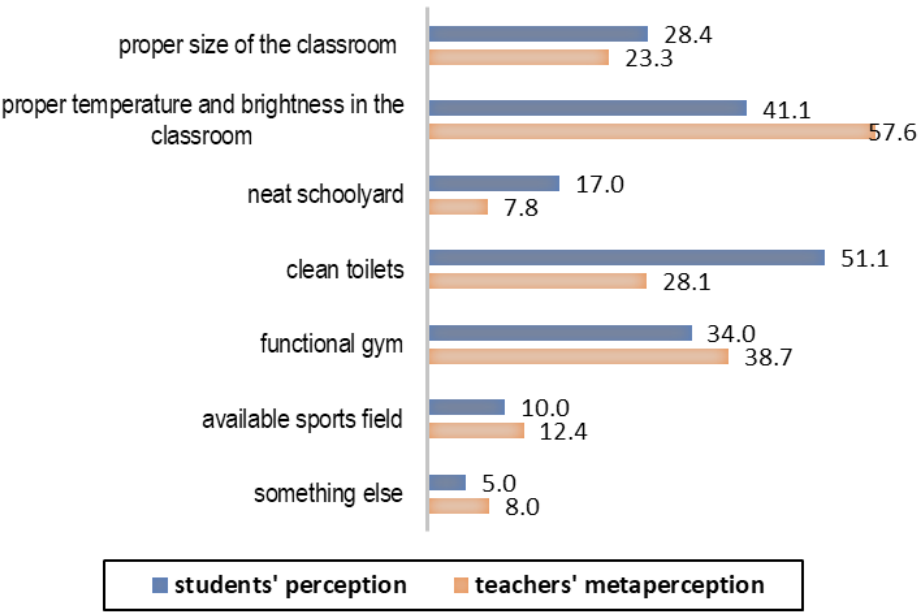
The qualitative data were analyzed thematically. They were presented as an addition to the relevant quantitative findings to provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Quotations used to illustrate the findings of the qualitative analysis are presented as close as possible to their original form.

Results

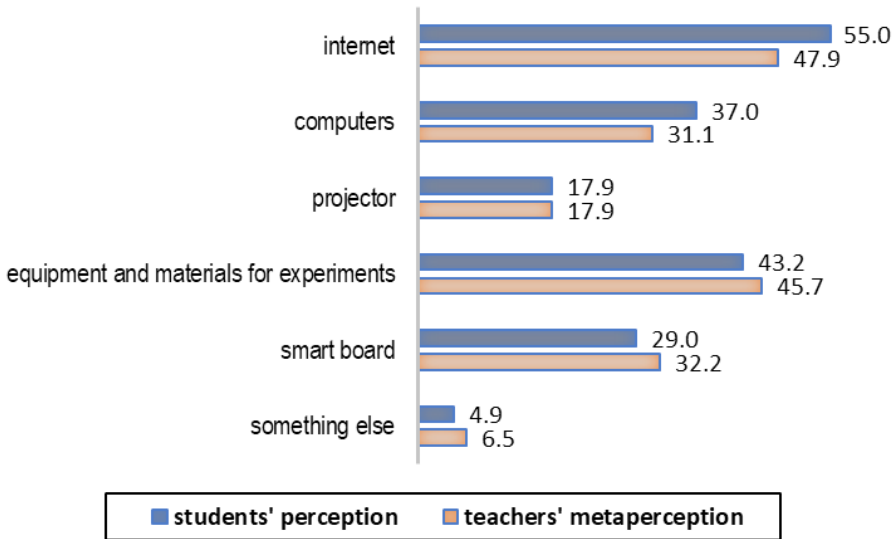
Quantitative analysis

Given the study objectives and the large number of included participants, the quantitative results are presented by direct comparison of percentages. Responses given by at least one-third of the respondents are emphasized as significant. The responses are used to describe students' perceptions of an ideal school (how students envisage an ideal school) and compare these perceptions with the teachers' meta-perceptions (what teachers see as students' perceptions of an ideal school).

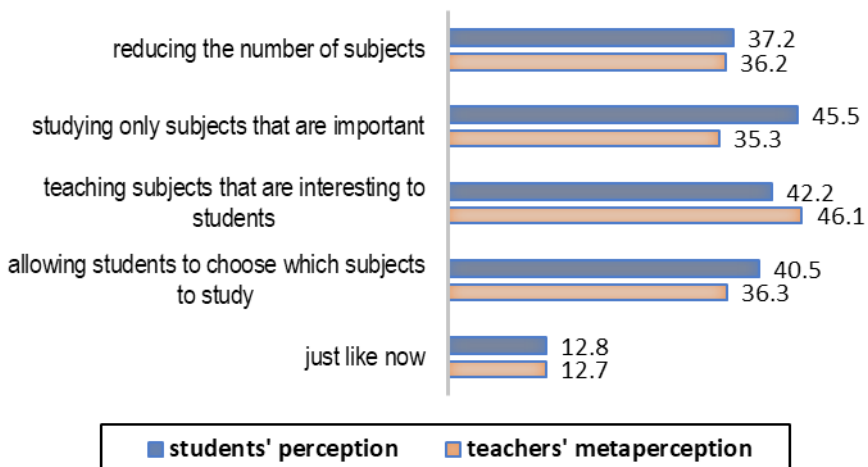
Figure 1.
Infrastructure of an ideal school -% (max 2 answers)



