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Education for Sustainable Development in the Kosovo: The Voice of Youth

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Content

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Abstract:
The aim of this project is to explore the state of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in Kosovo, from a student's perspective. The education system in Kosovo has for some years undergone reform. The principles of Education for Sustainable Development have been incorporated in ministerial policy and the curriculum. Throughout the past years, numerous research papers and reports have assessed the practice of ESD in Kosovo. An assessment of the voice of youth regarding this topic seems to be lacking. This project contributes towards filling this gap. The results of this study show that official policy in Kosovo makes reference to ESD, yet educational practice remains far from living up to what is desirable and doable in terms of ESD. By and large, this study suggests there is a large gap between the rhetoric of ESD in the education system in Kosovo and the actual practice in schools. Further research is hence needed to provide a more in-depth and representative analysis of ESD in the Kosovo education practice. Moreover, this study concludes that it is increasingly important to recognize the opinion of young people, they are marginalized and have been left out of the decision making about the future of the country. More importantly, youth will determine what Kosovo will be in 10-20 years and therefore they should be heard more strongly and more often.

Keywords: Education for Sustainable Development, Kosovo, Education, System, Policy, Practice, Students

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Summary:
This research assessed whether the concept of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) has been integrated into important government and ministerial policy documents and validated that ESD has been incorporated in Kosovo. Second, through a theoretical framework based on an understanding of what ESD is and should be, in combination with the ESD five pillars of learning, a consultation with youth has been established to determine how educational policy and practice has been influenced by the policy. The results of this research show that despite the policy, ESD remains far from being implemented in practice in the Kosovar high-schools. The consultation with youth reaffirmed numerous problems, such as lack of infrastructure and resources, inadequate teacher backgrounds and methods coupled with lack of pre-and-in-service training, an outdated system and outdated content, lack of extracurricular activities, lack of integrating effectively the potential of IT and the internet, which were found by other researchers plaguing the education system, All of these problems were reflected in this study by unhappy students who have great expectations and want their voice to be heard.

Keywords: Sustainable Development, Education for Sustainable Development, Kosovo, Education, System, Policy, Practice, Students

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1. Introduction

1.1. Kosovo and its Environmental and Sustainability Challenges

Kosovo is a small landlocked country in South-East Europe, bordering Serbia to the North and East, Montenegro to the West, and Macedonia and Albania to the South. Its territory stretches over 10,908 km2 and is inhabited by approximately 1.9 million people (Kosovo Country Profile, 2017). The country has a complicated history. It is subject to unique dynamics which shape security and development challenges. For one century Kosovo was part of Serbia. In 1999, an ethnic conflict broke out. A few months into the conflict, the world witnessed grave atrocities committed towards the Albanian community in the country, and this compelled the international community to intervene and end the violent campaign towards them. Subsequently, Kosovo became subject to the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) which administered the transition after the war. They, in turn, established a provisional government for self-governance, consisting of local and international political actors. Their work eventually led to Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008. Today, the country is the second-newest nation in the world, and the newest in Europe. Out of 193 UN member states 114 recognize it (Kosovo Ministry of Foreign Affairs [MFA], 2017).

Nowadays, the country is marked by a fragmented political system that has had an enormous negative impact on the development agenda of the country (Belloni and Strazzari, 2014). Guided by the principle of local ownership, the international community enacted a strategy of swiftly devolving authority to local actors in the state-building process. This provided the impetus for political elites which captured state institutions and put their interests first at the cost of public services (Coelho, 2015, p.14). They consolidated their grip on political and economic power through patronage networks and rent extraction, resulting in the development of a particular 'social order' that emerged during the early days of Kosovo's status as an international protectorate (Ibid). A 'social order' which the economic historian Douglass North describes in a work on low-income developing countries suffering from a 'limited access social order' (North et al, 2007, p.3).

Kosovo, as a fledgling country, is still in transition from its tumultuous past. Development aid inflowing to the country for almost two decades coupled with the willingness of the entire society is generating a thrust to move from a post-war situation to a developed society. With an annual per capita income (purchasing power parity) of $7,400 (Kosovo Country Profile, 2017) and with one third of the population estimated to be poor and almost half of the population to be unemployed, the country is among the poorest in Europe (World Bank, 2016, p.4). A wide array of wicked problems need to be overcome along the country's path towards a more prosperous future. For many years the country was subject to the absence of peace and social order. Now the goal is to leave the past behind and to power up the weak and small economy.

Environmental degradation adds strains on society and the state of the economy. There is an especially acute problem of air pollution, mainly caused by energy production based predominantly on coal, conjointly with the emissions from transportation. This causes many cases of cardiopulmonary and lung cancer, resulting in an estimated 835 premature deaths, 310 new cases of chronic bronchitis, 600 hospital admissions and 11,600 emergency visits each year, and with aggregate damage costs at €37 million to €158 million per year or 0.89-3.76 percent of GDP (Ibid., p.26).

With a number of healthier solutions and sources of renewable energy available, it is hard to justify a 98% dependence on fossil fuel. Despite the government being increasingly pressured by civil society to pursue green alternatives in energy production, it has approved the plan for the construction of a new thermo power plant, which was previously endorsed by international partners and finance institutions with co-finance through a long-term loan (Kammen, Mozafari, and Prull, 2012, p.51). But Kosovo is home to one

of the most notorious polluting dynamos in Europe, while furthermore the entire region of the Balkans houses seven of the ten most polluting coal power plants in the old continent (Health and Environment Alliance [Heal], 2017). The construction of a new plant will exacerbate the pollution problem.

