

RESEARCH REPORT

“Opinions and attitudes of elementary school students on the importance of theatre clubs in educational approaches, self perceptions and social preferences in Kosovo”

An experience of online training in times of pandemic crisis

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Introduction

Performing arts represent a highly valuable source of development potential for both educational and social issues. The project “Growing through Arts in Education – ArtEd”, including all activities, especially the establishment of theatre clubs in schools aims to present the potential of performing arts, and, more specifically, the potential of theatre as an educational tool for overcoming socio-cultural inequalities and for the development of new communicative strategies capable of nurturing inter-subjective teaching-learning. Arts, especially theatre represents an educative tool for the empowerment of a vulnerable group, such as youth in elementary schools, enabling new interaction paths with the social and school environment, and facilitating the appearance of capabilities from elementary school students and through giving the opportunity to all interested students and teachers to ensure inclusiveness.

The reason for introducing an educational tool, such as the performing arts, entails the proposal of tangible methodologies in order to put into action the type of education we pursue. Therefore, it is not a matter of striving to deconstruct long-established pedagogic perspectives still in use, neither about plotting utopist itineraries or unclear conceptions of what a pedagogical proposal through art could be, but relatively about offering tools to combat the standard disconnection between education research and the truthful reality.

The social emergency that our world is going through, the rising social inequalities and the appearance of innovative forms of segregation and violence correlates in its particular approach with the socio-educational environment of these globalized times. In such circumstances, it is essential to strengthen the role of education as an agent of change, introducing new pedagogical formulas aimed at renewing the educational paradigm, which is considered as old-fashioned and recurring by numerous sociological perspectives (Bauman, 2003). Thus, it is a priority to restore this old-fashioned educational institution, which could be perceived as a “shell institution” (Giddens, 2000), detached from the social situation and, therefore, ineffective for the accomplishment of its original function, as well as the different pedagogical paradigms beneath additional educational fields, both non-formal and informal.

The growing pressure from international organizations to face the challenge of reducing vulnerability, as well as initiatives particularly directed toward youth act as a dual encouragement for building capable responses. It is thus critical to develop educational actions aimed at enabling important and relevant learning starting from a large perspective based on dialogical learning (Morin 2001). Such a model focused on the conception of dialogue is frequently referred to as dialogical learning or dialogical education, underlining the capabilities rather than the deficiencies of the learners while preserving the important function played by the teacher within the educational setting (Kazepides, 2012).

The idea of an empowering education, able of generating social change, is directly connected to the paradigm of dialogical learning. Education must be built leading dialogical and participatory

methods intended at achieving empowerment as a “process of disobedience and an effort of defeating individual and social oppressive structures” (Torres, 2009). Art as a social and educational tool encourages empowerment and social cohesion strategies, promoting both individual and group development while enabling the learning of new dialogue and expression (Allan, 2014).

Art education has a useful function as a multidimensional process conditioned by attitudes, interests, values, and numerous additional variables where the essential role of the teacher is to involve and motivate students, standing away from obligation and indoctrination. Thus, art becomes both a platform and an educational tool of great significance for its ability to support involvement and for acknowledging diversity as an educational asset instead of a shortage (Gjærum and Rasmussen, 2010). Therefore, art can be conceived as a facilitator of the human ability to increase the creative and critical capacity in order to question assumed truths and deconstruct prejudices (Efland, Freedman, and Stuhr, 2003).

Education through art, and more specifically theatre, is offering valuable elements for renovating the socio-educational paradigm, contributing to the critical change of society and to the decrease of social vulnerability (Barak, 2015).

Theatre helps youth to evolve from participation to becoming active leaders of the community. Daily work and interaction across inter-ethnic boundaries and contexts help break the cycle of passivity, and enhance the social inclusion of the disadvantaged. And by choosing the issues and staging their own stories, community members publicly articulate social problems. Often, this helps significant accumulated tensions to be mediated, as problems of immediate local importance are ventilated. It helps build a stronger and healthier community, and new active community leaders emerge in an organic way. As participants become more self-aware and self-confident through engagement with their artistic mentors and through common work, they become more active and socially engaged. Success on the stage builds self-confidence and prepares them for autonomously chosen activities later on. These youngsters learn how to organize their community for future agendas — and become real actors in their own lives.

Forum theatre as a tool for social change originates from Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed. Theatre of the Oppressed is a participatory theatre that fosters democratic and cooperative forms of interaction among participants, a form of theatre presented by Augusto Boal in the 1950s. More specifically, theatre of the oppressed is a rehearsal theatre designed for people who want to learn ways of fighting back against oppression in their daily lives. Theatre of the Oppressed and specifically Forum theatre urges people to intervene in a theatrical action and change it the way they think is right for them. Boal claims that, “The aesthetics of the oppressed aims at the liberation and fortification of metaphorical activities, a symbolic language, intelligence and sensitivity. It aims at the expansion of the perception that we have of the world”. Forum theatre does not only allow the audience to participate in discussion, but also give them a chance to take part in a play as actors. This happens as a process of finding a solution to the present oppression problem.

Unlike other theatre, Forum theatre has the power and opportunity to connect everyone who is in the settings. It gives audience members a chance to transform their role from spectators to actors by which Augusto Boal calls Spect-actors.

Objectives of this research report

The main objective of this research report was to identify the attitudes and opinions of young people (Students of elementary schools in Kosovo) on the impact that theatre clubs have on the educational approach they receive in their schools. Furthermore, another objective of this research was to find out if theatre clubs help students socialize and self-improvement through joint rehearsals and creation of artistic performances.

Within the project “Growing through Arts in Education – ArtEd” were developed and presented 20 different new youth performances/video drama online from 20 schools in Prishtina, Gjakova, Podujeva, Prizren, Gjilan, Obiliq and Shtime. Prior to the establishment of theatre clubs, two Theatre Based Education trainings were organized; one with 20 students (one per each school), and another one with 20 teachers (one per each school). Later on, regular virtual rehearsals were conducted for one month before presenting the performances online on social media outlets.

The links of these performances can be found online on Facebook pages: Travelling Theatre for Children and Youth <https://www.facebook.com/Travelling-Theater-for-Children-and-Youth-704545026590462/> and Artpolis - Art and Community <https://www.facebook.com/artpolisKosovo/>

Relevant information of the youth performances/video drama

Throughout March – June, 2020 20 performances were created through the establishment of 20 theatre clubs in 20 schools, geographically covering 7 municipalities of Kosovo: Prishtina, Gjakova, Podujeva, Prizren, Gjilan, obiliq and Shtime. Once theatre clubs were established, rehearsals started in order to create youth performances online. Each group, respectfully each school conducted rehearsals for one month before presenting the performances on social media. Due to the pandemic COVID19 all over the world, the initial format of the rehearsals and the presentation of the performances were alternated. Initially rehearsals started out on school premises, but then due to the situation created starting on 13th March all of the work was redirected online, including activities of this project. Nonetheless, each school/theatre club had one specific trainer/professional actor and one lead student that helped organize the process together with the teacher priory participating in the Theatre Based Education training organized by Art and Community center - Artpolis. Data on the schools, students, trainer and the thematic of the performances will be presented in the following tables:

Table 1. Information of youth performance “Discrimination of people with disabilities”

School	Municipality
Xhemajl Mustafa	Prishtina
Trainer/Mentor	Qendresa Kajtazi
Lead teacher	Gresa Rrahmani
Lead pupil	Debora Sheremeti
Number of theatre club members	14
Title of the performance	Discrimination of people with disabilities
Synopsis	
The video drama performance aims to raise the awareness of society that people with disabilities are equal and should be treated as such. The story of the video drama is about a blind girl who is faced every day with different harassment and unfairness from classmates and even from the teachers at school.	

Table 2. Information of youth performance “Domestic Violence”

School	Municipality
Nazim Gafurri	Prishtina
Trainer/Mentor	Edlir Gashi
Lead teacher	Mimoza Emini
Lead pupil	Elda Jahiri
Number of theatre club members	6
Title of the performance	Domestic Violence
Synopsis	

This performance aims to show how difficult it is for children who suffer out of odd situations in the family, such as domestic violence, and consequences manifested in their behavior.

Table 3. Information of youth performance “The audition”

School	Municipality
Shkolla e Gjelbër	Prishtina
Trainer/Mentor	Qendresa Kajtazi
Lead teacher	Gezime Bajrami
Lead pupil	Jon Thaqi
Number of theatre club members	13
Title of the performance	The audition
Synopsis	
The play aims to raise public awareness that people's employment and engagement should be based on their knowledge, qualifications and talent. Through this video drama, the reality in Kosovo is shown, where young people are discouraged to apply for jobs, colleges, scholarships or in other fields, due to the selection of 'favoritism'.	

Table 4. Information on youth performance “Bullying”

School	Municipality
Asim Vokshi	Prishtina
Trainer/Mentor	Edlir Gashi

Lead teacher	Bedrije Bojniku - Jashari
Lead pupil	Meris Gubetini
Number of theatre club members	7
Title of the performance	Bullying
Synopsis	
The purpose of this performance is to show that we should not bully anyone, nor remain indifferent when we see such a thing, because it is a violence, psychological or physical, which can lead to a worst thoughts or actions to the person who is a subject to this negative phenomenon.	

Table 5. Information on youth performance “The talent”

School	Municipality
Pjetër Bogdani	Prishtina
Trainer/Mentor	Daniela Markaj
Lead teacher	Krenare Basha Zeka
Lead pupil	Tuana Aliu
Number of theatre club members	13
Title of the performance	The talent
Synopsis	
Having a dream and having the talent to make it come true is the most beautiful part of it. And all that is needed is support. Zana, a new student at the school where she attends classes, faces prejudice and mockery from her peers because of her choice of school activity.	