When it comes to the school infrastructure, half of the students believe that an ideal school should have clean toilets, and a considerable number of them responded that the physical conditions in the classroom and functional gym are also desired (Figure 1). On the other hand, most of their teachers believe that the students' priorities for an ideal school are reduced to physical conditions in the classroom and functional gym.

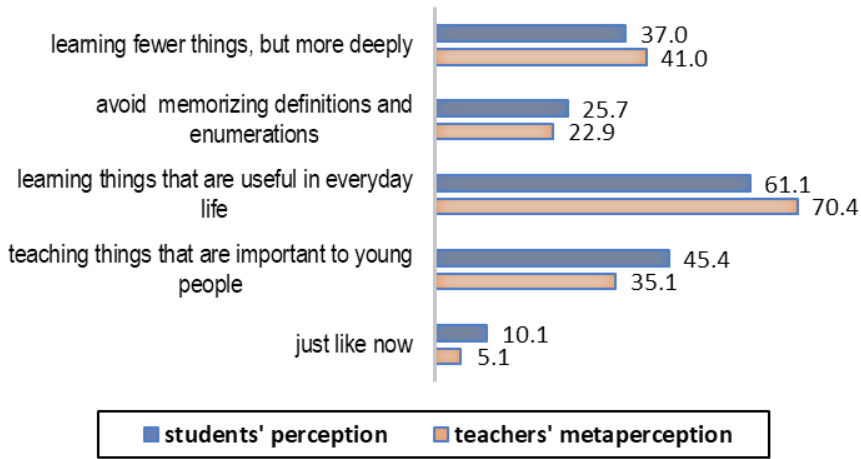
Figure 2.*Equipment in the classrooms of an ideal school - % (max 2 answers)*

Regarding the equipment in the classroom of an ideal school, the majority of the students consider internet access as a priority (Figure 2). Students would also like to have access to resources for conducting experiments and computers. The teachers believe that their students prioritize only internet access and equipment/resources for experiments, while projectors, smart boards, and computers are not that high on their list of necessities for an ideal school.

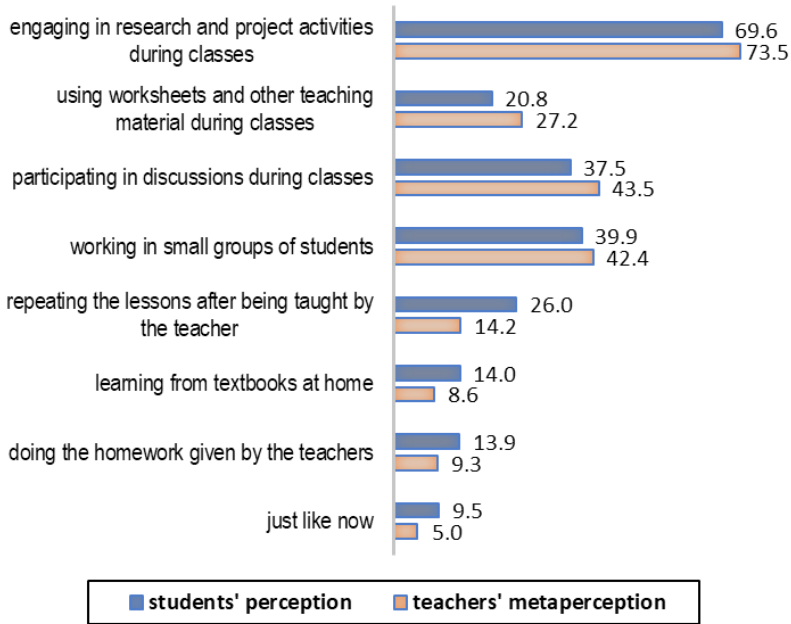
Figure 3.*Subjects in the curricula of an ideal school - % (max 2 answers)*

According to students, an ideal school should differ from the actual school in the subjects taught (Figure 3). They would like to have fewer subjects and study only those that are important. They prioritize subjects that are interesting for them and would be happy to have an opportunity to choose the subjects to study. The teachers have made good estimates of their students' perceptions of the subjects, the only difference being the level of importance assigned to the included options.