Following air pollution, lead contamination is the runner-up main environmental problem It is caused by a handful of lead and zinc mines and related processing facilities in various parts of the country. It also emanates from the usage of leaded petroleum which phased out some years ago, yet its effects seem to be still lingering in the air. It is estimated that the annualized loss due to polluting processes of lead contamination range between €42 and €94 million or 1.0-2.2 percent of GDP in 2010 (Ibid., p.10).

The myriad challenges, and especially the poor economy, increases Kosovo's susceptibility to climate change as well. It is worth underscoring that the country has a limited budget for adapting and mitigating the effects of climate change. By the same token, concerns related to climate change mitigation and adaptation fail to be mainstreamed into other policy areas and in the workings of various policy actors. As an attestation to this problem serves the analysis of the European Commission which reiterated that "Kosovo is suffering from a lack of human, administrative, and financial capacity to implement EU environmental and climate standards" (EU Commission, 2012, p.46, para 5). The country is entangled in a big environmental degradation problem that amounts to approx. €221 million in damages, At the root of this is the inability to manage activities that produce a lot of pollution (World Bank, 2012, p.10).

Still. early in 2008, only months after declaring independence, the leaders of Kosovo heralded the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were also ratified by the Kosovo Assembly (parliament). In October 2015, the Kosovo Government followed up by solemnly launching the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which in that year had been adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA, 70/1, p.3/35., paragraph 1-2). The then Prime Minister (PM) gave a keynote address highlighting the government's achievements in economic development, as being at the forefront in terms of SD. The PM stated "we have achieved some results in economic growth, the annual growth of GDP, the economic viability, the sustainability budget in addressing the problem of poverty and unemployment […] we are trying also to build infrastructure in all areas, in order for it to be an important prerequisite for sustainable development" (SDG in Kosovo, 2016).

An analysis of the PM's October 2015 address reveals that, while alluding to a long term strategy for SD, there is no reference to how the gears of development are going to be fueled; there is no reference to the state of the environment or the effect that development is going to inflict unto it; there is no mention of the problems of pollution as one of many problems in this domain; and there is no indication of a government strategy to restore the country's environment from the damage already made or to preserve it from the ongoing rapid degradation. To this day, the environment has never been a priority area for any of the previous governments in Kosovo, Alternative and more sustainable routes (as, for instance, discussed theoretically by authors such as Sachs et al. 1992, and Seabream, 2011) have not been on the agenda.

Thus, since 2015 the government in Kosovo is officially brandishing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to mark the direction of the country's development (see, for instance, Prime, 2016, p.3). This leads us on to the notion of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) which is introduced here and will be further explained in section 2.2 below.

1.2. SD and ESD could be the Solution

As seen above, the concept of Sustainable Development (SD) has grown into prominence in worldwide efforts to deal theoretically as well as practically with the kinds of development problems now referred to. As also seen, it has found its way into Kosovo's official language. It is a complex and contested notion regarding its exact meaning and definition. Nevertheless, since the early nineteen-eighties, the Brundtland

Commission's definition of sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987: Ch. 2, para. 1) has gained widespread recognition as a basic formulation.

For meeting the challenge of SD, education is a vital pillar in the long term. In line with the fourth SDG: *"Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all"* (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2017), Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) could be utilized as a tool to propel the country's education system forward and its entire development agenda. Education prepares young people to succeed in life, to be established in the national community and beyond. Besides shaping the individual, the quest is to foster harmonious relationships among groups and thus teaching youngsters to live together. Along similar lines, ESD is about teaching new generations how to tackle local and global challenges, enriching their human capital and learning how to apply critical and holistic thinking. It is also about teaching youngsters that individual actions matter, but nothing stands in isolation, so new generations should understand and embrace the interconnectivity, thus leading to communal well-being and sustainability.

As a matter of fact, the Kosovo education system has already integrated ESD and pursued it or parts of its principles into some strategic documents like policy papers and official pronouncements of the Government. However, existing educational policy, which already incorporates to some extent principles of ESD requires the acceleration in the practical application of it, and more debate is needed as to how that could be achieved. Usually, in a study like this, stakeholders such as teachers, policy-makers, civil society representatives and experts are asked for their views and experiences. But they are not the only ones to evaluate and effectively to ameliorate the education system in Kosovo.

1.3. Youth are Left Out

Kosovo has the youngest population in Europe, with youth being an important demographic group in the country constituting 50-60% of the population. They are often considered a driving force for prosperity and the future of the country and they will determine Kosovo's future in so many ways. Although they represent an enormous source of untapped talent, their voice (about the future) is not well heard. There is ample support for the claim that they are not receiving a quality education and that their voice is absent from formal and informal fora where their education and future are discussed and decided upon. As the government's youth and strategy and action plan (Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sports [MCYS], 2017) explains "...young people in Kosovo are left out in the decision-making tables, and youth are not regularly invited to join relevant discussions that affect their lives and future in schools, universities, the local or central government". Along similar lines, the "Demand for Education Innovation" study revealed indications of what youth think about education in general. The study conducted by UNICEF was a youth-driven study based on nationally representative surveys of young people in Kosovo, Georgia, and Tajikistan. It revealed that 90% of youth participants report problems such as poor quality of education, lack of modernized learning content, lack of non-formal learning opportunities, etc. These are only a few of the barriers preventing them from receiving a quality education (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2011).