Table 6. Information on youth performance “Why me?”

School	Municipality
Emin Duraku	Prishtina
Trainer/Mentor	Daniela Markaj
Lead teacher	Kastriot Azemi
Lead pupil	Erza Rexhepi
Number of theatre club members	4
Title of the performance	"Why me?"
Synopsis	
Bullying is the most commonly used term in school, where as always through harassment, threats and other forms of abuse, it is caused to an individual or a group of students.	

Table 7. Information on youth performance “Don’t deny my rights”

School	Municipality
Zekeria Rexha	Gjakova
Trainer/Mentor	Qendresa Kajtazi
Lead teacher	Sevdije Haxhibeqiri
Lead pupil	Oltian Morina
Number of theatre club members	10
Title of the performance	Don't deny my rights

Synopsis
The topic of the video drama is gender equality, a very delicate and very important topic for our society. Two different approaches towards the property rights for girls and women, by two Kosovo families.

Table 8. Information on youth performance “Is it my fault?”

School	Municipality
Emin Duraku	Gjakova
Trainer/Mentor	Daniela Markaj
Lead teacher	Arjeta Hajdaraga
Lead pupil	Arrita Zhubi
Number of theatre club members	10
Title of the performance	"Is it my fault?"
Synopsis	
Mistakes are part of our lives and we have consequences from them but can learn a lot as well. The same thing happened with the student of the class VIII-5, Kleant, who had endangered his grandmother in pandemic time by visiting her after playing with his friends. When his classmates found out during a virtual meeting, they scolded and judged him.	

Table 9. Information on youth performance “What do I want?”

School	Municipality
Ibrahim Rugova	Obiliq

Trainer/Mentor	Edlir Gashi
Lead teacher	Remzie Sadiku
Lead pupil	Eda Shala
Number of theatre club members	11
Title of the performance	"What do I want?"
Synopsis	
When children's talents and desire to pursue their dreams conflict with their parents' decisions, then the question arises, what should be done? To listen to her/his father to choose a profession that brings money or to pursue the dream in which his/her mother also supports that and to try to realize it through the talent he/she has?	

Table 10. Information on youth performance "Wait, wait – you have friends?"

School	Municipality
Thimi Mitko	Gjilan
Trainer/Mentor	Daniela Markaj
Lead teacher	Blerta Hyesni
Lead pupil	Jon Doda
Number of theatre club members	6
Title of the performance	"Wait, wait - you have friends?"
Synopsis	

Learning and communicating from distance has become our way of life, during the time of pandemic. But Era has a strong reason to meet her friends and share beautiful moments with them! It's her birthday and her friends surprised her.

Table 11. Information on youth performance “I want to live differently”

School	Municipality
Zija Shemsiu	Gjilan
Trainer/Mentor	Qendresa Kajtazi
Lead teacher	Florije Mehmeti Latifi
Lead pupil	Kamila Aliu
Number of theatre club members	10
Title of the performance	I want to live differently
Synopsis	
This video drama urges everyone to take more care of the environment in which we live and the saying "Humans are the greatest enemy of the Earth" let's make it a message that raises awareness to all those who do not appreciate the environment and the surroundings where they live.	

Table 12. Information on youth performance “Whispering conscience”

School	Municipality
Zef Lush Marku	Gjakova
Trainer/Mentor	Edlir Gashi

Lead teacher	Doruntina Hana
Lead pupil	Migena Kqiraj
Number of theatre club members	13
Title of the performance	whispering conscience
Synopsis	
Harassment in society, which in everyday jargon we call 'bullying', towards one or more persons is a bad phenomenon of society. Numerous cases of bullying take place in schools, while these are considered to be the lowest acts of those who practice it.	

Table 13. Information on youth performance "How do I feel?"

School	Municipality
Emin Duraku	Shtime
Trainer/Mentor	Qendresa Kajtazi
Lead teacher	Bajram Dugolli
Lead pupil	Pranvera Zeqiri
Number of theatre club members	9
Title of the performance	How do I feel?
Synopsis	
The theme of the video drama is the life of a 15-year-old girl who, despite her young age, she feels sad. The life she faces can be difficult even for a teenager. So, depression can be part of them, too.	

Table 14. Information on youth performance “Children and negative phenomena”

School	Municipality
Ibrahim Fehmiu	Prizren
Trainer/Mentor	Edlir Gashi
Lead teacher	Ilaz Bllaca
Lead pupil	Lionit Rashkaj
Number of theatre club members	7
Title of the performance	Children and negative phenomena
Synopsis	
The performance aims to raise public awareness of the negative impact of child drug abuse and other negative phenomena.	

Table 15. Information on youth performance “My life, my rights”

School	Municipality
Enver Maloku	Podujeva
Trainer/Mentor	Edlir Gashi
Lead teacher	Eroll Bejta
Lead pupil	Art Hyseni
Number of theatre club members	6
Title of the performance	My rights, my life

Synopsis
The performance addresses the gender based discrimination. In this case the sister does not dare to talk to a friend because her brother and father do not allow it.

Table 16. Information on youth performance “The weight of responsibility”

School	Municipality
Xheladin Rekaliu	Podujeva
Trainer/Mentor	Qendresa Kajtazi
Lead teacher	Sebahate Llugaliu
Lead pupil	Rona Llugaliu
Number of theatre club members	10
Title of the performance	The weight of responsibility
Synopsis	
Here are addressed the shortcomings of the patriarchal system, where the weight of the hierarchy discriminates the rights of children and leaves consequences for them.	

Table 17. Information on youth performance “Rich in spirit”

School	Municipality
Lidhja e Prizreni	Prizren

Trainer/Mentor	Daniela Markaj
Lead teacher	Lulije Buzhala
Lead pupil	Suela Tafallari
Number of theatre club members	7
Title of the performance	Rich in spirit
Synopsis	
The performance deals with the situation of a boy with bad financial conditions, who does not feel equal with society for this reason.	

Table 18. Information on youth performance “Everything is possible”

School	Municipality
Suleman Riza	Gjakova
Trainer/Mentor	Daniela Markaj
Lead teacher	Januz Shala
Lead pupil	Leona Berisha
Number of theatre club members	8
Title of the performance	Everything is possible
Synopsis	

The performance tells about a girl's ambitions and desires for a profession that society prejudices her.

Table 19. Information on youth performance “TechNo cyber bullying”

School	Municipality
Abudullah Shabani	Shtime
Trainer/Mentor	Edlir Gashi
Lead teacher	Shahe Kameri Hakiu
Lead pupil	Erlind Kadriu
Number of theatre club members	10
Title of the performance	TechNo cyber bulling
Synopsis	
Intrusive photos through smart devices, cyber bullying and gossip, are some of the negative phenomena that are treated in this performance.	

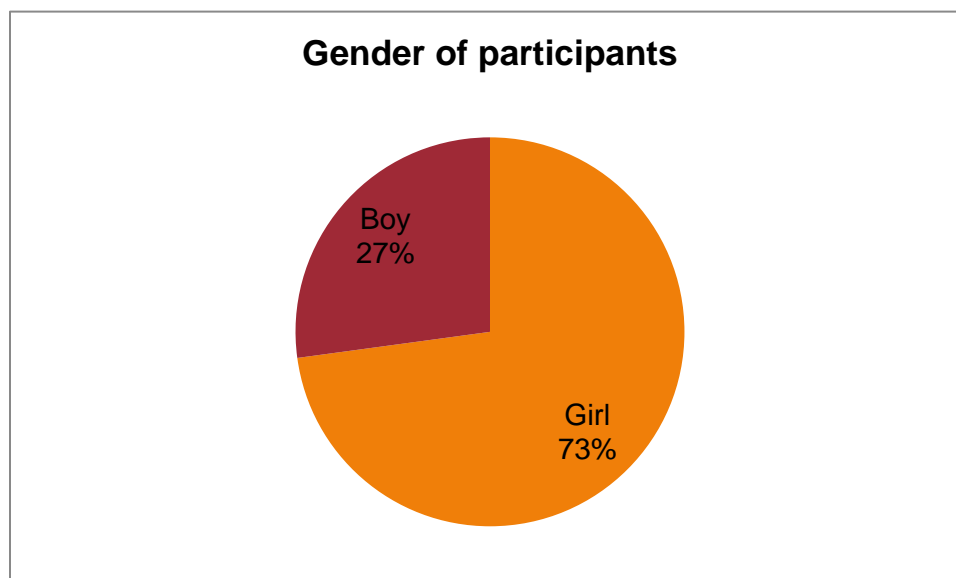
Table 20. Information on youth performance “Together we succeed”

School	Municipality
Pavarësia	Podujeva
Trainer/Mentor	Daniela Markaj

Lead teacher	Gazmend Nazifi
Lead pupil	Mustaf Mustafa
Number of theatre club members	7
Title of the performance	Together we succeed
Synopsis	
The play is about teamwork, cooperation between pupils and how they should support each other on every occasion.	