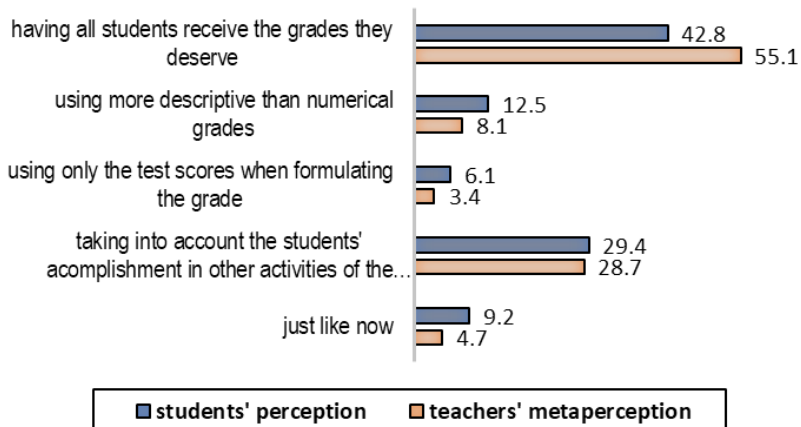
Figure 4.
Contents of the subjects in an ideal school - % (max 2 answers)



From the list of possible preferences on the subject contents in an ideal school, students have chosen to focus on things that are useful in everyday life and things that are important to young people, as well as to learn fewer things but more thoroughly (Figure 4). Teachers' beliefs about their students' expectations of an ideal school are pretty close to the students' priorities, even though they emphasize useful things more and underestimate the students' need to learn about things that are important for young people.

Figure 5.*Strategies of effective learning in an ideal school -% (max 3 answers)*

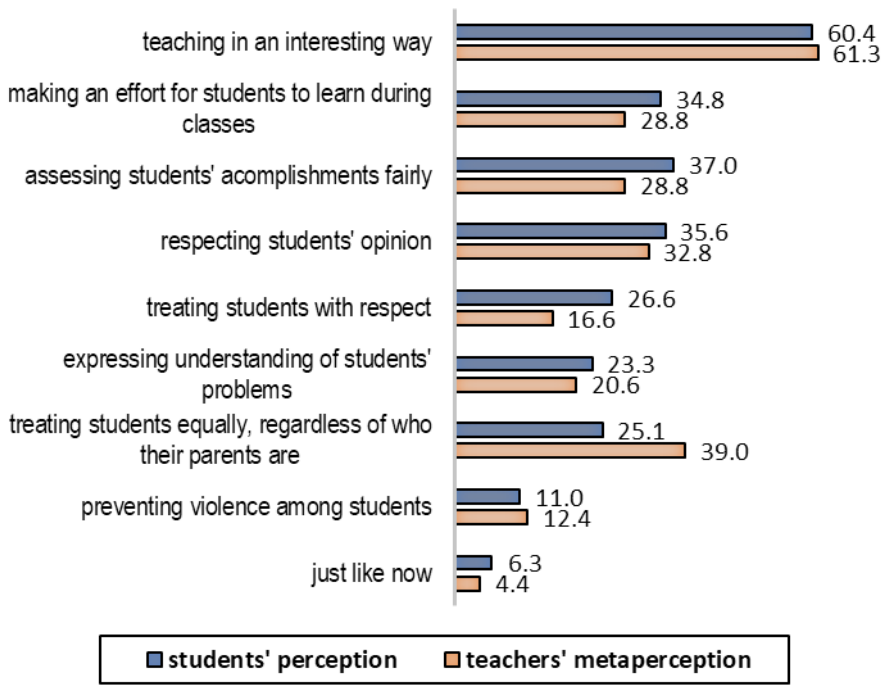
The majority of students believe that their engagement in research and project activities during classes would be the best way to learn in an ideal school. They also find small group work and class discussions as preferable facilitators in the learning process. Figure 5 also shows that teachers are successful in assessing their students' preferences when it comes to effective learning strategies.