This study intends to go into more detail by focusing on young people's opinions and experiences with ESD – the framework that also the Kosovo government has adopted for ensuring that the education system prepares young people for coping with the SD challenges. However, there was no systematic effort from the side of the Government to solicit the voices of youth in evaluating the application of ESD in the education system in Kosovo. In contrast, this study intends to capture and resonate the voices of youth on current education practice, which might be based on state of the art legislation but is falling short of providing a similar high-level implementation in practice.

1.4. Objective

The research reported in this thesis deals with the impact of educational and learning interventions and approaches resulting from the educational policy that is influenced by ESD, especially, as viewed from the perspective of a group of Kosovar high school students. Therefore, this study focuses on current ESD-related educational policy and educational practice in Kosovo and has two objectives. First, to examine official ESD-related documents (policy) in order to determine what is desirable and doable in terms of ESD. Second, to document and examine the opinions of young people (secondary school students) about: a. what they know about SD, b. how they experience ESD practice (or not) in the classroom, and c. what they expect from ESD practice to change (improve).

This study is constructed through a bottom-up approach, which focuses on students' experiences, the obstacles they encounter and their needs. The study concludes by identifying a set of recommendations for aligning Kosovo's education (policy, practice) with the requirements emanating from the ESD and the outcome of the youth consultation.

2. Background

2.1. Educational System and Reform in Kosovo

There is growing support for the claim that there is a large gap between the policy rhetoric of 'better education' and actual practice in schools (Stevenson, 2007). And it is known that transforming policy into practice is especially difficult in the context of relatively weak institutions and infrastructure. Kosovo's education system is characterized by poor quality at all levels. It is a system that is yet unable to equip youth with the knowledge and skills to match the demands of the labor market, especially those of the private sector, thus resulting in vast numbers of unemployed youth (United Nations Development Program [UNDP], 2016, p.6; United States Agency for International Development [USAID], 2013, p.I). By the same token, in the SDG Index and Dashboard Report, under SDG4, there are some indicators (SDG Index, 2015), out of which one is the PISA educational assessment conducted by OECD. Among the 72 countries that participated in the PISA test in 2015 Kosovo is ranked third from bottom (PISA, 2016). The likely main reason is that it has a traditional education system with outdated practices, based on teacher-centered learning and memorization (Pupovci, 2002). The system is also marked by; limited professional and financial capacities in the educational system; and the delays in preparation of supporting materials for implementation of the curriculum, as well as the lack of suitable textbooks (Kosovo Education Strategic Plan [KESP] 2016, p.25).

Since the year 2000, many donor-funded programs supporting the development of various parts of the Education Sector have been put in place, and remain to this day a vital part in financing the education sector in Kosovo (KESP, 2016, p.105). Agencies such as UNICEF, the World Bank, the EU, etc., all contributed to the design and the implementation of the Kosovo Curriculum Framework (KCF) which was adopted in 2011 by Kosovo's Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MESTKCF, 2011). In 2010, the government established an accreditation system for training programs recognizing the in-service training of teachers, as well as a teacher licensing system which evaluates participation in in-service training. Also, performance appraisal was introduced, thus incentivizing teachers to continuously enhance their professional performance (Ibid). Additionally, MEST worked with international partners on developing e-content and upgrading and maintaining ICT equipment in schools (Ibid).

Delving deeper, the international community in Kosovo, represented by UNMIK, put the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) in charge of assessing the education system and subsequently to facilitate educational reforms (Tahirsylaj, 2013, p.3). The need was to shift from a traditional and content-centered education into a more contemporary and learner-centered education and to introduce a system that would also be reflective of the larger democratic establishment, which was under construction (Tahirsylaj, 2013, p.1). This transition demanded significant changes, from introducing a new curriculum to effectuating new teaching methods and new assessment techniques. For example, in the teacher magazine "Shkendija" during 2004-2007, teachers themselves reported the lack of ownership over the process; while they were confronted with a myriad of challenges during implementation (Tahirsylaj, 2013, p.6-7).

Studies suggest that no educational change can be successful without involving the final beneficiaries such as teachers, students, and school administrators (Schmidt and White 2004, 209). All these actors need to participate in the curriculum review and implementation process. The top-down approach used in Kosovo resulted in a lack of deep understanding of the workings and the intentions of the proposed changes on the side of teachers, who had none or limited involvement in the process. Because international experts were the main architects of this reform, the benchmark of the policy was a combination of best practices from different countries. Although the new reform found willing teachers, there was no adequate involvement of major stakeholder groups, there was no adequate teacher training and there was a lack of infrastructure (including facilities and the content). Throughout the process, the system remained burdened by a high number of students, inadequate teacher backgrounds and the lack of

professional development opportunities (Tahirsylaj, 2013, p.12). This resulted in a weak reform process overall. Thus, in introducing any educational reform, and especially one that is based on ESD, the failures of the past reform process should be taken into consideration and the needed steps to include teachers and students should be taken. Otherwise, policy borrowing leaves behind merely the rhetoric and the symbolic act of enacting a new curriculum (Tahirsylaj, 2013, p.12).