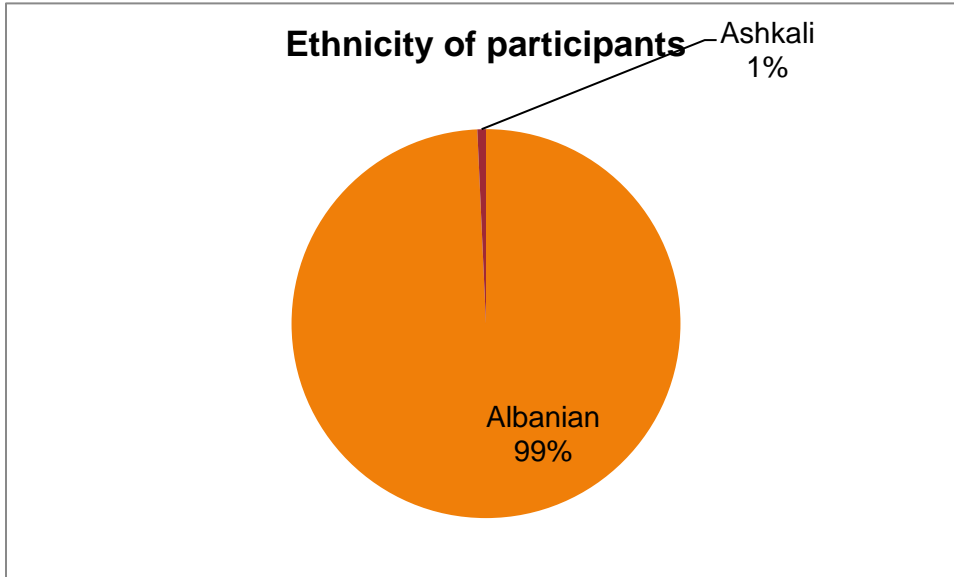
Methodology

In order to identify the opinions and attitudes of elementary school students in Kosovo in regards to educational approaches, self-perceptions, social preferences and the importance of theatre clubs we conducted a quantitative research through the administration of questionnaires online (google forms) once the students finished the rehearsals and the recording of the performances. 140 students of 20 elementary schools in 7 municipalities participated in this research all together creating 20 youth performances, this does not reflect the total number of students that are members of all theatre clubs established through this project, that is 181 students in total.



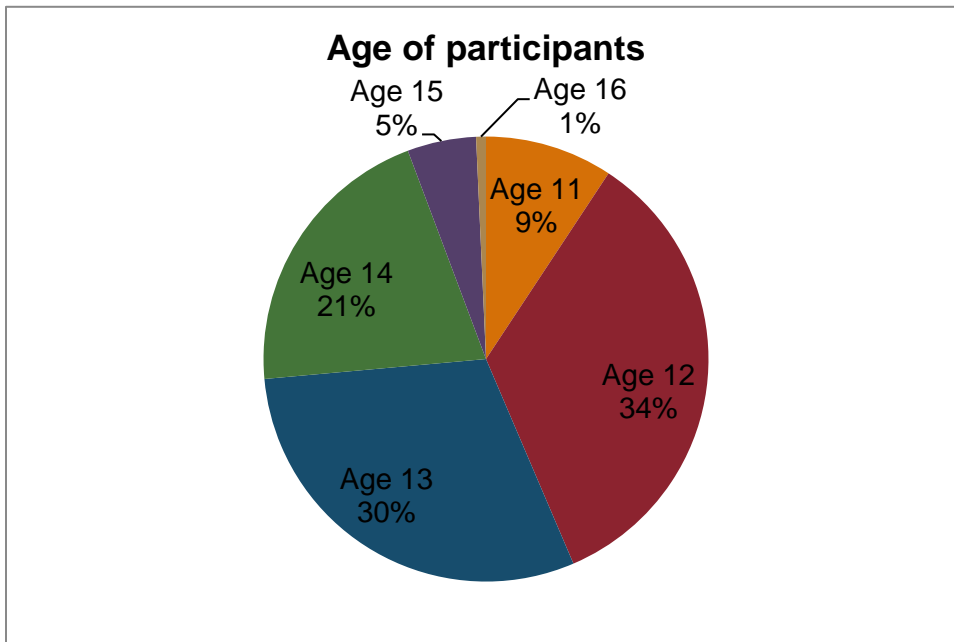
From all students that submitted the online questionnaires there were 102 girls and 38 boys.

Figure 1. Gender of participants



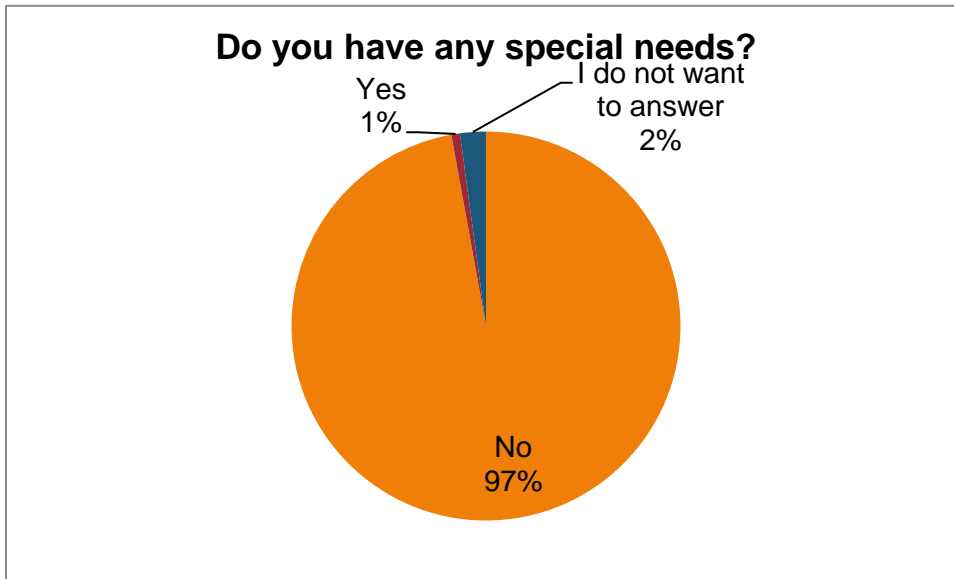
Students were from 2 different ethnicities: 139 Albanian and 1 Roma.

Figure 2. Ethnicity of participants



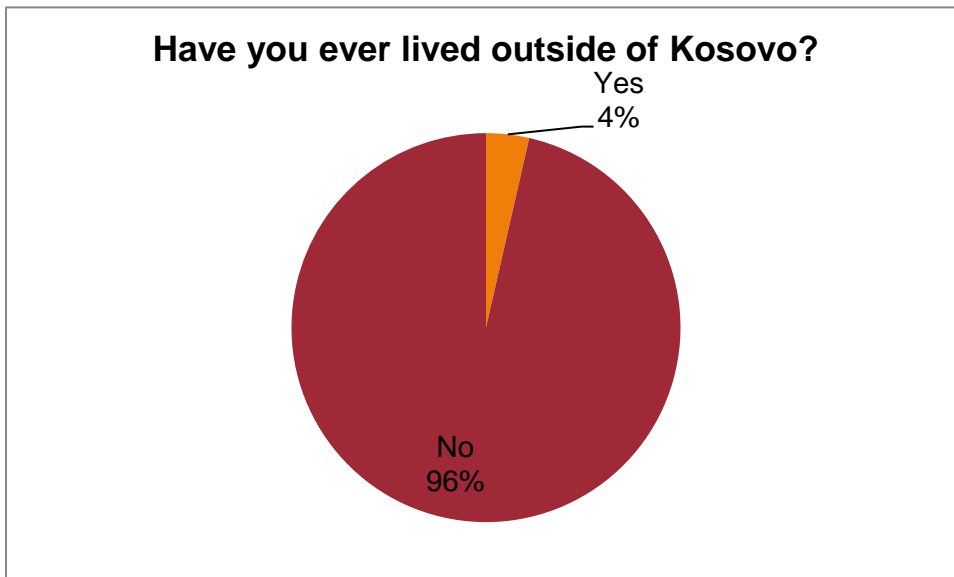
Student's age participating in this research variate from ages 11 to 16: 13 students were of age 11, 48 of age 12, 42 of age 13, 29 of age 14, 7 of age 15 and 1 of age 16.

Figure 3. Age of participants



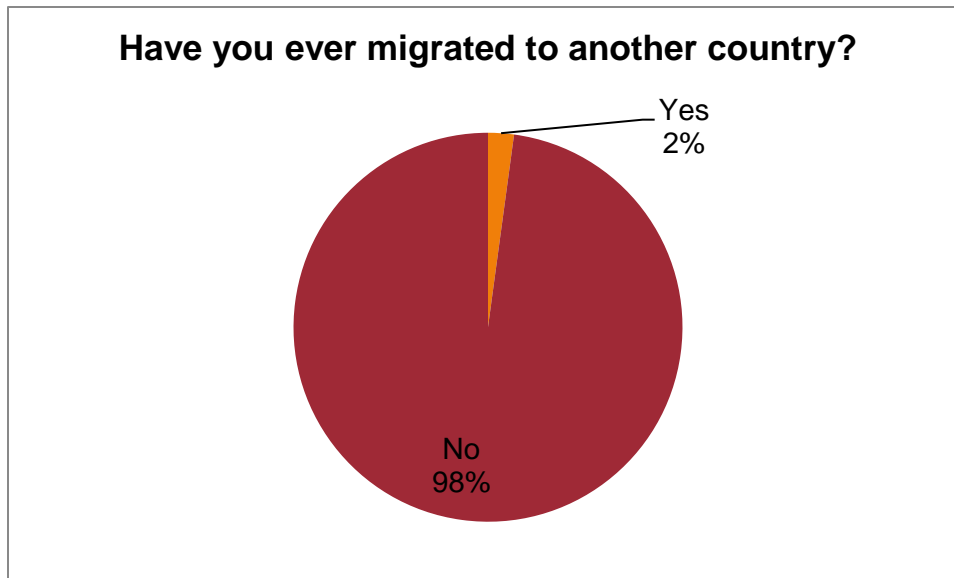
When asked if they have any special needs? 136 students answered "No", 1 student answered "Yes", and 3 students answered that they "do not want to answer".