Figure 6.*How should teachers grade in an ideal school -% (max 1 answer)*

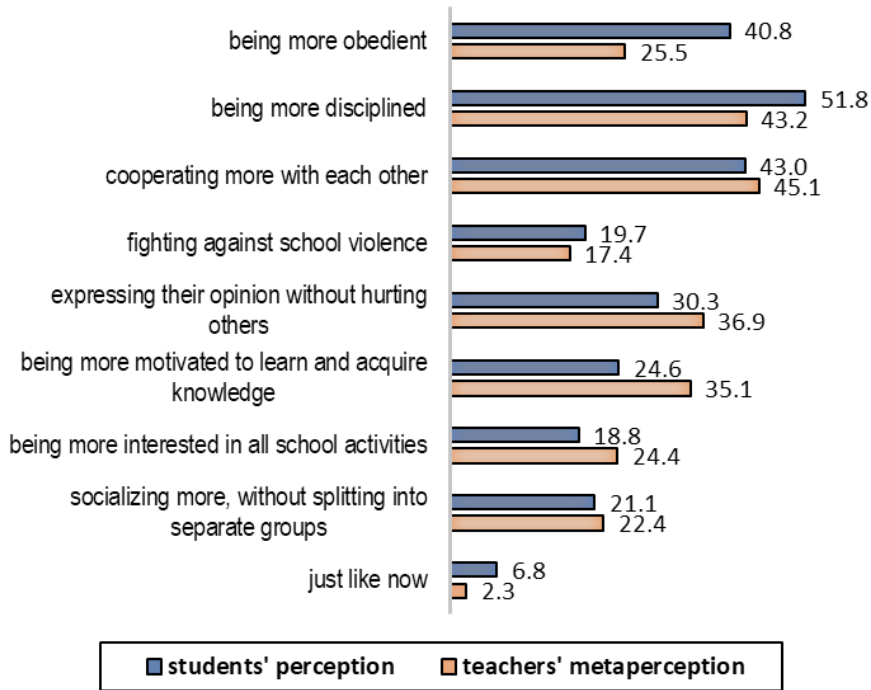
In an ideal school (Figure 6), most students would expect to be objectively graded. The majority of teachers recognize students' preference in assessing their accomplishments.

Figure 7.

Teachers' attitudes and behavior in an ideal school - % (max 3 answers)



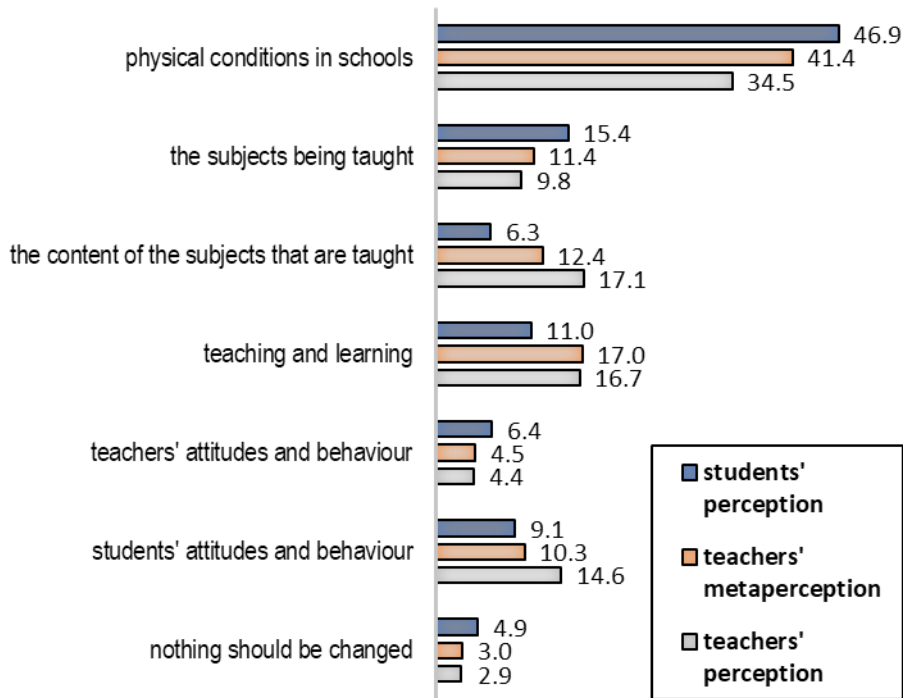
Concerning teachers' attitudes and behavior in an ideal school (Figure 8), the majority of students envisage teachers who teach interestingly, and the majority of the teachers acknowledge their preference. Students also emphasize as their priorities that the teachers should grade them fairly, respect their opinions, and have them learn in class. More than one-third of the teachers recognize the students' expectation to have their opinions respected but overestimate students' need to be treated equally regardless of their family background.

Figure 8.*Students' attitudes and behavior in an ideal school- % (max 3 answers)*

To transform the actual school into an ideal one, students believe that they themselves have to become more disciplined, more cooperative with each other, and more obedient (Figure 8). Teachers' perceptions of their students' expectations overlap with the first two behaviors/attitudes but collide when it comes to students' obedience. Additionally, teachers overemphasize the students' anticipation of their motivation to learn and acquire knowledge and the way they express their opinions.

Figure 9.

Most important transformations of actual schools - % (max 1 answer)



When asked about the most important change that actual schools should undergo to approximate an ideal school, students' answers are concentrated on the improvement in their physical conditions. The same transformation is also suggested by teachers (teachers' perception), but they are not that convinced, even though they recognize it as a priority of their students (teachers' misconception).