2.2. ESD in Principle and in other Countries

In a matter of 200 years, the world's human population has multiplied by seven-fold, from 1 billion to more than 7 billion. Over the next three-four decades, 2 billion more people will be living on the face of Earth (UNNSC, 2011) than today. In parallel to a booming population growth, countries anywhere have placed economic growth at the center of their development, fueled by continued material production and consumption and with vast disregard for nature and the planet's carrying capacity. A finite planet cannot sustain the rate at which we are collectively excavating and consuming natural resources. Over the long run, humanity cannot ignore many existential questions resulting from the processes and events just described. It is time for sustainable development, for decisions that bring our economies, our societies, and the environment into a harmonious balance.

Towards the end of the 20th century, it was becoming clearer that sustainable development must ultimately enlist everyone. Therefore, the international community met for the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. This produced AGENDA 21 and its Chapter 36 on Education, Training, and Public Awareness. Among many issues, it was agreed that adult illiteracy needed to be cut by half, to expand access to education for all children, and to update curriculums with environmental and developmental learning (RIO, 1992, p.13). A decade later, world countries reconvened in the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002, where major partnerships were created and synergy worked to build support for education for sustainable development (UNESCO, 2002), culminating in the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (UNDESD) 2005-2014. Occurring at the same time as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Education for All (EFA) movement and the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD), the UNDESD addressed particularly the content and purpose of education but it also operationalized ESD as a way to address SD issues/challenges (UNESCO, 2005-2014, p.2).

ESD as a form of education is based on the ideals and principles that underlie and promote sustainability. There are many interpretations and uses of ESD but generally it is a learning process or approach to teaching which deals with all levels and types of learning to provide quality education and foster sustainable human development – learning to know, learning to be, learning to live together, learning to do and learning to transform oneself and society (*UNESCO Office in Bangkok* [UNESCOBKK], 2017). The underlying argument for ESD is that it enables us to constructively address present and future global challenges and create more sustainable and resilient societies (UNESCOESD, 2017, III, p.6, p.16). ESD leads to a transformative change of the individual, preparing learners to think holistically and systemically, activating students in critical thinking, solving complex problems, and collaborative decision-making (Malone and Somerville, 2015, p.37-41).

These are all factors which propound the view that ESD could prepare students for their future and equip them with the skills they need to enter and succeed in the world of work while contributing to a growing economy and transitioning to a more sustainable society. Considering this, ESD stands out as a promising framework that could make a positive difference in Kosovo.

The standard argument goes that "ESD helps students prepare for a sustainable future: becoming environmentally and socially responsible, globally aware, economically astute, and technologically able citizens who are capable of coping with the emerging challenges and opportunities we are facing now and

will continue to face in the future" (Laurie et al., 2016, p.236). A curriculum based on ESD encourages students to think critically, ask more questions, and explore themselves and the world around them and beyond. Pedagogies based on ESD channel the attention to students as opposed to teacher-centric lessons; learning based on memorization is replaced with participatory learning (UNESCO, 2012a, p.15). As opposed to traditional teaching methods and curriculums, those based on ESD often deal with concrete and relevant issues that are connected to the place affected; they draw upon the arts, using drama, play, music, design, and drawing to stimulate creativity and imagine alternative futures. ESD helps students to develop a sense of social justice and self-efficacy as community members" (UNESCO, 2012a, p.15).

Current research appears to validate the view that ESD is a pedagogy that can be favorable for promoting cooperation and collaboration. But it can also serve well to meet student needs and to foster equity in the classroom, to encourage diverse views, and promotes interdisciplinary and intercultural competencies as it addresses challenges to local or planetary sustainability (Kappa Delta Pi, 2015, p.1; UNESCO, 2012b, p.5; McKeown and Hopkins, 2010, Nolet, 2016, Tilbury, 2011). According to Laurie et al (2016, p.228), ESD is in practice locally relevant and connected with the real-world. This is because students learn with concrete knowledge through which they can also contribute actively to developing the community. In turn, the more students learn about practical issues and solving real world problems the more they are likely to address the problems they face in the future. This goes also in line with *learning for a sustainable future* which is intertwined with the principle of *lifelong learning* and *inquiry-based learning*. The common denominator of these aforementioned dimensions is that in the long run, they prepare students to know what to do when the options before them are unclear (Learning for a Sustainable Future [LSF], 2017). Students are placed at the center of gathering and processing information and deriving their own conclusions or actions (UNESCO MOD 23, 2017, p.4). During this process, students develop meta-cognitive and other learning skills and also sharpen their critical thinking; the process promotes collaborative learning and the ability to take initiatives and show social cohesion (Kahn and O'Rourke, 2005, p.2; McKinney and Levy, 2006, p.2).

In 2009 UNESCO released the Monitoring and Evaluation document for the DESD (2005-2014). The vision behind ESD was once more reiterated. It emphasized the focus on developing knowledge, capacities, qualities, or competencies required for active, critical and meaningful contribution to SD. It affirmed that ESD helps in instilling in young people the right sets of know-how, attitudes, values, and behavior that will guide them through their lives and with which they can make a positive impact in their community. Furthermore, the report states that: "ESD must be seen as a comprehensive package for quality education and learning within which key issues such as poverty reduction, sustainable livelihoods, climate change, biodiversity, sustainable consumption, gender equality, and corporate social responsibility are found" (UNESCO, 2009, p.29). The rapidly growing research on the contribution of ESD to quality education provides lots of evidence. For example, a synthesis of studies on actual ESD in 18 countries (Laurie et al, 2016, p.234-240) observes that similar significant positive themes occur across all countries:

"ESD allows students to improve their problem-solving skills as it focuses on actual practices as opposed to only learning theories" Korea

"The students are excited; they get far regarding knowledge development and appreciate the contacts with the surrounding society. They work on something they perceive as meaningful and real." Sweden

"Increased curricular relevance associated with ESD leads to increased student engagement and commitment (Canada, China, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, Peru, Scotland, Sweden, the US), self-confidence (Germany), self-esteem (Finland, Korea) and self-awareness" (Estonia, Korea)

"ESD improves the outcomes of education by putting emphasis not only on cognitive aspects of teaching

but on developing the spiritual [so that] a person...treats the surrounding world, people, and cultural heritage with sensitivity, care, and respect." Latvia

The aim is to support all students in developing the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that promote their ability to understand the importance of a sustainable future." These quotes provide confirmatory indications of the potential of ESD to upgrade the quality of educational practice in a given country.

