Safety in primary schools with the participation of pupils from marginalised Roma communities in eastern Slovakia

Bezpečnosť na základných školách s účasťou žiakov z marginalizovaných rómskych komunít na východnom Slovensku

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Abstract:

Safety in elementary schools is a key factor influencing the quality of the educational environment. This research focuses on analysing current security measures at primary schools with the participation of pupils from marginalised Roma communities in eastern Slovakia, identifying the main threats and proposing possible improvements. Using qualitative and quantitative methods, we explored perceptions of safety among students, teachers and parents, and assessed existing safety measures.

Keywords: *School safety, Pupils from marginalised Roma communities, Security measures at schools, Security policy of elementary schools.*

Abstrakt:

Bezpečnosť na základných školách je kľúčovým faktorom ovplyvňujúcim kvalitu vzdelávacieho prostredia. Tento výskum sa zameriava na analýzu aktuálnych bezpečnostných opatrení na základných školách s účasťou žiakov z marginalizovaných rómskych komunít na východnom Slovensku, identifikáciu hlavných hrozieb a návrh možných zlepšení. Pomocou kombinácie kvalitatívnych a kvantitatívnych metód sme skúmali vnímanie bezpečnosti medzi žiakmi, učiteľmi a rodičmi, a hodnotili sme existujúce bezpečnostné opatrenia.

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Introduction

Ensuring a safe school environment is crucial for providing a high-quality education and supporting the personal development of students, as well as ensuring the safety of teachers and other school staff. In recent years, there have been significant changes in how school safety is approached due to the increasing incidents of violence, bullying, and other threats. A strong security policy is essential to creating a safe and supportive surrounding for students. The safety of children in schools is fundamental to their healthy development and academic success. The youth protection safety policy encompasses physical, emotional, and digital safety. This research focuses on analysing the current state of security in elementary schools, particularly those with students from marginalised Roma communities in eastern Slovakia.

The security of any organization relies on identifying risks, implementing measures to eliminate them, and systematically evaluating and controlling their effectiveness. Inadequate response and unpreparedness for an emergency can have a significant impact on school facilities and other institutions. In audited schools, it's a rule that an attack is always calamitous and likely to result in loss of life or injury to students, teachers, and staff. School facilities are often unprepared for such threats and unable to prevent the initial attack. Each school is unique in its location, architectural design, relationships with other entities, and the composition of its students, teachers, and staff, as well as in its established guidelines, rules, and other parameters. All factors affecting security must be considered in assessing and designing security measures. There's no one-size-fits-all solution for educational facilities and institutions; instead, there's a need for uniform safety principles and standards. It's crucial to gradually implement safety and security measures in every school and institution. [1]

1. Safety in primary school

Safety in primary schools encompasses several elements, including physical safety, social integration, and inclusive education. [2]

1.1. Physical security

Schools should have adequate infrastructure, including secure buildings, adequate lighting, safe yards and sports grounds. Security measures in the framework of physical security at elementary schools may include security cameras, school guards and regular security training for school employees and students.

1.2. Social security

It is a concept of measures to protect the physical, emotional and social well-being of students. Preventing bullying and violence is crucial, and educating students and staff in recognizing and addressing these situations is important. Additionally, mental health support is provided by a school psychologist and educational counsellor to help students with emotional and psychological issues.

1.3. Inclusion and support system for pupils from marginalised Roma communities

Support of an inclusive and friendly environment where pupils feel welcome and respected, including supporting cooperation between pupils and teachers. However, inclusion is a system of education that respects the child's personality and develops his personality. It allows children to attend regular school facilities. In inclusive schools, each child is treated individually, and the teachers involve the parents themselves in the teaching and various projects to help children learn to communicate with others. Children's differences are seen in such facilities as an opportunity to develop respect for themselves and others. They improve their empathy, tolerance, consideration and responsibility. [3]

In recent years, emphasis has been placed on teaching pupils important social and emotional skills such as empathy, conflict resolution and effective communication. In marginalised Roma communities, an important factor is the involvement of parents and the wider community in school activities and the creation of strong ties between the school and the students' homes. Schools mostly use cooperation with community centres in the village as well as with members of local civic and preventive services. Cooperation is important within the framework of compliance with laws and ethical standards that protect the rights of students and ensure fair and equal treatment for all. All of these efforts help to create a safe and supportive learning environment where students can focus on their education and personal development without fear of physical or racially motivated danger.