Qualitative analysis

When asked about an ideal school, the first thing that comes to students' minds is that they expect better physical conditions in which the teaching takes place. There are two dominant visions of how schools could be better: one refers to basic equipment and space, and the other one to hygiene, especially in toilets. Although the term ideal was sufficiently stressed, it was worrisome that only one student expressed a more "daring" imagination and stated that such a school should have its swimming pool. All other students talked either about wider classrooms, school canteens, playgrounds and lockers, or newer technol-

ogy in classrooms, more precisely computers and smart boards. These are some statements that reflect such extremely modest expectations:

“There should be enough desks and chairs for everyone, the blackboards should be new”. (f)

“(I would like) smart boards and everything should be clean, not dirty”. (f)

“We need to have lockers and a canteen”. (m)

“It’s not bad like this, but the toilets are falling apart and they should be clean”. (f)

Conversations about the school curriculum were notably more dynamic, with students expressing heightened interest in sharing their concerns, needs and perspectives on the modifications they believe should be implemented for an ideal school setting. Their complaints centered on the number of subjects they have to take, and subsequently, they raised concerns about the substance or content of the subjects. In an ideal school, with no exceptions, all participating children would expect fewer subjects per academic year.

“I would expect fewer subjects. No more than ten”. (f)

“Regarding the subjects, oh, I think there are more than there should be. For us, in the ninth grade, fifteen subjects are really too many because we need to pay a lot of attention to all of them”... (m)

“Only the most basic subjects should be studied, biology, chemistry, mathematics, mother tongue, foreign languages, and physics for example so that we can have physical activity”. (f)

Rather than delving into abstract concepts that seem disconnected or irrelevant to their everyday lives, students prefer to engage with more practical, interesting, and applicable content in their studies. They think that the idea of introducing elective subjects that are practical, oriented towards physical activity, personal growth and mental health, or life-skills is a great one for a school that they would love to go to. What stands out prominently is their earnest effort to convey their desire for acquiring new and relevant knowledge. They emphasize the necessity for this learning to primarily revolve around skill development rather than a mere accumulation of theoretical information. Furthermore, they stress the importance of a clear connection between the acquired skills and their practical application in real, everyday life. These are illustrative statements:

“There should be a special subject where we would learn how to behave, to learn things that will be useful in our everyday life. Things that would help us solve problems when a difficulty arises in our life.” (f)

“I think we should have to improve the mental state. We all have thoughts that bother us and someone can help us turn those dark thoughts into something we can express in a way.” (m)

“I would like to have subject where we could learn how to light a fire in wilderness, or how to provide a first aid” (m)

In line with that, students envisaged an ideal teaching approach that is in a contrast to what they are dominantly faced with in reality. Briefly, they describe the dominant method of teaching to which they are exposed as “listening to what teachers are saying or reading from power point presentations”. During a typical class, a lesson is taught after which something as a summary is written down and that is the core expected to be repeated as “knowledge”. They lack active involvement, work in small groups, discussions, and most of all, opportunities for discovery learning and for enjoyable learning activities that relieve stress and enable cooperation. Over half of the respondents said that enjoying the learning process would require the use of a variety of teaching methods. Similarly, they would like teachers to try to simplify the presentations, without “unnecessary complications,” and to find more interesting content and ways of conveying the knowledge. All this is in strong contrast to what the majority of students describe that they currently experience. An illustration of this worrisome ambiance is well reflected in this statement:

“Teachers should help us in learning and not be on the phone during the class. Normally, they are also bored. In the middle of class, when the teachers feel like it, they go outside, not because they have anything to do, but because they are bored and go out to let the time pass”. (f, a)

Students would like to be heard and to be given the freedom to express themselves. They consider that this lack of sensitivity to their perspective is something that should not happen in a school they would like to belong to.

“Ahm, in the current state, students do not have the right to express themselves at school. From my own experience - I do not have the freedom to express myself, let alone to behave freely. In an ideal (school), all students have the right to say and should be heard”. (m)

“If we had the opportunity to express our opinion, then we would have also known how teachers think about certain issues, and we could understand them better” (f)

Students believe that in an ideal school setting, they should be more actively engaged rather than treated merely as passive recipients. As one student says, this should be more relevant participation, not just “the opinion about the school uniforms”. In regards to participation, another subtheme appeared frequently as an expressed concern. The majority of students who participated in the focus groups feel that teachers give attention to only several students, usually those who are teachers’ “favorites”. The others feel neglected even if they ask for explanations or attention. Thus, an ideal school would be engaging for everyone.

“I think that in order to have ideal teaching, every student should be involved equally, because it is not only here, it is like that everywhere....for example, if you don't understand something, the teacher just rolls her eyes and won't help you explain”.

Alongside their desires for a decent physical environment and improved curricula and instructional methods, all students strongly stressed the importance of social, emotional, and ethical aspects of the envisaged ideal school. The identified subcategories of this theme are: justice and equality respect, emotional and physical safety, friendship, and happiness. In each of the focus groups, the majority of children agreed that they would have felt better if all teachers treated them equally and with respect.