One of the best examples of integrating ESD into curricula is Finland, one of the world frontrunners in education quality and success. The country has reformed the national core curricula for preschool and basic education to support and promote SD and well-being following the value basis of education, where the necessity of a sustainable way of living and eco-social understanding is emphasized (UNESCO, 2017, p.50).

3. Methods

3.1. Summary of Methods

At the outset, despite the time constraints of this MS thesis, the efforts of the researcher were focused on having both primary and secondary data. The research draws on a theoretical framework and review of what ESD is or should be, as indicated above, combined with a review of salient policy documents served as a tool to assess secondary data and scrutinize existing and proposed policy regarding ESD in Kosovo. The conclusions of this process and the position of young people facilitated the design of an Internet-based survey (IBS) and focus groups (FG) among a group of high-school students, with the purpose of capturing their experiences with and opinions of existing educational curricula focused on ESD as well as common practices found in the classroom setting. Ultimately the components of this study provide indications which facilitate the critical discussion of the research and synthesize into the compendium of recommendations.

3.2. Review of Salient Policy Documents

The study review of salient policy documents focuses on the: "Kosovo Curriculum Framework" (MESTKCF 2011), the "Kosovo Education Strategic Plan (KESP) 2011-2016" (KESP, 2011); "Evaluation Report of KESP 2011-2016" (MESTEP, 2015); the "Education Strategic Plan 2017-2021" (KESP, 2016); the "National Development Strategy of Kosovo 2016-2021" (NDSKS, 2016).

3.3. Internet Based Survey (IBS)

The ideal survey would be a random sampling where larger numbers, representativeness, quantitative statistical analysis for correlations between variables, generalizable conclusions would be generated. Due to the financial and time limitations, school visits and a paper-based questionnaire was not feasible. Therefore, an Internet-based survey (IBS) was created. With at least 90% of the people of Kosovo being of Albanian background, the survey was formulated in Albanian.

A number of factors impeded the involvement of students from other ethnic groups than the majority Kosovo-Albanian group. Especially difficult for the topic under examination was the involvement of the second biggest ethnic group, the Serbian community, which has its education system governed by Serbia and thus not under the control and instruction of the Kosovo Government. Other ethnic groups were excluded from the process due to their low number of students, the language barrier, and the time constraints that prevented conducting the survey in other local languages.

For conducting the survey, the focus was not primarily relationships between certain variables (hypothesis testing) but to explore salient issues as perceived by young people. Therefore, on purpose and based on convenience, an easily identifiable group was approached. Namely, the network of the Prosperity Initiative in Kosovo (PIKS), a non-profit organization, focusing on youth projects and dealing predominantly with environmental problems.

PIKS has created a network of youth constituents and volunteers from high-school students from across Kosovo. Through PIKS, the author had access to an extensive network of schools and the contacts of students from more than 15 municipalities around the country with the idea to capture the voice of at least 50 self-selected Albanian-speaking high-school students. Ultimately, a sample among this group was not established. Instead, about 300 members of the PIKS network, involved in projects dealing with environmental problems, received an invitation to participate in an internet-based survey. The respondents, representing 25% of the target-group were, in effect, a self-selected group. Their responses, therefore, cannot be automatically generalized to the entire PIKS membership or all Albanian speaking students in the same age bracket.

The fact that they volunteered for participation does however indicate motivation and interest in education and sustainable development. This makes their observations and opinions highly relevant to the issue of ESD, although obviously not allowing for generalizing to all students.

3.4. IBS Design

Regarding the design and substance of the survey, the questions were inspired directly by the review of the salient policy documents, in combination with the literature that established the theoretical framework of what ESD is and should be, and with the position of youth in the Kosovar society. Therefore, the design of the survey was based on the objective of revealing students' ESD understanding and competencies. It combined open-ended questions with soliciting the students' degree of agreement or disagreement measured on scales from 1 to 5, or by using multiple choice questions. The questionnaire was tested in a trial run with three students from different high schools in Kosovo which did not participate in the study. These students were asked to reflect on the questionnaire regarding the content, layout, and instructions. The resulting feedback helped to address some issues regarding the format and to leave out an apparent degree of ambiguity but also confirmed that the study should not take longer than 15 minutes. The analysis and coding were carried out solely by the author.

The questionnaire was distributed to a preselected network of students, accessible via email lists and closed-for-public Facebook groups of PIKS NGO. In the online survey, confidentiality was guaranteed for participants as they did not have to identify themselves. Students were only asked to state a contact detail in case they wanted to contribute later to this study by taking part in the subsequent focus groups. In the first part, participants were asked about demographics, their age, sex, city, and to which school they go as this might influence their learning content and the teaching methods they could be subject to. The survey was accessible for two weeks and as an outcome, the final sample had 74 participants and included students from 36 schools (Fig.1) in 21 cities (Fig.2).