Figure 4. Do you have any special needs?



From the overall number of students participating in this questionnaire, 5 students answered "Yes" including Netherlands, France, Italy, Germany and Albania.

Figure 5. Have you ever lived outside of Kosovo?



When students were asked if they ever migrated to another country? 3 students reported that they have migrated to United States of America and Germany.

Figure 6. Have you ever migrated to another country?

Questionnaires

There was developed one questionnaire online within this research project to identify the opinions and attitudes of Kosovar elementary school students aged 11 to 16 in 20 different schools in Prishtina, Gjakova, Prizren, Gjilan, Podujeva, Obiliq and Shtime. Regardless of the thematic of the performances these youngsters developed, they all responded to the same questionnaire that aimed to identify their opinions and attitudes on the importance of theatre clubs on educational approaches, self-perception and social preferences.

This online questionnaire had the demographical section, where the students were asked to answer questions on their gender, age, municipality, ethnic background, if they have any special needs and whether they have ever lived or migrated outside of Kosovo and where.

It should be noted that the initial aim of this research project was to conduct pre and post questionnaires, before and after the establishment of theatre clubs and presentation of the youth performances. However, due to the pandemic COVID19 that covered the whole world, rehearsals, presentations of the performances were conducted online and therefore pre questionnaires were not administered to the students.

The second part of the questionnaire includes questions identifying the preferred educational approach, social preferences, self-perception and the importance and impact of theatre clubs on these students.

Procedure

The design and implementation of these questionnaires were done according to ethical principles; school directors, teachers, parents and students were notified prior to the implementation of these questionnaires, their purpose and use, all data is kept confidential and it was designed that each student remains anonym.

The online questionnaire was addressed to students after the one month rehearsals and the recording of the performance online. Before the questionnaires were implemented the students were informed on how to fill them out, and also if and when needed help the coordinators of the project were within reach at all times. Students were contacted through email with the link of the google form and the instructions needed to fully understand the questions and the purpose of the research.

After receiving 140 questionnaires on google forms, the data then was transferred to the statistical software SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) for further intentions of this research.

Results

Initially this research was designed to identify the opinions and attitudes of students in two different time periods before and after the theatre clubs, due to the pandemic COVID19 that impacted the work of everyone around the world, this research was of no exception. Therefore, the questionnaires were administered online only after the theatre clubs were established and video drama were recorded. Considering this, the data presented in this research report falls more under descriptive analysis, with further implications on the correlation between different variables of the research.

Out of 181 students of 20 elementary schools that are members of the respective theatre clubs, 140 students participated in this research. The questionnaire was administered online with the option on all quantitative questions as *required, in order to receive on the database only completed questionnaires.

Through this questionnaire we aim to identify four issues important to the objectives of the research: educational approach, social inclusiveness, importance of theatre clubs and the overall experience on online rehearsals and performance.

Educational approach

It has become clear that many teachers are seriously considering using new means of education such as drama as a means of explaining the teaching of different subjects such as science, mathematics, and language. The idea came from the educational programs offered by television

and the scientific and social information they provide through drama. The student is either read or narrated as far as this is when the class is a field for presenting the vocabulary and concepts in a dramatic and exciting drama (Wahab, 2005).

The educational process must be an integral responsibility of the teacher and the learner. It has been shown that drama is a technical model that helps to apply this method and works to develop visions and understanding through research understanding and planning. It is also attractive, as events can be described smoothly to facilitate understanding of students, and is effective in that they develop or move the imagination and contemplative thinking of the recipient, which enables him to increase his/her life skills (Adıgüzel & Timuçin, 2010).

The importance of drama in education is that it helps to develop the learner's thinking and get rid of the stodgy atmosphere of education; characterized by repetition and stagnation. Also, it helps to develop his/her personality through integration and work and cooperation with the group. Therefore, it is a successful educational method and a medium of learning. Some methods are used to convey an educational idea to the student. The state of stalemate is broken, and the learner's understanding of the ideas in his or her natural life deepens. This leads to the development of creative thinking and develops mental, psychological, cultural, and social levels (Afana, Al-Louh & Hassan, 2008). It can be said that contemplative thinking is the look and thinking of the individual in depth to all what is happening in the environment. Consider the idea from several aspects, including the presentation of elements, and know the reasons that led to the results by linking ideas to each other. It establishes a good understanding of things, and also develops the ability to analyze its performance. Also, to identify the ideas and beliefs behind them, and their consequences, leading to new knowledge and decisions contributing to the development of itself, and reflective thinking makes the student always planning and reflecting on all the information presented to him, while this has the effect of learning in the mind of the learner, and therefore Enhances life skills (Agha, Ihsan K. & Lulu (2009).

In addition to its intrinsic educational value, drama can reinforce the rest of the school curriculum. Since communication and empathy are central to drama, a student who has explored like in the drama classroom will be better able to understand ideas in history and current events. He/she will be able to put himself/herself into the shoes of figures in history and literature, to understand the way human beings interact. The link between dramatic arts and subjects such as English, history, social studies, and related areas is obvious. More importantly, drama can be used to promote active learning in any subject-to give students a kinesthetic and empathetic understanding as well as an intellectual understanding of a topic. Studies have shown again and again that this approach yields greater depth of understanding and a marked improvement in retention. In this way drama accomplishes several goals at once-enriching students' school experience through art as well as reinforcing traditional academics.

When this specific group of students was asked "What are your preferred subjects in school?", 78 students (55.3 %) answered that their preferred subjects are "Artistic subjects". It is worth mentioning that this could be impacted by the fact that these students voluntarily registered to become members of the theatre club of their school, therefore typically these students are more prone to lean towards social and artistic programs. Regardless of the fact that these

predisposed characteristics of students might impact the results of the question, 55.3% is a high percentage of the school population to not be considered when developing school curricula that it should have been adapted to their needs and interests.

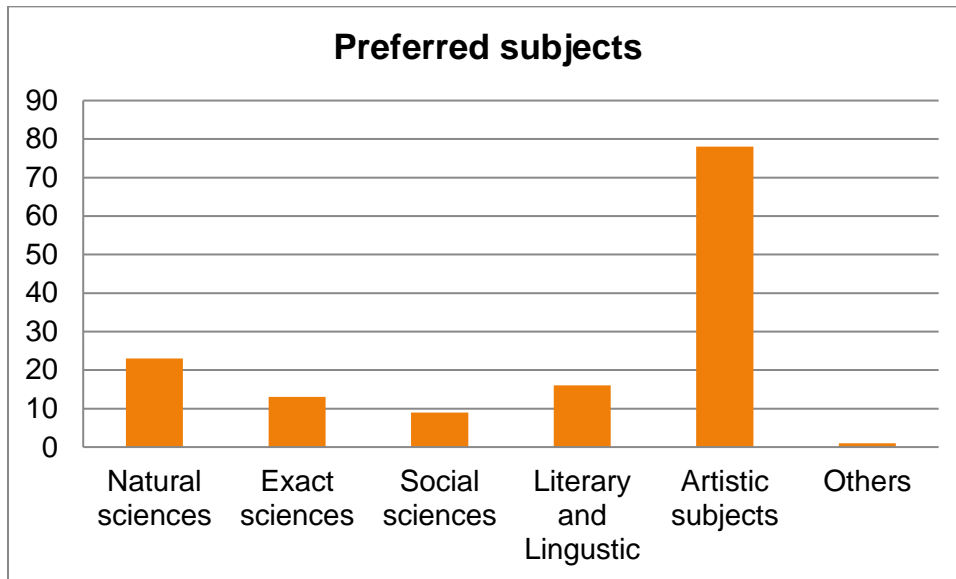


Figure 7. Which are your preferred subjects in school?

Out of 140 students 86 (61.4%) responded that their preferred methodologies of learning are innovative methodologies, compared to the 49 students that choose classic methodologies. What could be noted from the results of the questions regarding their preferred subjects and methodologies is that the majority of students lean towards artistic subjects and innovative methodologies. In regards to the results of these two questions, even though 55.3 % of students prefer “Artistic subjects”, a higher percentage of students (61.4 %) would still rather prefer innovative methodologies of learning, thus feeding to the need of students to use creative and artistic methodologies into their learning and school experience.

The Conclusions of the Council on developing the role of education in a fully-functioning knowledge triangle encourages education and training institutions to ensure that curricula and teaching and examination methods at all levels of education incorporate and foster creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship (Council of the European Union, 2009a). Member States have been invited to consider how to foster greater synergy between knowledge and skills on the one hand and creativity on the other, as well as how to best promote, monitor and assess creativity and innovative capacity, at all levels of education and training (Council of the European Union, 2008b). They should encourage teachers to develop their roles as learning facilitators and promoters of creativity, and help teacher education institutions to respond to the new demands of the teaching profession. At the same time, it is recognized that fostering creative abilities and attitudes within schools also requires the support of an organizational culture open to creativity and the creation of an innovation-friendly environment in general.