The importance of emotional safety as an aspect of well-being was evident in children's complaints about being exposed to unnecessary stress by teachers' behaviors. We identified overlapping narratives of students describing teachers who act in a manner that makes the majority of children feel threatened and intimidated. Examples of these descriptions are the following:

“When the lesson is being taught by a teacher, it means – mhm, they shouldn't offend us, I have noticed that many teachers are like that and I think that it should not be done as a practice” (m)

“(In an ideal school), the teachers should be more ... I mean, the teacher should not insult us, scold us, but they should try to be calm and interactive and help us if something is not clear to us”.(m)

Teachers should not yell at the students if they do something wrong, but just tell them that this is wrong, you have it wrong, correct it. (f)

When we have a problem, the teachers should be considerate towards us and help us to solve it, not just to attack us in such situations. (f)

“They (teachers) often threaten the students, for example, one teacher recently threatened my classmate, he said - I will beat you up, I will change your appearance and I will post you like that on social media. Then I will leave my job as a teacher, as a real Boss.” (m)

“Last week, a friend of mine was insulted three times by three different teachers for being a little chubby. When the blackboard had to be erased, the teacher told her in front of us to go out and erase it, to move a little, to melt a layer of fat that she had”. (f)

In one-third of schools, students reported that they do not feel physically safe as well. Bullying is an everyday experience, and they feel that, except preaching that this should not take place in and out of schools, school authorities do not do much about it. As one student said, teachers do not bother much, “they will say this is not good and sometimes they call the parents and that's it”, which is very

surprising because students report that “some students carry knives at schools” and some “would punch you if you do not give them money”. A remarkable discovery is that, when asked about their expectations regarding how an ideal school should address this issue, students tended to attribute the largest part of the responsibility to themselves as a group. While emphasizing the importance of an ideal school as a secure space free from physical, verbal, and emotional abuse towards children, they seldom express the expectation for teachers to take control and ensure such an environment. They said that “students should be more respectful towards each other”, “to treat each other equally, regardless of who is poorer or richer”, “to show understanding, especially for students with disabilities because they are vulnerable” and “stand up for the peers when (teachers) are disrespectful”.

All these young participants agreed that children are “not treated fairly at school”. Teachers “pick their favorite students”, usually two or three who are getting all of the attention and approval from them. This inequality reflects mostly on how pupils are treated during classes, however, the culmination is in the process of student assessment. Generally, students are very disappointed by both the methods and the ethos of grading their academic achievement. They complain that the grades are never based on the accumulation of different activities, that only formal tests are taken into account, and that the grades are completely unfair and do not reflect individual differences in knowledge. In the words of one respondent, in an ideal school:

“Every student should be given the grade he deserves, without interventions from parents ... bribes are accepted everywhere, we all know that there’s nothing to hide, even though it’s a ticklish topic...” (m)

According to the majority of respondents, the ideal school should stimulate an atmosphere of happiness. The first concern is reducing unnecessary stress. Teachers are expected to be more sympathetic and patient, as well as respectful and open-minded, with a pedagogically gentle approach and preferably, motivated to work.

“Something that would motivate students to learn a lot is to see a happy teacher, it has a positive effect, and if he treats the students well they are not always angry” (m, a)

“The student in the ideal student asks questions and receives answers from the teacher. No one is mocked, and when you are not mocked you are more motivated, and others - when they see that the motivated student is respected, free, asks questions and they will be motivated too”(f)

Discussion

Students's expectations regarding the physical environment resonate only to a certain extent with the previous research (eg. Flutter & Rudduck, 2006; Könings et al.), showing that improving the physical environment is something that students regularly prioritize when asked about their vision of an ideal school. However, qualitative data show a salient difference in the responses of this group of students in comparison to the majority of previous studies. When granted the freedom to articulate their ideal school without constraints, students in our sample predominantly channeled their responses only towards realistic expectations, primarily centered on concerns related to hygiene and spatial conditions. There was just one instance where imagination was expressed, exemplified by the notion of an ideal school having its own swimming pool.

The findings of this study demonstrated that students were focused on highlighting the shortcomings of their existing order (criticism) and could hardly envisage perfect conditions, even in imagination. This absence of responses that include bolder imagination might suggest hopelessness in students that their voices matter. This finding is very much aligned with the results from the longitudinal study on children's health-related behavior, which showed a strong decline in how much adolescents in the Republic of North Macedonia liked their schools throughout the last decade (HBSC, in press). Following Maslow's framework on the hierarchy of needs, one might also conclude that students are still very much fixated on their basic needs in the school environment, such as safety, a sense of belonging, and esteem, whereas the higher needs are still in the background.