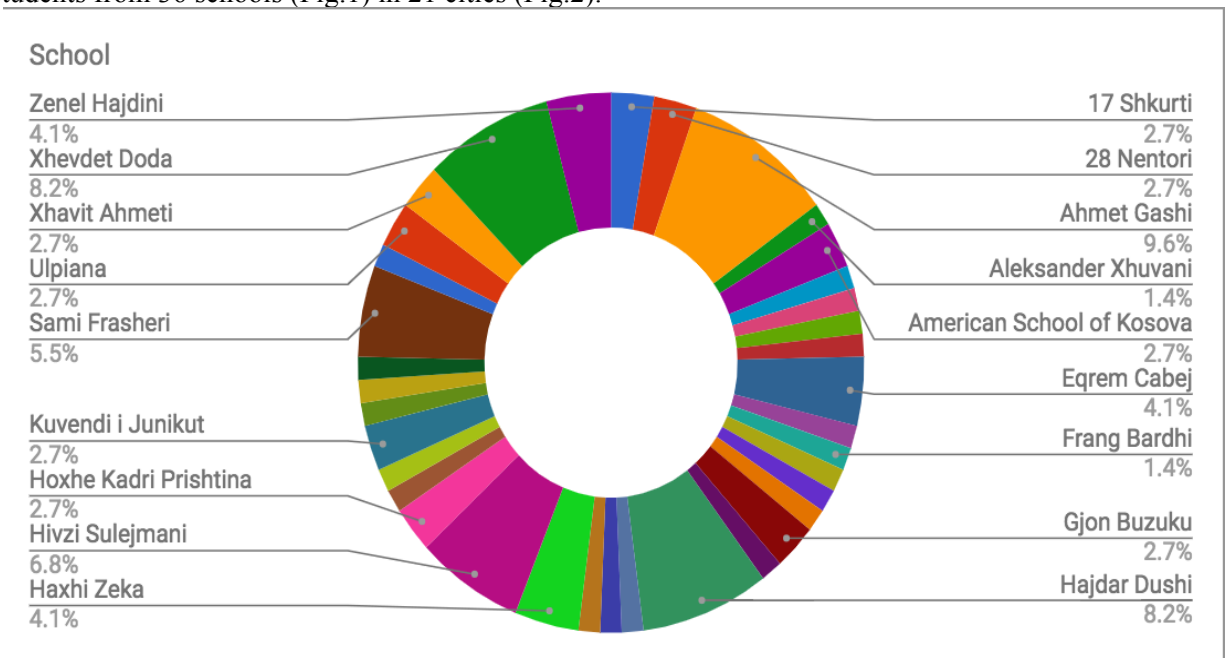

Fig. 1 The schools (36 in total) of respondents (n = 74)

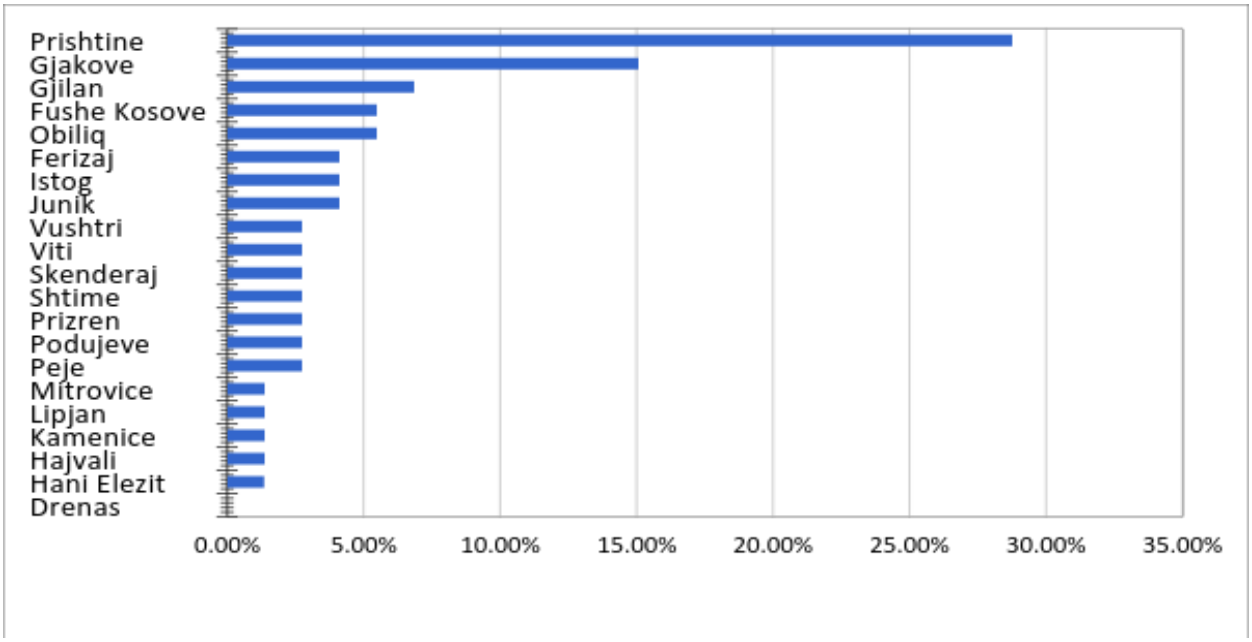

Fig. 2 The cities where respondents live in percentage (n=74)

The questionnaire participants were between 15 and 22 years old with an average age of 17 years (Fig.3). In terms of gender, 63.2% of respondents were female and 37.8% male (Fig. 4), which is typical for the projects of PIKS NGO, in which usually more girls than boys participate.