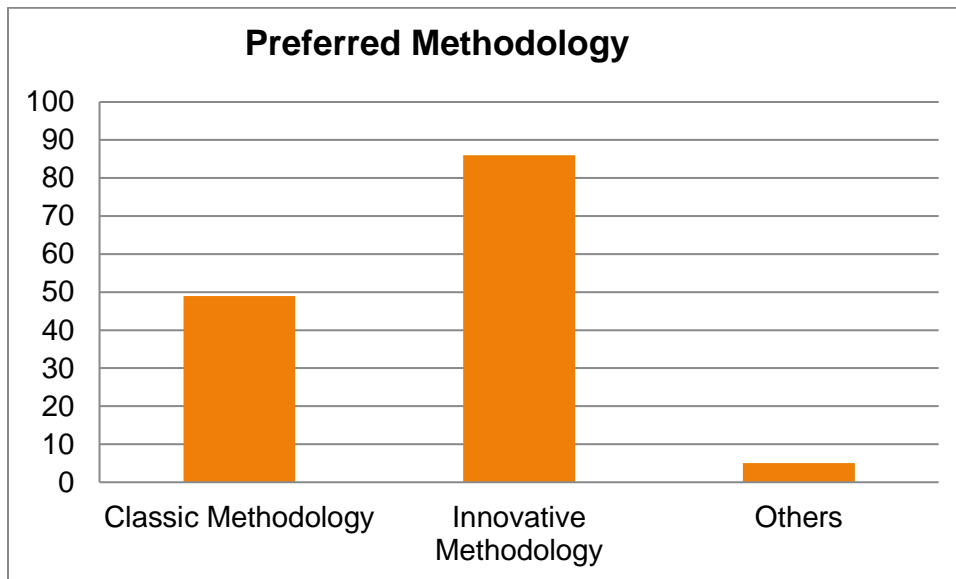


Figure 8. What is your preferred methodology of learning in school?

When students were asked if they think extracurricular activities (theatre clubs) will help them to better understand the subjects in school? 84% of the students answered “Yes”, once again proving the students needs and interests to use artistic and creative methodologies as the preferred and productive educational approach.

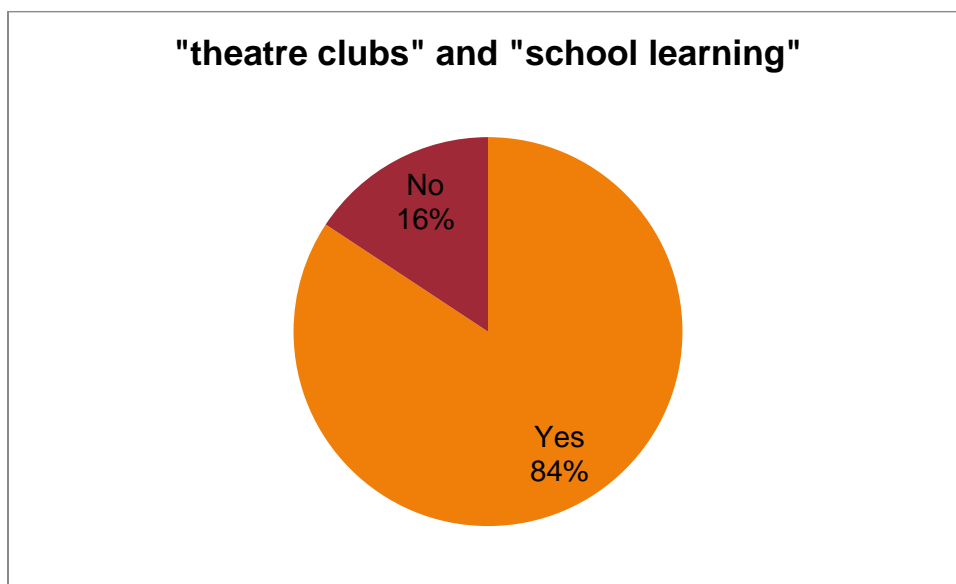


Figure 9. Do you think extracurricular activities (theatre clubs) will help you to better understand the subjects in school?

Furthermore, when students were asked “If yes then why?” they were offered to answer in their own words the impact that these theatre clubs have on the better understanding of the school subjects:

- “The learning process is more attractive/appealing.”
- “I can better expand my thoughts; see the bigger picture of an issue.”
- “I think it helps our brains function better, and makes us more prepared for the school subjects.”
- “It helps us to better understand new knowledge, rather than learn by heart.”
- “Artistic activities have more effect in learning faster than other methodologies.”
- “I can understand and remember things easier. It helps me reinforce my knowledge.”
- “I learn about new things from all over the world.”
- “Practicing what we learn in school helps us to better understand theoretical lessons.”
- “I always learn new things, and it increases my curiosity.”
- “I learn things that are not included in the school curricula.”
- “It helps me to be more creative and develop my imagination.”
- “It broadens my perspective on the world, and it helps me to talk more easily to others.”
- “It makes school more fun!”
- “It helps me explore my skills and how to present them to others.”
- “It inspires me to write essays, and I feel more confident.”

As we can see from the answers of the students the main theme here is cognitive engagement. Most of the reasons given by the students fall in the line of subjective engagement, learning by doing, in respect to literature and human relationships. It is the equivalent of Scientific Departments and Classes using laboratories and experiments to explain complicated scientific theorems. By engaging all senses, not just hearing, retention and imagination, the learning process of Social Subjects and Classes becomes much more appealing, interesting and impactful. This is reflected in most of the student’s answers, such as: “The learning process is

more attractive/appealing.”, “It helps us to better understand new knowledge, rather than learn by heart.”, “I can understand and remember things easier. It helps me reinforce my knowledge.” and “Practicing what we learn in school helps us to better understand theoretical lessons.”

Social preferences

The tendency to use drama in education stimulates students and develops their mental abilities, which increases the knowledge of himself/herself and his/her abilities and knowledge of the skills and talents, and these skills are important to enable the individual to communicate with others and interact with them, so that it facilitates the achievement of its objectives successfully.

Drama is communication. Like all the arts, drama allows students to communicate with and understand others in new ways. Perhaps more than any other art form, drama also provides training in the very practical aspects of communication so necessary in today's increasingly information-centered world. Students who have participated in dramatic activities are less likely to have difficulty speaking in public, will be more persuasive in their communications, both written and oral, will be better able to put themselves into others' shoes and relate to them, and will have a more positive, confident self image. Participation in dramatic activity requires self control and discipline that will serve the student well in all aspects of life. Students in drama will learn to work together, to cooperate, and to find the best way for each member of a group to contribute, and to listen to and accept the viewpoints and contributions of others. No art form is more truly collaborative. Drama is an important tool for preparing students to live and work in a world that is increasingly team-oriented rather than hierarchical (Buchanan, 2007).

When students were asked about the way they socialize with others and given the chance to select one out of three options (personal preferences, group work or artistic and literary activities), the majority of students answered that they prefer socializing with others in consideration to their personal preferences (47.9%), followed by “through artistic and literary activities” (32.9%) and last “group work” (19.3%). Coupled with the facts that an overwhelming number (91%) of students answered “Yes” to the question “Do you think extracurricular activities (theatre clubs) will help you create new friendships?” and almost all of the students (99%) liked that they now were a part of a Theatre Club, we can safely assume, personal preferences of socialization are fully in line with the idea of a Theatre Club. It is the lack of opportunity that has stopped these students from joining artistic clubs and venues, not the lack of motivation or desire. By comparison, 32.9% of the students already socialize through artistic activities, 19.3% socialize through group work (from which we assume they have had some cooperation in organizing artistic shows, since the students are supposed to have some artistic background).

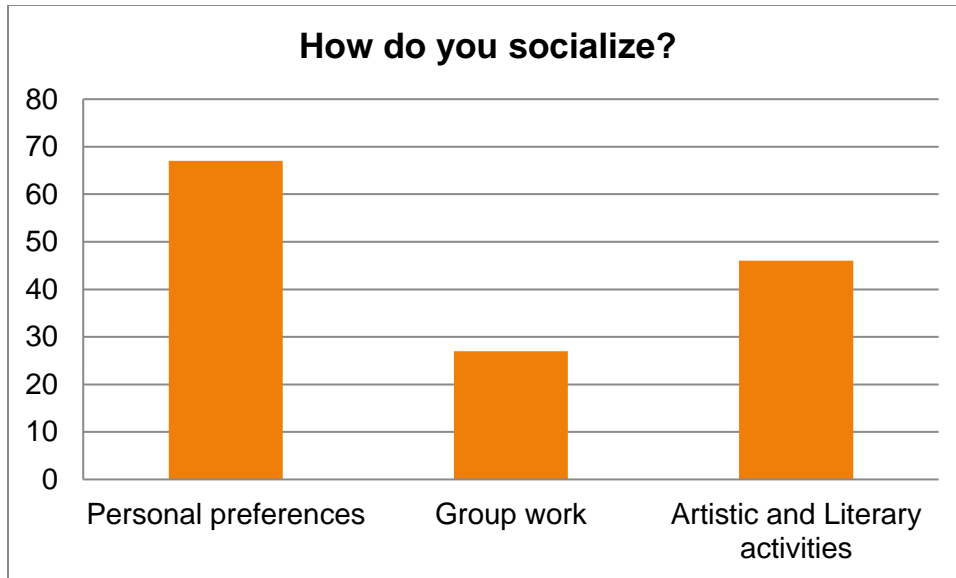


Figure 10. How do you socialize with friends in the classroom or school?

When students were asked if they think extracurricular activities (theatre clubs) will help them create new friendships? 91% of the students answered “Yes”. This corresponds with studies conducted on the increasing impact of artistic activities on socializing, especially among youth.

