

Factors Influencing Public Safety, Societal Development and Sustainability Due to Shortcomings in the Educational System

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ABSTRACT

The interdisciplinary study was conducted with an aim of identifying and eliminating gaps in public education of children at the levels of health, education and participation in national/local policy planning. Multidisciplinary Questionnaire was completed by 1209 students of the University of Latvia. Before conducting the survey, students were introduced to the states responsibility to ensure the health, life and development of every child, as described in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). 95.4% of students expressed their will to have been taught more useful life skills and knowledge at school, preparing them better for different challenges. 85.5% considered that teaching more about the history of the country and the region is necessary to be able to make the right choice when making important decisions. Differences between democratic and totalitarian regimes in observing human rights principles have been taught at school for 63%, only 46.3% were well informed about Russia's military aggressions against sovereign states violating international law. 87% still lack systemic health education at schools, 41% do not feel ready for the provision of first aid. Only 16% admit that respect for children's opinions is at least partially ensured in decision-making at various levels. Educational deficiencies of broad spectrum from knowledge of modifiable disease risk factors, first aid skills in critical situations, to the lack of historical knowledge that prevents strategic analysis of credible threats to the country's sustainability and national security, and maintenance of democratic principles of societal development. Urgent improvements of public education covering these gaps of knowledge are necessary.

Keywords: University students, School education, Life skills, Educational deficiencies, Country's sustainability

INTRODUCTION

As the challenges for the adaptation of youth to the rapidly changing world increase, a unified, research-based approach to identifying and preventing deficiencies in public education is needed. Experience of our previous studies shows that knowledge of young people, entering their social and labour life about basics is marked by significant limitations. State's obligation to ensure health, life and development of every child is described in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Development and sustainability of

society as well as national security are determined by the knowledge and understanding of each member of society about responsibility towards themselves and the state, which must be provided at schools (World Bank, 2026). Our aim was to identify the shortcomings of the children's education system that pose risks to public safety, societal development and sustainability of the state and to prepare proposals for eliminating these deficiencies.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Qualitative type interdisciplinary study based on UNCRC principles addressed children's rights at the level of health, education, and participation in state/local policy planning. Multidisciplinary Questionnaire was completed by 1209 students of different study programs of the University of Latvia, of which 81.1% were 17-25 years old, 78.7% female. Methods included introduction of students to UNCRC before the questionnaire. Microsoft Excel was used for the processing of data. Questions included in a Multidisciplinary Questionnaire: 1. Did the school provide you with the knowledge and skills necessary for life? Do you wish school had taught you more useful skills for everyday life? In which area of children's rights does the country fail to meet its obligations the most? 2. Is it necessary to know the history of one's people and country, as well as the countries of the region, for the full development of a student's personality to be able to take the right decision in complicated geopolitical context? 3. Did the school teach about the differences between democratic and totalitarian countries in respect of human rights principles in different regions of the world? 4. Did you learn at school that Russia in 1991-2022 made military interventions in sovereign countries? 5. Is it necessary to introduce Health education as a separate subject in school? Are you ready to provide emergency assistance? 6. Is respect for the child's point of view ensured? Have you or children you know been asked their opinion about what is happening in the country or municipality with the aim of improving things? Were you or any of the children you know asked for such an opinion about what is happening in the country or in the municipality, and was the proposal implemented?

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Knowledge Given at School and Life Challenges

Answering the question "Did the school provide you with the knowledge and skills necessary for life?" only 14.4% answered positively, but 67.3% determined that it was done only partially, and 15.1% said that the school did not provide the knowledge and skills necessary for real life. 95.4% stated that they wish school had taught you more useful skills for everyday life. Evaluating areas of children's rights does the country fail to meet its obligations the most, absolute majority of students named as first and second protection against violence and protection against any form of discrimination, the shortcomings of the education and health care systems are ranked only after them.

History of the Country and Region

Among the respondents, the highest percentage of participants, 85,5%, considered that it is necessary to know the true history of one's people and country, as well as the countries of the region for the full development of a student's personality in order to be able to make the right decision in serious geopolitical situations, however 14% were on opinion about the history editions as misleading or limited by personal interpretation of a single author.

Understanding of Democratic Versus Totalitarian Regimes and Human Right Principles

When asked about teaching concerning the differences between democratic and totalitarian countries in respect of human rights principles in different regions of the world 63,5% of students stated that they have received this knowledge, while 21,5% assessed this knowledge as insufficient.