Students seemed to be preoccupied with the issue of safety and well-being in schools. This aligns both with Seligman's emphasis on emotional well-being and with the socio-cultural theory's focus on the social context of learning. Students were also notably concerned with the lack of fairness, articulating this concern through their expectations for more objectivity in grading and emphasizing the importance of equal treatment, conveying worries about teachers favoring certain students. Teachers generally recognize this expectation, but there is a slight discrepancy in the perceived importance of certain aspects, such as treating students equally regardless of their family background. We identified a striking difference in the ascribed importance of protection from harassment from peers and teachers in the quantitative versus qualitative data. While the absence of stress, positive atmosphere and equal treatment were the most engaging topics in the focus group discussions, quantitative data shows that much more attention is paid to the physical environment and the subjects being taught.

Both quantitative and qualitative results underscore the importance of connecting subject contents with real life and delivering them by engaging and varied teaching methods. Students express a preference for research and project activities, small group work, and class discussions. This preference aligns with Kolb's experiential learning model the principles of active engagement and several previous research findings (Fraser-Smith et al., 2021; Saljo, 2004).

An intriguing result from the quantitative analysis was that, generally, teachers are well-informed on students' preferences and expectations. Moreover, some of the teachers' responses reflected even closer to what has been discovered by using the qualitative approach. For example, teachers' acknowledgment that students desire equal treatment and fair grading is better aligned with the depth of responses on these matters in the focus group discussions than the students' responses expressed in percentages. While it is reassuring that teachers are aware of their students' needs and expectations, there is a concern that this awareness does not translate into substantial efforts to bring about meaningful change in the current educational setting.

In conclusion, the results of this research provide a comprehensive understanding of students' and teachers' perspectives on an ideal school. The findings align with key educational theories and contemporary discussions on student-centered, engaging, and inclusive learning environments. The recommendations derived from this study could contribute to informing educational policymakers and practitioners in fostering positive changes in schools to better meet the needs and expectations of both students and teachers.

To transform the current (rather disappointing) educational setting into an ideal school environment, several key initiatives should be undertaken. It is imperative to prioritize the enhancement of physical conditions, allocating resources for the improvement of basic equipment and space, with a specific focus on ensuring cleanliness and comfort, especially in areas such as toilets. Diversifying teaching methods is equally crucial, encouraging a variety of approaches to make the learning process more engaging and enjoyable. Introducing elective subjects that emphasize practical knowledge, personal growth, mental health, and life skills can significantly contribute to a more comprehensive educational experience. Reducing the subject load is essential for alleviating students' workload, considering a potential reduction in the number of subjects per academic year while concentrating on essential subjects are also steps that could improve students' well-being and motivation.

Active student participation should also be strengthened through the creation of opportunities for involvement in group discussions and discovery learning. Ensuring equal participation and attention to all students while avoiding

favoritism is essential for a fair and inclusive educational environment. Along with that, fostering equality and respect requires promoting equal treatment and respect for all students, regardless of their backgrounds, especially by improving the assessment system for objectivity and encouraging teachers to create an atmosphere of fairness will substantially contribute to the improvement of the school atmosphere.

The promotion of emotional and physical safety involves both implementing strong anti-bullying measures and addressing teachers' behaviors. In line with that, encouraging teacher motivation by providing support and recognition for teachers who contribute to a positive and engaging learning environment is vital for sustaining a high-quality educational experience.

References

- Alnajdawi, A. M. (2019). Exploring Jordanian children's perceptions of the characteristics of an ideal school and learning environment. *Journal of Social Studies Education Research*, 10 (4), 201-225.
- Bland, D. (2012). Analyzing children's drawings: Applied imagination. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 35(3), DOI: 235-242. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2012.717432>
- Calp, Ş (2020). Peaceful and happy schools - how to build positive learning environments? *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education*, 12(4), 311-320. <https://doi.org/10.26822/iejee.2020459460>
- Cropley, A.J. (2004). *Creativity in education and learning*. Routledge.
- Fraser-Smith, J., Morrison, L., Morrison, V., & Templeton, J. (2021). What makes an ideal and non-ideal school in Scotland? – Pupils' perspective, *Education- al Psychology in Practice*, 37(1), 52-73, DOI: 10.1080/02667363.2020.1860909
- HBSC International - Health Behavior in School-aged Children (*in press*). *Focus on adolescents' school experiences in Europe, Central Asia, and Canada - Report from the 2021/22 survey*, Volume 4.
- İnce, N.B., İşler, N.K, Akhun, B. & Durmuşoğlu, M.C. (2022). The Dream School: Exploring Children's Views About Schools. *International Journal of Progressive Education*, 18 (4), 90-104, DOI: 10.29329/ijpe.2022.459.7
- Kangas, M. (2010). Finnish children's views on the ideal school and learning environment. *Learning Environments Research*. 13. 205-223. 10.1007/s10984-010
- Kangas, S. E., & Cook, M. (2020). Academic tracking of English learners with disabilities in middle school. *American Educational Research Journal*, 57(6), 2415-2449.
- Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning; Experience as the source of learning and development*. Prentice Hall.
- Könings, K.D., Brand-Gruwel, S., van Merriënboer, J.J. (2005). Towards more powerful learning environments through combining the perspectives of designers, teachers, and students. *Br J Educ Psychol.*,75(4), 645-60. doi: 10.1348/000709905X43616. PMID: 16318683.
- Martin, R., & Murtagh, E. M. (2015). Preliminary findings of Active Classrooms: An intervention to increase physical activity levels of primary school children during class time. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 52, 113-127. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2015.09.00>
- Maslow, A. H. (1962). *Toward a psychology of being*. Van Nostrand.