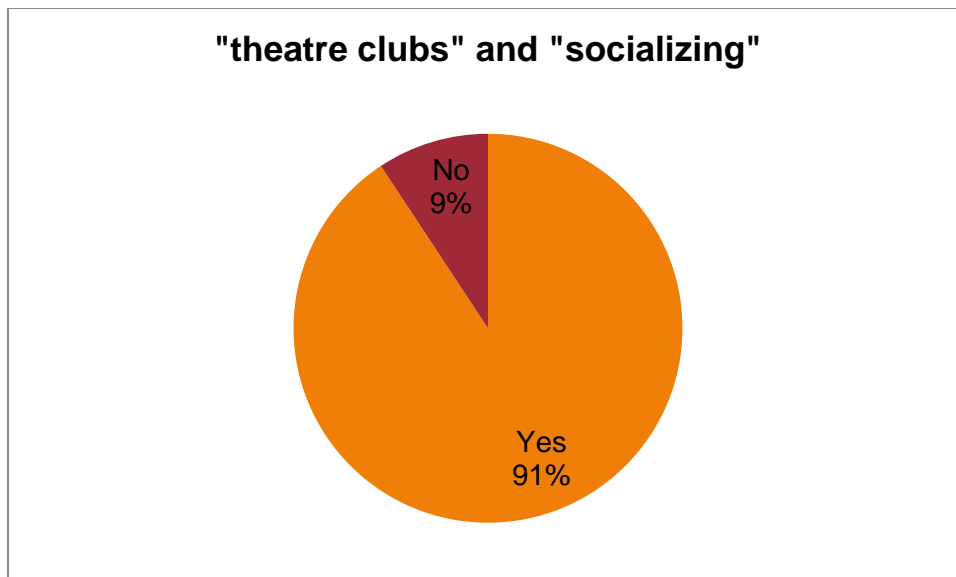


Figure 11. Do you think extracurricular activities (theatr clubs) will help you create new friendships?

Further on, the students were asked to explain why they think extracurricular activities help create new friendships? Many of them listed reasons from their personal experiences, which are listed below:

- “Because it offered me the opportunity to meet people with the same interests”
- “Because during the upcoming activities we will have the chance to meet students from other schools as well”
- “Because through joint work, we will have the chance to make new friends”
- “Because now, I have friends that otherwise I do not think I would hang out”
- “Because we meet with people with the same interest as me on theatre and acting”
- “Because I have meet students with similar personality as mine”
- “Because we get to talk, discuss and get to know with many other students”
- “Because we communicate with each other regularly”
- “Because our work in the theatre clubs involves group work, and in this way we connect with each other”
- “Because we get to work with students from other classrooms and generations”

After students were asked to list the reasons of how they think theatre clubs helped them to socialize, another question on this issue was presented, “Do you socialize with other students outside of your social circle, ethnic, economic status or other feature group? 61.4% answered that they prefer to socialize with friends similar to them, but they would not exclude others who are different to them, this alone does not illustrate their most important need to create new friendships regardless of their background. But, when given the chance to pick those similar to them, only 12.1 % responded to that option, whereas 26.4 % answered that they prefer to socialize with students different from them. This data feeds to the before mentioned answers on the open question “If yes, then why?” where many students responded that what interests them the most is to meet “new” friends, friends that otherwise would not have met.

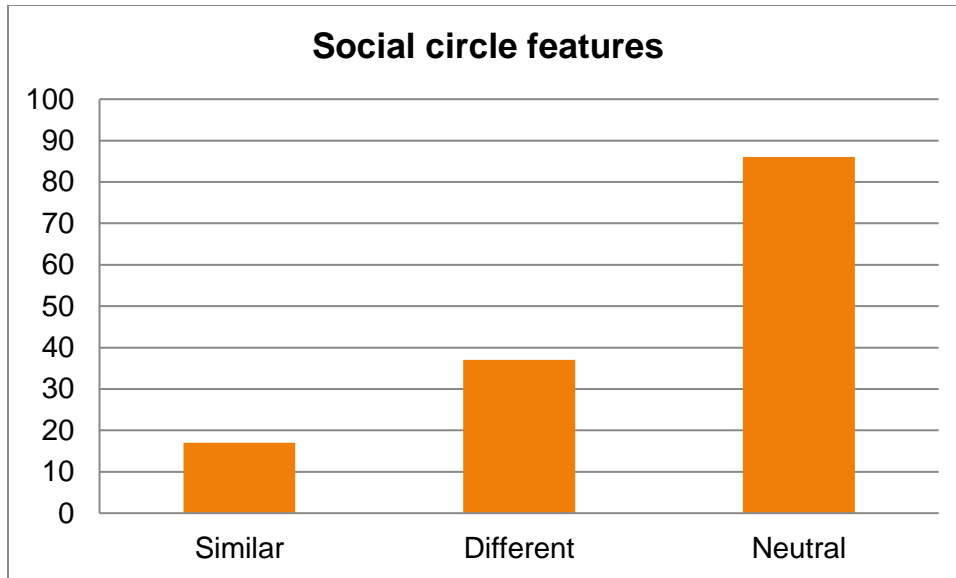


Figure 12. Do you socialize with others in the classroom and school outside of your social circle, ethnic, religious, economic or other feature group?

Importance of theatre clubs

The life skills of students also develop the use of thinking. This is one of the successful methods that motivate the individual to achieve and build his/her personality in a unique way. The more the individual understands the things around him, the more he has the ability to acquire many skills. The basic idea is teaching the human how to think and infer by themselves, as opposed to receiving ideas from others, so the teacher must use multiple methods to enrich and stimulate thinking in students. For example, a teacher can use the method of asking relevant questions, or the method of dramatic expression of attitudes relating to the course material. These enhance students thinking revealing the real knowledge underlying the educational situation, which in turn gives students an opportunity to clarify and reflect what they have learned, and thus create a reasonable answer and build logically correct generalizations (Costa, Faccio, Belloni, & Iudici, 2014).

The practice of contemplative thinking makes the individual a distinct personality composed of many characteristics and qualities, such as listening to others and understanding, and reducing the rush impulsiveness and recklessness, and allowing flexibility in thinking and scrutiny and control, and understanding the behavior of others emotional and emotional reactions, and managing to act effectively in unexpected situations while reacting to what is happening around, and considering it, and practicing reflective thinking on the development of the skills of literary students, which strengthens them with multiple skills that make them more creative (Duatepe-Paksu, & Ubuz, 2009).

When students were asked if they like being part of the theatre club? 99% of them answered “Yes”, when asked “If yes, then why?” The students were offered to use their own words to describe the overall process. The following answers reflect a summary of their reflections:

- “Participating in the theatre club helps me relax”
- “Because through work I can meet new people and create new friendships”
- “Because I want to experience new things”
- “Because I want to perform on the stage and become an actor/ess on the future”
- “Because through acting me and my friends can spread important messages to our peers”
- “I want to act because I can escape from any problem, feel calmer and I am more in touch with things that are happening around me”
- “Because I learn new things, and also I feel free to express my thoughts”
- “It gives me self-confidence and that I can create new friendships”
- “Because it’s stress-free and it helps me develop my imagination”
- “Because it teaches me new things about myself and others around me”
- “Because it’s fun and it’s a space where I can unfold my creativity”
- “Because it’s inspiring, it makes me forget my problems and I can make other people happy”
- “Because it made me reflect on the experiences of discriminated people”
- “I like acting because it helps me develop ideas and it teaches me more on body language”
- “it helps me express my inner thoughts and feelings”
- “It gives me the opportunity to be myself and it helps my emotional well-being in general”
- “Because it’s challenging and it gets me out of my comfort zone”

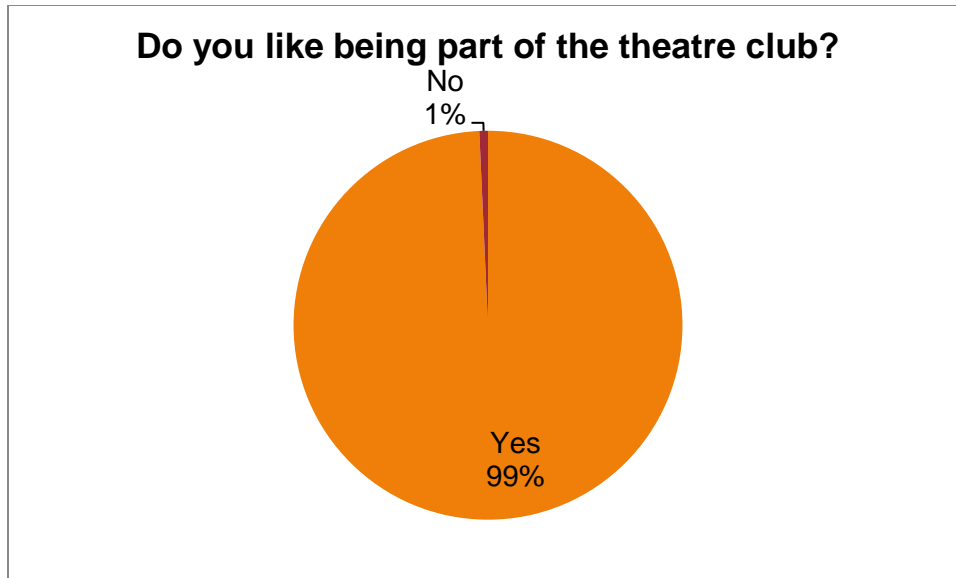


Figure 13. Do you like being part of the theatre club?