Russia's Military Aggression Against Sovereign States

Most participants 46,2%; agreed that they learned at school that Russia in 1991-2022 made military interventions in sovereign countries violating international law, while 17,8% have not received such knowledge at school, the rest being not sure. While asked about specific historical events (facts) of Russian aggression that were taught at school, the January 1991 coup attempt in Latvia ranked first, 51.4% of the students knew about it. Second mostly known historical event - attempt of Russia's predecessor, the Soviet Union, to carry out a coup in Lithuania at the same time with the help of the army, about which 36.1% of the students had knowledge. Only 27% at school had heard about the fact that the Russian Federation started aggression against Ukraine as early as 2014.

Necessity of Systemic Health Education at Schools

The vast majority (87%) believe that health education must be taught in schools as university medical professionals developed lectures (online), 11.6% that it should be done by random school teachers without higher medical education, while 1.3% believe that health education is not necessary and internet resources are sufficient. Answers to more specific questions about health issues split as follows: 92.4% were taught the basic principles of healthy nutrition, 52% taught about healthy nutrition as the main possibility to prevent a high risk of heart attack, stroke, diabetes and tumours, 41% not taught, 6.3% do not remember; 79% were not taught about the effect of iodine deficiency during pregnancy on the intellectual development of the fetus and child, 11.8% were taught; 10.3% were taught about the effect of zinc deficiency on the fetus and child during pregnancy, if a vegan diet without Zn supplements is used, 80.7% were not taught; 40% taught about emotional intelligence, 47.5% not taught, 12.4% do not remember; 75.6% taught about sexually transmitted diseases, 20.6% not taught, 3.8% do not

remember; 17.9% were taught about the signs of depression, 74.4% were not taught, 7.8% do not remember; 53.2% were taught how to provide first aid, 41.2% were not taught, 5.7% do not remember.

58% of the respondents would be ready to provide first aid, 37.6% would not be ready and 4.4% do not know; 55.5% learned how to perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), 39.9% did not learn and 4.6% do not remember; 41.4% would be ready to provide CPR, 54.2% would not be ready and 4.4% do not know. Concerning state involvement in children's health and protection from the use of addictive substances – 61.1% believe that the state has not done enough, only 12.2% believe that the state has done enough and for 26.7% it is difficult to judge.

Respect for Children's Opinions

Only 5.9% are sure that in local governments and state administration, children's opinions are considered, or they are asked to submit proposals for improving the situation in the field of enhancing the implementation of children's rights. The largest part – 43.9% - believed that it is not done at all, but 22% had difficulty deciding about it. Of the children who nevertheless had positive contact with the authorities, 27% remembered that such a child's opinion was requested once, only 0.9% of the respondents had observed such a positive attitude. A significant share – 18% was sure that such children's opinion, which is essential for solving problems, is requested only in those cases when the law requires it, but only an empty request that remains only on paper.

Basic Gaps of Implementation Achievements of State's Obligations Towards Children

Health care emerged as the top priority mention in this deficiencies list. 48.9% of the respondents describe health care as difficult to access, 18.9% believe that doctors lack sufficient competence, 65.6% that medicines are expensive and 64.4% that dentistry is a paid service therefore difficult to reach. 16.7% have not encountered violations in health care. The free access to health care - majority (60.6%) believe that it partially works, 30% that it does and 4.7% that it does not work in real life, though declared as a constitutional right. Next came education, the problems and drawbacks of which we reflect in one of the previous sections. Following deficiencies were protection against violence and protection against discrimination. Results were as follows. Protection against violence – 51.7 were poorly implemented; 24.7 - difficult to judge; 13.5 - perform well; 4.5% - do not comply at all; excellent performance – 5.6%. Protection against discrimination – 57.3% considered as poorly implemented; 23.6% as difficult to judge; 10.1% - do not comply at all; 7.9 - perform well 7.9% and was considered as excellent by 1.12%.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study confirm that significant deficiencies in the educational system are closely linked to broader risks affecting public safety, societal development, and national sustainability. The overwhelming majority of respondents indicated insufficient preparation for real-life challenges, which aligns with international research emphasizing that education systems often fail to equip students with essential life skills, including critical thinking, health literacy, and civic engagement (OECD, 2024).