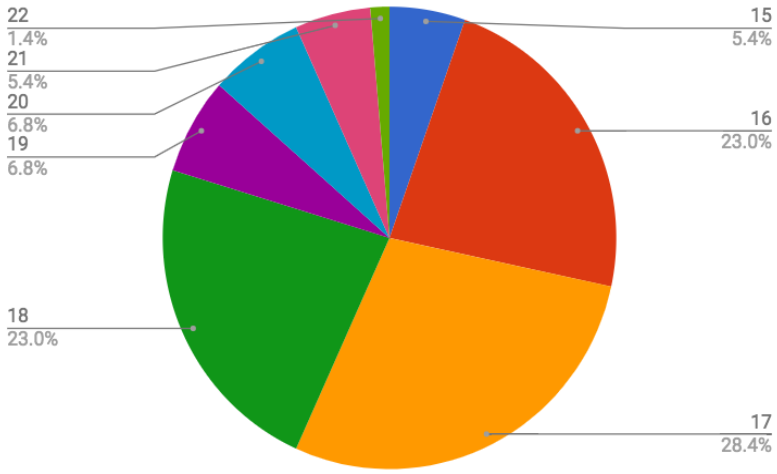

Fig. 3 Age of Respondents (n=74)

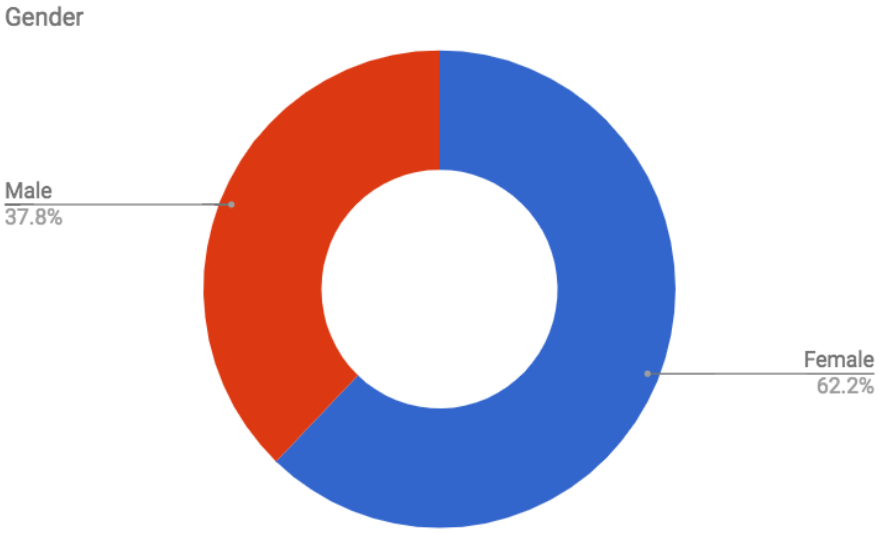

Fig. 4 Gender of Respondents (n=74)

As far as distribution among school grades is concerned, 18.3% of respondents are in the 10th grade, 26,8% in the 11th grade, and 25.4% in the 12th grade. 29.6% of respondents graduated from high-school within the past two years.

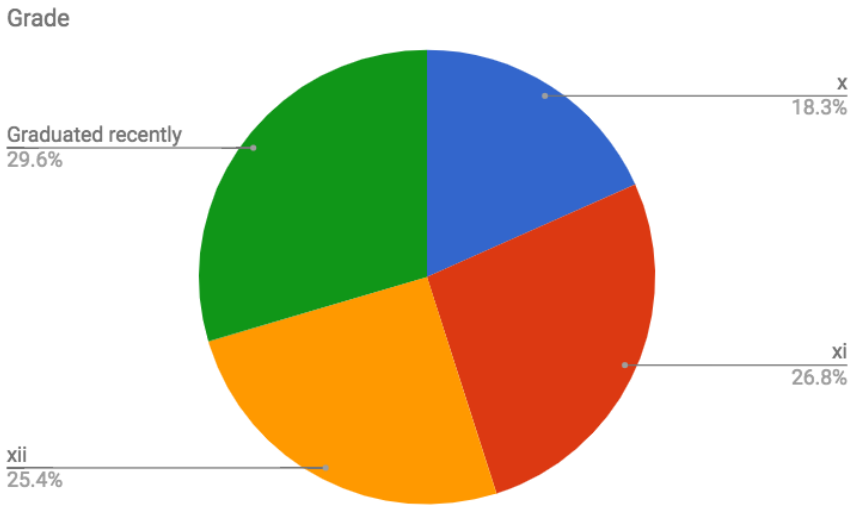

Fig. 5 Grade of each respondent, x stands for grade 10, xi for grade 11, xii for grade 12, and graduated recently means having completed high-school not more than two years ago. (n=74)

3.5. Focus Groups (FG)

To offset the consequences of a limited number of participants in the IBS, the study was strengthened by organizing two focus groups with a small number of students from the pre-selected network of PIKS. Similar to the invitation to the internet survey also the invitation to partake in the focus groups was posted on the PIKS network. Tens of youngsters were interested, but only students from two schools were chosen to participate again based on convenience and as limited by resources.