When students were asked about how does being part of the theatre club makes you feel? They were offered to choose between two options, on relation to oneself (It makes me feel better about myself, fulfilled, self-confident) and in relation to others (It makes me feel better in relation with others, active role in the social circle/school, I can bring positive change in my society, I can make new friends). 46% of students answered that this experience affects them in relation to themselves and 54% answered that it affects them in relation with others. These equilibriums on the responses of the students give a clear picture on the equal importance of artistic activities on the personal level as well as social level.

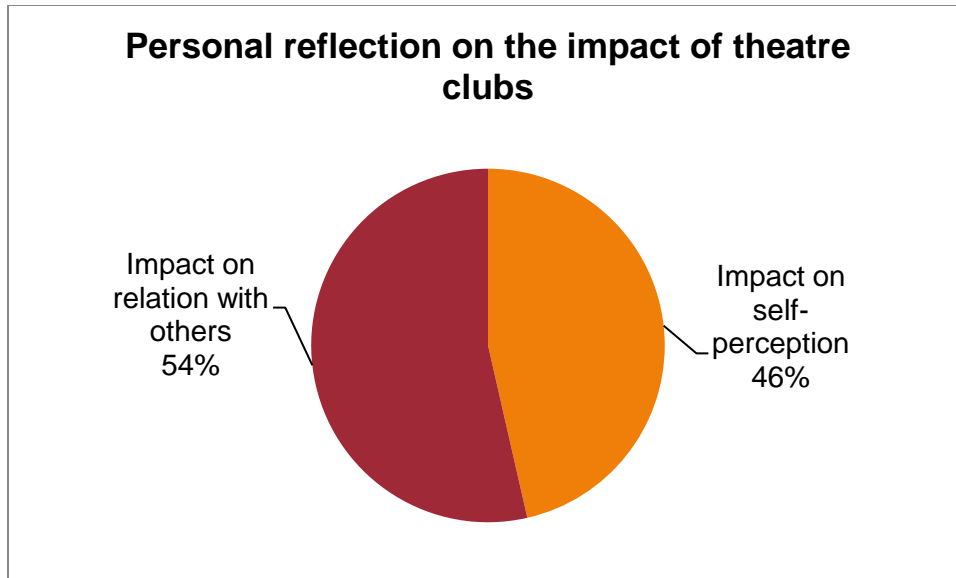


Figure 14. How does it make you feel that fact that you are part of the theatre club?

The online training experience

There are many perspectives brought to the surface when discussing the effectiveness of online/virtual trainings as a tool for non-formal education. That is why it is important to measure their impact from the recipient's perspective. Through 5 questions based on Likert's Scale were measured five different aspects of this intervention, the data on the following charts clearly confirms the impact that the activities implemented through the project "Growing through Arts in Education – ArtEd" had on the students of 20 schools in Kosovo.

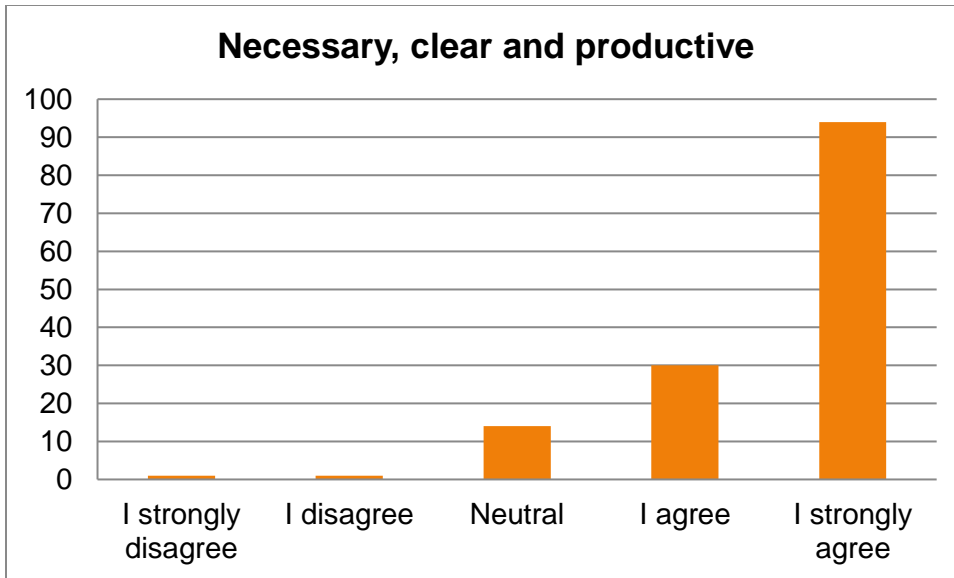


Figure 15. Lessons that I have learned from the online/virtual training were necessary, clear and productive.

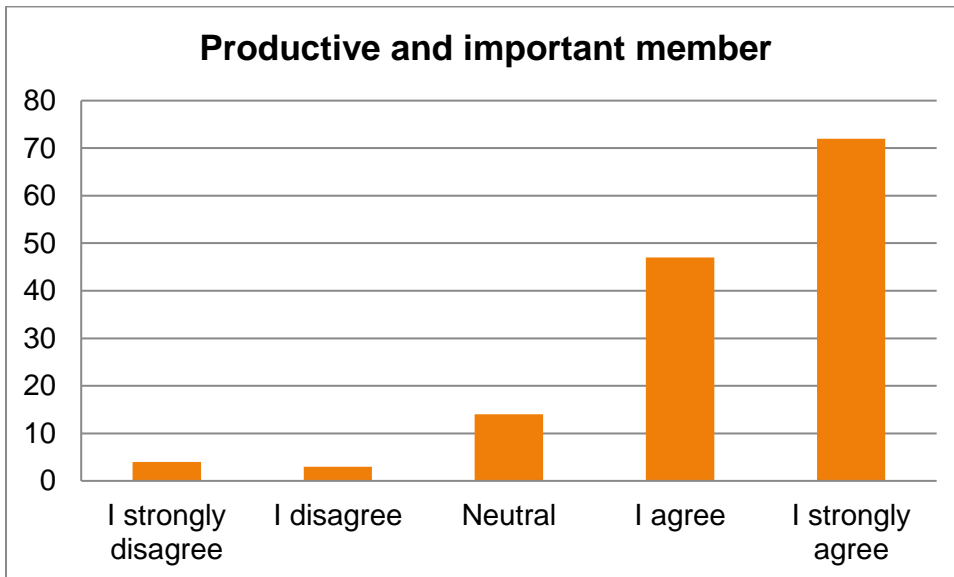


Figure 16. I have felt productive and an important part of the theatre club.

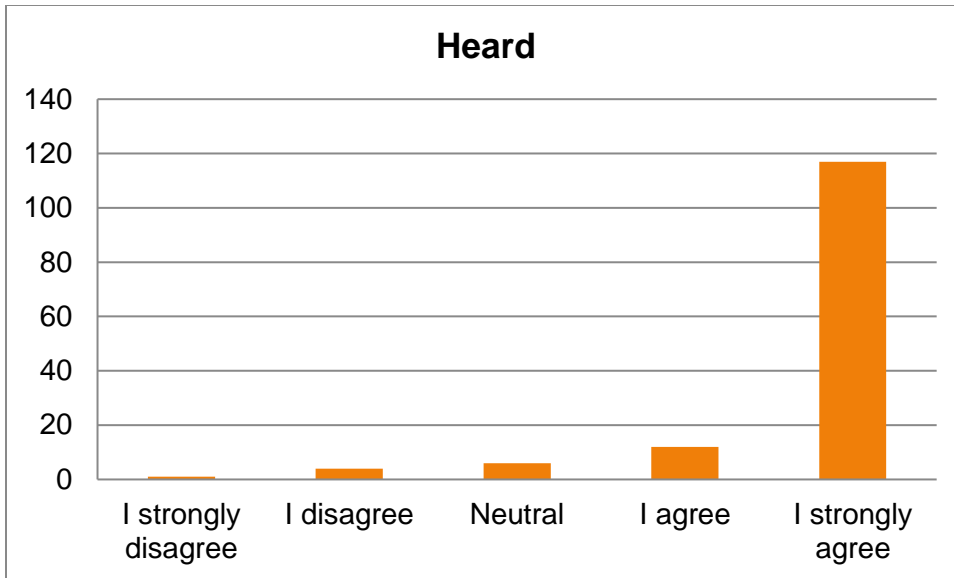


Figure 17. I have felt heard during the online/virtual training (I have had the opportunity to share my opinions and to receive an answer from the trainer).

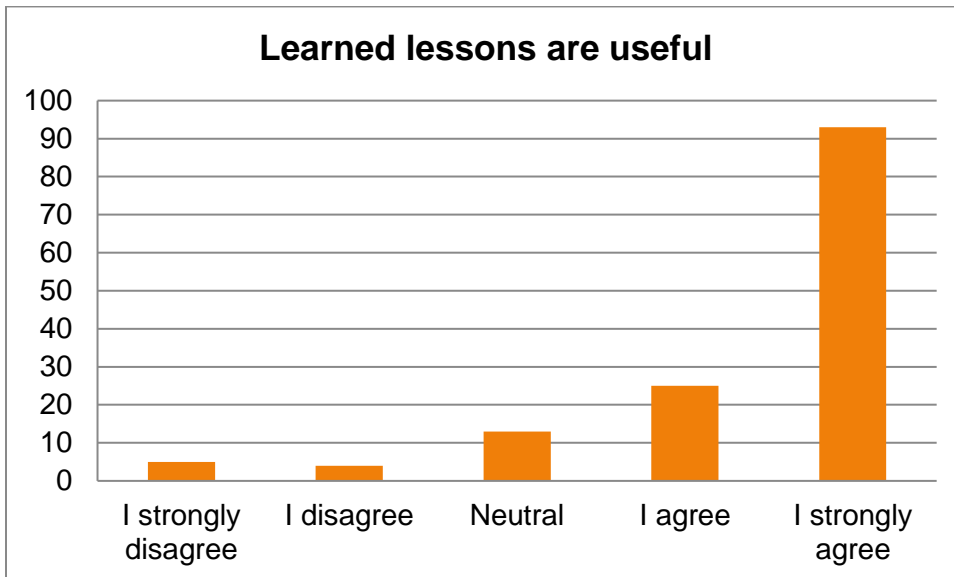


Figure 18. Lessons learned during the online training are useful and easily implemented on the performance we will later present in the school's environment.