The identified gap in life skills education reflects a broader global trend, where formal curricula prioritize academic knowledge over practical competencies. According to WHO (2020), life skills education—including decision-making, problem-solving, and emotional intelligence—is essential for promoting both individual well-being and societal resilience. The lack of such competencies may contribute to reduced preparedness in crisis situations (UNESCO, 2025), as evidenced by the relatively low confidence in first aid provision among respondents.

NATO historical Report of the Committee of Three (1956) explicitly states that progress in education, public understanding, economic cooperation, and development of resources can be as important for security as military equipment. Recent World Bank Study Human Capital Index Plus 2026 (2026) directly connects health and education outcomes with the future productivity of the next generation. This is one of the strongest recent sources for linking school educational and health deficits to national economic performance influencing societal development and national security too. The insufficient knowledge of national and regional history, as highlighted by 85.5% of respondents, is particularly concerning in the context of democratic stability and security. Research indicates that historical literacy is a key factor in fostering civic identity and resilience against misinformation and geopolitical threats (Wineburg, 2018). The limited awareness of Russia's military aggressions further demonstrates a gap in strategic understanding, which may weaken societal capacity to respond to external threats and undermine national security.

Moreover, our findings related to health education reveal systemic shortcomings that may have long-term consequences for public health outcomes. Studies show that early education on modifiable risk factors significantly reduces the prevalence of non-communicable diseases and improves health behaviours later in life (Marmot et al., 2020; WHO, 2021). The lack of knowledge about nutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, and mental health issues identified in this study indicates a missed opportunity for preventive health strategies within the education system.

Insufficient school education on nutrition, physical activity, health literacy, and first aid should not be viewed only as a pedagogical weakness. International evidence suggests that it can become a macro-level risk to a country's human capital, economic productivity, fiscal sustainability, and societal resilience. WHO (2022) and OECD (2025) sources show that poor health literacy and unhealthy behaviours established early in life increase the burden of noncommunicable diseases, while World Bank (2026) evidence

links health and education deficits directly to lower future productivity. Peer-reviewed studies further show that childhood obesity creates substantial long-term economic costs (Ling et al., 2023; Ma et al., 2024) and that school-based first aid and CPR training can improve emergency response capacity (Schroeder et al., 2023; European Resuscitation Council, 2025). In the current European security environment shaped by Russia's war against Ukraine and repeated economic shocks, these educational gaps are more than public-health problems: they are resilience and security vulnerabilities because they weaken the population's capacity to remain healthy, productive, and prepared under crisis conditions (World Bank, 2026).

The limited inclusion of children's opinions in decision-making processes highlights a failure to fully implement the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, particularly Article 12. Previous research demonstrates that meaningful youth participation enhances policy effectiveness and strengthens democratic governance (Lansdown, 2010). The low percentage of respondents who experienced such participation suggests that this principle remains largely formal rather than practical. Additionally, the perceived inadequacies in healthcare accessibility and affordability reflect structural inequalities that intersect with educational deficiencies. Education plays a crucial role in enabling individuals to navigate healthcare systems and make informed decisions (Kickbusch et al., 2013). Therefore, gaps in education may further exacerbate inequalities in health outcomes and social development. The convincing results of our study, which show the desire of the respondents (87% were in favour) to achieve inclusion of systematic health education in schools, are in line with other authors' studies, which prove its effectiveness (WHO Europe, 2021; AHA/Schroeder et al., 2023). In the broader context of global challenges, including pandemics, geopolitical instability, and rapid technological change, the role of education becomes even more critical (World Bank, 2023; OECD, 2024). UNESCO (2021) emphasizes that education systems must adapt to prepare individuals not only for employment but also for active citizenship, resilience, and sustainable development. The results of this study indicate that these objectives are largely missing in current educational approaches. Overall, the result of this study highlights the urgent need for a comprehensive reform of the education system, integrating interdisciplinary approaches that combine health education, civic education, historical awareness, and practical life skills. Such reforms are essential to ensure the sustainable development of society, strengthen democratic values, and enhance national security.

CONCLUSION

Educational deficiencies of broad spectrum from knowledge of modifiable disease risk factors, first aid skills in critical situations, to the lack of historical knowledge that prevents strategic analysis of credible threats to the country's sustainability and national security, and maintenance of democratic principles of societal development. Urgent improvements of public education covering these gaps of knowledge are necessary.

High-quality teaching of recent history, first aid and health risk reduction as well as involvement of young people in decision-making process, could guarantee the sustainability of the country in everyday life and in a situation of threat in Europe.

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