

EDITORIAL

Schools and society in Albania: psychoeducational approaches to well-being and inclusion _____

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This special issue of *Polis* is conceived as an academically grounded yet practice-oriented contribution to the field of psychoeducation in Albania, developed through close collaboration between researchers and practitioners engaged in school, clinical, and community settings. The volume reflects the Faculty of Humanities, Education and Liberal Arts' commitment to advancing evidence-based approaches to children's development and inclusion, while addressing the practical constraints faced by professionals in contemporary educational environments. Co-edited with Prof. Dr. Erika Melonashi, Head of The Department of Psychology, Education and Sports, whose expertise in psychology has significantly informed the thematic and methodological direction of this issue, the edition aims to offer a rigorous, multidisciplinary treatment of psychoeducational processes within the Albanian context.

The education system constitutes a dynamic environment where children develop psychological, social, physical, and intellectual dimensions. The structure and characteristics of the immediate environment have a fundamental impact on their formation, requiring ongoing professional engagement and research in psychoeducation. However, the psychoeducational process often faces challenges related to children's individual characteristics, the level of parental involvement, and the professional competencies of teachers (often limited by insufficient training and lack of institutional support). The inadequate involvement of school psychologists or organizational inefficiency of the system (class size, curriculum, schedules, etc.) can negatively affect children's development and learning. Significant challenges might also arise in the psychoeducation of children with

neurodevelopmental disorders, due to the complexity of these conditions and the lack of specific resources and intervention programs.

The psychoeducation of children, whether with typical or atypical development, represents one of the primary challenges of the Albanian educational system and society. Recent studies show that Albania is undergoing a slow transition toward inclusive education, where social expectations, the lack of professionals, and rapid technological changes directly influence the way children develop academic, emotional, and social abilities. This special edition of *Polis* is a collection of scientific papers presented at the National Conference “**Challenges of psychoeducation for children with typical and atypical development in Albania**” and provides a multidimensional analysis of psychoeducation in the Albanian context. Studies provide recommendations for policymakers, schools, psychosocial workers etc.

Psychoeducation of children with autism is discussed in a considerable number of papers of this edition. As highlighted in the study by Sulaj, Cani, and Mehmetaj, children with autism face significant difficulties in developing social skills, not only due to the disorder but also to the lack of structured psychoeducational strategies in schools and development centers. The study highlights the need to promote effective programs and professional training in Albania to improve the independence and well-being of children with autism.

The study by Kapo et al. provides a comprehensive literature review on classic and modern theories and techniques in psychoeducation of children. Authors critically discuss theoretical and practical issues involving mental health, technology, neuroscience, extracurricular projects, diversity, and inclusion in the education process and provide recommendations for the specific Albanian context.

Along the same lines, the study by Kotherja, Mucaj, and Zhilla emphasizes that classroom management strategies, especially for children with disabilities, are often inadequate and pose several challenges during the learning process. The article identifies effective techniques and strategies that teachers can apply to ensure an inclusive classroom environment. Drawing from contemporary literature and practical experiences, the aim of this paper is to provide a structured approach to classroom management with a focus on inclusion.

The study by Sulaj and Cani shows that support teachers, despite their dedication, are only partially equipped with professional training, thus hindering the inclusive approach in the public education system. This study highlights the importance of an integrated and well-supported approach to strengthening the role of support teachers in inclusive education and the need for sustained policy interventions, including regular training programs.

Case study articles provide a special contribution to this edition, as they provide in-depth analysis of cases of children with phonetic disorder, social communication disorder, and challenging behaviours. These articles are particularly useful for

professionals working with children, as they provide practical hands-on techniques and important reflections on the psychoeducational process for these children.

This special edition also includes two studies bringing family perspectives in the psychoeducational process. Andoni and Haxhihyseni argue that technology, fast-paced lifestyles, and high social expectations are weakening positive discipline, which is essential for quality psychoeducation. The article highlights the urgent need for targeted, expert-led training programs to enhance young parents' skills in applying positive discipline and promoting children's healthy emotional development. Parental styles in the context of psychoeducation are further explored in the article by Rexho, stressing the crucial role of a supportive family environment.

The physical and mental health of children and adolescents is also examined in two studies, focusing on obesity and stress. These two topics represent emerging issues in these specific target groups, particularly considering the ever-increasing rates and the long-term negative effects. In the article "Stressors and coping strategies in a sample of Albanian Adolescents: A mixed-methods study", authors Rakiplari & Ferra provide data from the Albanian context, and recommendations regarding prevention and intervention programs.

The pilot study by Ferra presents alternative education models such as that of TUMO Tirana. Findings demonstrate the positive impact of creativity, technology, and nonformal education in ways that meet the needs of a generation growing up in a reality vastly different from that of their parents. Participation in a free and creative learning environment such as TUMO increases children's sense of competence, autonomy, and social connection, with particularly positive effects for children with atypical development.

The article by Shkodra & Nakuci examines the daily challenges faced by teaching assistants supporting an 8-year-old child with co-occurring Social Communication Disorder and ADHD in an inclusive primary school in Albania. Drawing on practice-based evidence, it highlights systemic, professional, and cultural barriers while proposing training, collaboration, and policy measures to strengthen inclusive education.

The case study by Dr. Sulaj and Msc. Babaramo further examines the use of Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) therapy to address high-frequency challenging behaviours in a verbally advanced preschool boy, highlighting behaviour function and effective intervention planning. It underscores the impact of limited educator training on behaviour management and demonstrates how ABA-based strategies and interprofessional collaboration can significantly reduce problem behaviours and improve social inclusion.

The systematic review by Sulejmani examines sexual behaviours in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, aged 5–15 years, highlighting educational challenges and risks arising from limited understanding and lack of adapted sexual

education. It emphasizes the need for culturally sensitive curricula, educator training, and family support to promote inclusive, evidence-based practice within the Albanian context.

Extending the continuum of developmental, educational, and mental health challenges addressed in the previous articles, the qualitative study by Dahati examines psychological self-diagnosis among young adults in Albania, focusing on the influence of social media, stigma, and limited access to professional care. It highlights how gaps in psychoeducation and support systems shape mental health understanding and help-seeking behaviours, underscoring broader systemic needs for structured, evidence-based mental health education and services.

Finally, the study by European University student, Rexho, examines how different dimensions of parenting styles influence children's self-esteem, highlighting the role of parental behaviour in psychological development. The findings emphasize the positive impact of authoritative mothering and the risks associated with permissive parenting, reinforcing the broader need for informed family, educational, and psychosocial practices that support healthy mental and emotional development.

To conclude, this special issue of *Polis* provides a substantial contribution to the understanding of psychoeducation challenges of children with typical and atypical development in Albania. Articles provide a comprehensive, interdisciplinary analysis of the current trends, challenges, and opportunities from various disciplinary perspectives, including education, psychology, sociology, social work and healthcare. Findings have important implications for policy makers, professionals, teachers and parents, in terms of improving the quality of psychoeducation for the young generation.