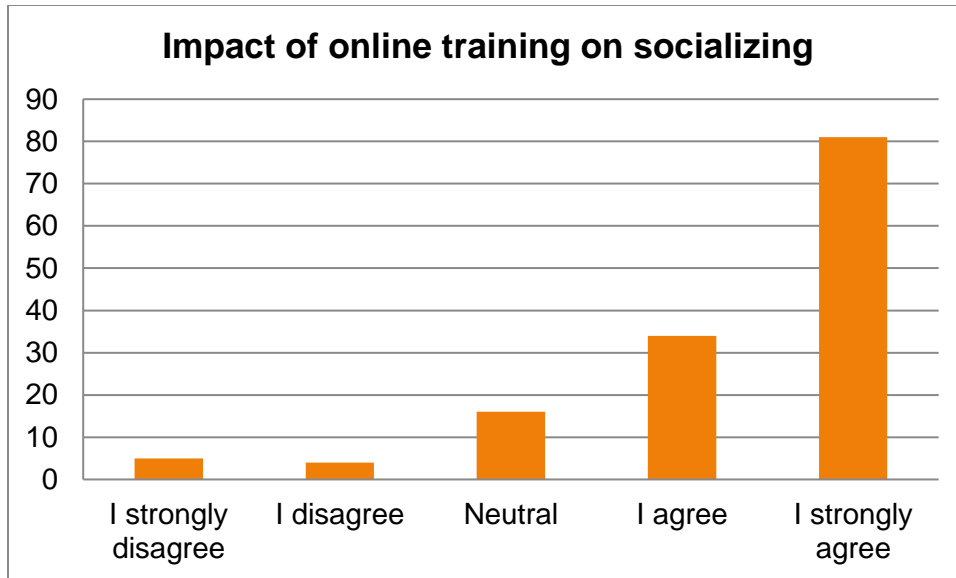


Figure 19. The online/virtual trainings have impacted my socializing with other members of the theatre club.

Overall analysis

The role of the pandemic crisis must be taken into the equation, when discussing the importance of the establishment of the theatre clubs in the respective schools during this working online period. As we know from numerous studies (Susan M. Sutton Clawson, Ph.D, M.P.H developed the theoretical term Crisis Bonding) people tend to bond more during times of extreme stress or crises'. This could present an opportunity to encourage and continue the fostering and engagement of students that has taken place during this experience through the Theatre Clubs Program. As we already know, Art is an effective method of learning, growth and mental well-being, also used as a form of therapy for difficulties such as anxiety and stress, depression and trauma, social difficulties etc. Drama Therapy especially, is used as a tool to treat trauma, social anxiety, set individual and group goals and achieve catharsis. (Jones, 2007). Keeping in mind Kosovo's PISA scores put students in the "Low performers in reading" category

(<https://gpseducation.oecd.org/CountryProfile?plotter=h5&primaryCountry=XKO&treshold=10&opic=PI>) , these Theatre Clubs could offer a new construct with which students can learn to understand, process and digest the social information presented in the various mandatory readings they have to do for their classes. Because the process is experiential in nature it provides further inclusion of groups too shy or anxious to participate in schoolwork reading and analysis during classes by offering a more appealing, simple and direct mode of participation. By dividing roles, welfare is increased through feelings of usefulness, understanding and clarity of tasks, and teamwork. This is supported by the respondents answers in the questionnaire in which the vast majority (70%) declared they felt they were Productive and an Important member

of the group, almost all (95%) of the participants felt Heard and almost all the participants (95%) felt they had Learned Useful Lessons.

By these results the students will build up the confidence to tell stories, specifically their stories, set goals and solve problems, express feelings and explore their social fears by role-playing, making them less likely to get prejudiced and be understood. This could facilitate these behaviors to generalize in other spheres of the process of learning, inside school and outside, by giving them tools of socializing and problem-solving they can use anywhere.

When asked whether they were satisfied by being a part of the Theatre Club, 99% of the respondents answered “Yes”. Furthermore, nearly 70% of the respondents declared that “Personal Preferences” is their default method of socializing. One explanation that comes out of correlating these two numbers is that even when their default choice of socialization is “Personal Preference” the students still were satisfied belonging to a Club dedicated to an Art Form such as Theatre.

This goes contrary to anecdotal statements from teachers and school executives that students in Kosovo do not appreciate Theatre Clubs, at least as an extra dimension of communication, socialization and understanding others perspectives, and at most, a viable career choice.

Summary

The main objective of this research report was to identify the attitudes and opinions of young people (Students of elementary schools in Kosovo) on the impact that theatre clubs have on the educational approach they receive in their schools. Furthermore, another objective of this research was to find out if theatre clubs help students socialize and self-improvement through joint rehearsals and creation of artistic performances.

Within the project “Growing through Arts in Education – ArtEd” were developed and presented 20 different new youth performances/video drama online from 20 schools in Prishtina, Gjakova, Podujeva, Prizren, Gjilan, Obiliq and Shtime. Prior to the establishment of theatre clubs, two Theatre Based Education trainings were organized; one with 20 students (one per each school), and another one with 20 teachers (one per each school). Later on, regular virtual rehearsals were conducted for one month before presenting the performances online on social media outlets.

In order to identify the opinions and attitudes of elementary school students in Kosovo in regards to educational approaches, self-perceptions, social preferences and the importance of theatre clubs we conducted a quantitative research through the administration of questionnaires online (google forms) once the students finished the rehearsals and the recording of the performances. 140 students of 20 elementary schools in 7 municipalities participated in this research all together creating 20 youth performances.

After receiving 140 questionnaires on google forms, the data then was transferred to the statistical software SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) for further intentions of this research.

Theatre Clubs could offer a new construct with which students can learn to understand, process and digest the social information presented in the various mandatory readings they have to do for their classes. Because the process is experiential in nature it provides further inclusion of groups too shy or anxious to participate in schoolwork reading and analysis during classes by offering a more appealing, simple and direct mode of participation. By dividing roles, welfare is increased through feelings of usefulness, understanding and clarity of tasks, and teamwork.

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Annex – The questionnaire

Dear student,

This questionnaire is part of the research that will be conducted within the project “Travelling theatre for children empowerment” implemented by Artpolis – Art and Community Center and supported by GIZ “Capacity Development in Basic Education in Kosovo/CDBE” – component on educational inclusion of returnees and ethnic minorities, which is a part of the German Cooperation support to the Kosovo education sector reform.

All your answers will stay anonymous and confidential, and will be used only by the implementing organization Artpolis for the preparation of this research that will evaluate your attitude on social issues.

There are no right or wrong answers, therefore please be as more sincere as possible and answer the questions you feel comfortable answering.

Gender:

Girl Boy Third gender/Other

Age:

Class:

School:

Municipality:

Do you have any speical needs? YES NO

Nationality:

- Albanian
- Serb
- Roma
- Ashkali
- Egyptian
- Bosnian
- Other
- I do not want to disclose

Have you ever lived outside of Kosovo? YES NO

If yes, where?

Have you ever migrated outside Kosovo? YES NO

1. Which are your preferred subjects in school?
 - Natural sciences (Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Geogrpahy)
 - Exact sciences, technical and maths
 - Social sciences (History etc.)
 - Literary and Lingustic
 - Artistic subjects (figurative arts, music, performing, acting)

2. What is your preferred methodology of learning in school?
 - Classic methodology
 - Innovative methodology
 - Other

3. Do you think extracurricular activities (theatre clubs) will help you to better understand the subjects in school?
 - Yes
 - No
 - If yes, then why?

4. How do you socialize with friends in the classroom or school?
 - Personal preferences
 - Work group
 - Artistic and literary activities

5. Do you think extracurricular activities (theatre clubs) will help you create new friendships?
 - Yes
 - No
 - If yes, then why?

6. Do you socialize with others in the classroom and school outside of your social circle, ethnic, religious, economic or other feature group?
 - I prefer socializing with friends similar to me

- I prefer socializing with friends different from me
 - I prefer socializing with friends similar to me, but I would not exclude others than different from me
7. Do you like being part of the theatre club?
- Yes
 - No
 - If yes, then why?
8. How does it make you feel that fact that you are part of the theatre club?
- It makes me feel better about myself (fulfilled, self-confident)
 - It makes me feel better in relation to others (active role in social circle/school, I can bring change in society, I can create new friendships)
9. In the following questions please answer using the scale of 1 to 5 (I strongly disagree, I disagree, Neutral, I agree, I strongly agree).
- Lessons that I have learned from the online/virtual training were necessary, clear and productive.
 - I have felt productive and an important part of the theatre club.
 - I have felt heard during the online/virtual training (I have had the opportunity to share my opinions and to receive an answer from the trainer).
 - Lessons learned during the online training are useful and easily implemented on the performance we will later present in the school's environment.
 - The online/virtual trainings have impacted my socializing with other members of the theatre club.

Thank you for your answers and contribution in our research!