2. Research methodology

We used a combined methodology for our research:

1. Questionnaire survey

We distributed questionnaires to pupils, teachers, and parents from five primary schools with a higher participation rate of pupils from marginalised Roma communities in eastern Slovakia. The questionnaires included inquiries about safety perception, experiences with violence and bullying, and the effectiveness of school and school facility security measures.

2. Interviews with pupils, teachers and parents

We conducted interviews with school management, school psychologists, school support teams, teachers, parents, and pupils from individual classes, specifically engaging pupils from marginalised Roma communities.

3. Monitoring of the school environment

We carried out direct observation of the school environment during school days, focusing on the adherence to safety measures by pupils, teachers, and parents.

3. Research results

In our research on a sample of five elementary schools, we found several key findings:

1. Perception of safety: Most students and teachers consider their schools as relatively safe. However, there are significant differences in safety perceptions between individual schools. Parents often perceive security risks more than the students themselves. The biggest security risk for teachers and school employees is aggressive behaviour on the part of parents and students. The majority of teachers assess that parents behave rudely and aggressively when addressing issues at school between a student and a teacher, and this behaviour acts as a safety risk.

2. Incidence of bullying: Bullying is still present but in different forms. Cyberbullying is becoming an increasing problem, especially in the second grade of elementary schools. We found that schools using a support team such as a school psychologist, or a special educator to deal with incidents of violence and bullying achieve better safety results. Mental health promotion programs such as school psychologists and anti-bullying prevention programs have shown positive results. Schools that implemented these programs reported lower levels of bullying and higher levels of student and teacher satisfaction. With the increase in the use of technology in schools, digital security is a critical aspect. Schools that implemented programs to educate about cybersecurity and monitor online activity reported lower rates of cyberbullying.

3. Physical Security: Schools that have implemented security measures such as cameras, ID cards and security gates have seen a decrease in incidents related to violence and vandalism. However, some schools reported that these measures can create an atmosphere of mistrust between students and staff. Our findings suggest that safety in primary schools attended by students from marginalised Roma communities can be significantly improved by introducing systematic and regular training for teachers and school staff, modernizing security technologies such as a camera system, and an electronic gatekeeper, and involving parents and legal representatives of pupils in school security initiatives.

The results indicate that a comprehensive safety approach encompassing physical, emotional and digital aspects is most effective. It is important that schools continuously evaluate and adapt their security policies according to the changing environment and the needs of all parties involved. Additionally, the proactive and prompt handling of bullying and other forms of violence is integral.

Conclusion

Safety in primary schools with the participation of students from marginalised Roma communities is a complex issue that demands a coordinated approach at the national level from all relevant parties. The security policy for the protection of youth in schools is a dynamic process that requires continual attention and adjustments. Effective policies are those that are comprehensive and customized to the specific needs of the school. Schools should regularly evaluate their security policies and

modify them according to current threats and needs. Based on our research, we propose several recommendations for improving security:

1. Introduction of regular training and workshops for teaching staff as well as other employees of schools and school facilities.

2. Regularly update security measures.

3. Strengthening cooperation between schools and parents in matters of safety.

4. Investments in modern security technologies.

5. Systematically address cases of bullying with an emphasis on prevention.

Ensuring safety in elementary schools with the participation of students from marginalised Roma communities requires a comprehensive approach and cooperation of all interested parties - teachers, students, parents, community and state institutions. One good example from practice is the use of innovative programs that have already been proven in other schools or countries, for example, tutoring programs, peer-to-peer mentoring, or extracurricular activities that promote inclusion and safety. Implementing these recommendations will help create a safer and more favourable school environment for all school pupils.

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