- Piispanen, M. (2008). Good learning environment: Perceptions of good quality in comprehensive school by pupils, parents and teachers [Doctoral dissertation, Kokkola University]. Retrieved on January 22, 2024, from: <https://jyx.jyu.fi/bitstream/handle/123456789/19018/1/978-951-39-3382-1.pdf>
- Ridgers, N. D., Knowles, Z. R., & Sayers, J. (2012). Encouraging play in the natural environment: A child-focused case study of Forest School. *Children's Geographies*, 10(1), 49-65. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2011.638176>
- Rieber, R. & Carton, A. S. (Eds.). (1987). *The collected works of L.S. Vigotsky: Problems of general psychology, including the volume thinking and speech*. Springer New York.
- Roorda, D. L., Koomen, H. M., Spilt, J. L., & Oort, F. J. (2011). The Influence of affective teacher-student relationships on students' school engagement and achievement: A meta-analytic approach. *Review of Educational Research*, 81(4), 493-529.
- Saljo, R. (2004). Learning and technologies, people and tools in coordinated activities. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 41(6), 489-494.
- Seligman, M. (2011). *Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being*. Free Press
- Sezer, S., & Can, E. (2020). School happiness: A grounded theory. *Educational Policy Analysis and Strategic Research*, 15(1), 44-62. <https://doi.org/10.29329/epasr.2020.236.3>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). Interaction between learning and development. In M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner, & E. Souberman (Eds.), *Mind and Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes* (pp. 79-91). Harvard University Press.

ЗАМИСЛУВАЈЌИ ГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЕТО ПО СВОЈА МЕРА: ПЕРЦЕПЦИИ НА УЧЕНИЦИТЕ ЗА ИДЕАЛНОТО УЧИЛИШТЕ

Николина Кениг

Виолета Петроска Бешка

Кратка содржина

Како одговор на потребата од трансформативни промени во образованието, ова истражување го адресира концептот на идеално училиште, испитувајќи ги перспективите на учениците и мета-перспективите на наставниците.

Примерокот за квантитативната студија се состоеше од 4909 ученици од 119 основни училишта во земјата, од осмо и деветто одделение (51,9% девојчиња), кои учат на македонски (61,4%), албански (33,9%) или турски (4,7%) наставен јазик, како и од 4783 наставници (72% жени) кои предаваат од 4. До 9. Одделение, на македонски (61,9%), албански (36,9%) или турски (1,2%) наставен јазик. Дополнително, 93 ученици од 9 избрани училишта, чиј наставен јазик е македонски (78,5%) или албански (22,5%), учествуваа во дискусии во фокус групи, со што обезбедија податоци за длабинска квалитативна анализа.

Резултатите од квантитативната анализа ги откриваат приоритетите на учениците, како што се чисти тоалети, пристап до интернет и намален број на предмети во наставните планови. Наодите од дискусиите во фокус групите, од друга страна, ја истакнуваат желбата на учениците за попривлечни и практично ориентирани наставни содржини, нагласувајќи ја нивната потреба за развивање вештини неопходни за секојдневното живеење, наместо „суво“ теоретско знаење. Студијата, исто така, го открива незадоволството на учениците од преовладувачките наставни методи, и сугерира потреба од повеќе интерактивни и емоционално пријатни искуства во учењето. Генерално, наставниците се добро информирани за преференциите и очекувањата на учениците, но загрижува тоа што нивното знаење за дискутираните потреби малку се преточува во добри практики.

Наодите се во согласност со клучните образовни теории и со современите дискусии за предностите на ангажираните и инклузивни средини за учење кои се фокусирани кон учениците. Истражувањето фрла дополнителна светлина врз перспективите и потребите на учениците, обезбедувајќи вредни сознанија и за воспитувачите и креаторите на политиките кои работат кон создавање инклузивен образовен систем ориентиран кон децата.

Клучни зборови: *идеално училиште, перцепции на учениците, комбиниран метод*