The focus groups were shaped by five questions related to the following issues: understanding of ESD, importance of ESD for Kosovo; if ESD is implemented; if education is effective; and if teachers use ESD. These questions were supported with probing questions and an additional three matters: the role of the internet and information technology; the ongoing and future development of Kosovo; and intergenerational responsibility, in case time would permit. For starting the discussion, participants were asked if they have heard about ESD, how do they understand it, whether they think it is practiced and if it's important for Kosovo? The discussion then went to a deeper level by questioning whether education in the country is transforming students' ways of thinking or ways of acting, what are the common teaching methods, and if any ESD recommended method is practiced. The additional questions were about soliciting the view of respondents about the role of the internet and information technology, whether students learn anything about the current or future development of the country, and if they learn to contribute to it. Lastly questions were asked about whether they have learned about intergenerational responsibility, climate change, biodiversity, and renewable energy.

3.6. FG Design

After reviewing the response sheet of the IBS, it was evident that 17 respondents volunteered to take part in the focus groups. Because it was difficult to find a suitable time for all and arranging travel for 17 students from across Kosovo, it was decided to invite students from one specific school only, however. Two respondents from this group were invited to organize peers from their school and take part in the focus groups. Consequently, the first focus group gathered students from the "Sami Frasheri" Gymnasium in the capital city Prishtina and the second group from the "Hivzi Sylejmani" Gymnasium in the city of Fushe-Kosove (Fig.6). The two focus group sessions were organized in Prishtina at the European Union Information and Cultural Centre (EUICC) on March 31, 2017.

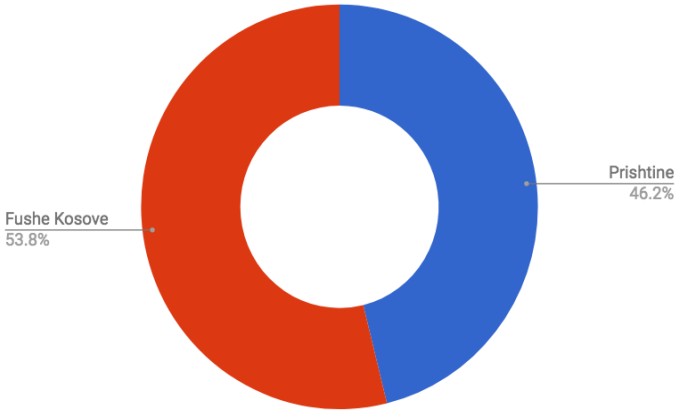

Fig.6 Origin of Student Participants in the Two Focus Groups (n = 13)

At the outset, a day before the focus group, all confirmed participants received an informational sheet and a consent form. They were requested to bring the signed consent form to the discussion. All invited participants agreed and were present the next day to take part in the two-hour long discussion conducted in Albanian. The first focus group had a total of six participants (75% women and 25% men), three students in the 10th grade, one in the 11th and two in the 12th; the second focus group had seven students (72% men and 28% women). Ultimately, there were 13 participants out of which 46% were women and 54% men with age ranging between 16 and 18 years old, mean age 17 (Fig.7, Fig 8, Fig 9).

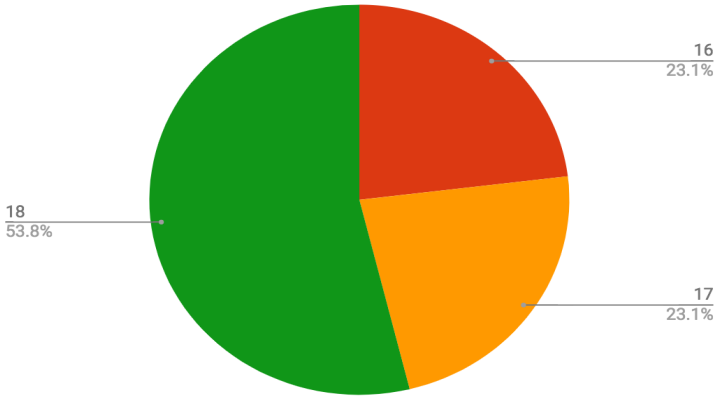

Fig. 7 Age of student participants in the two focus groups of the study (n = 13)

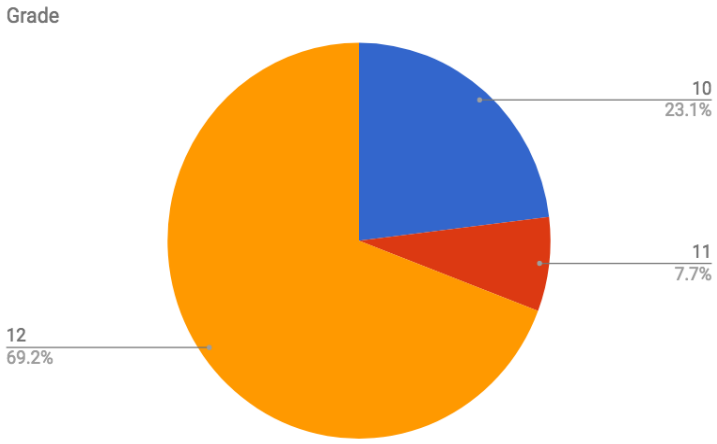

Fig.8 Representation among grade of participating students in the two focus groups (n = 13)

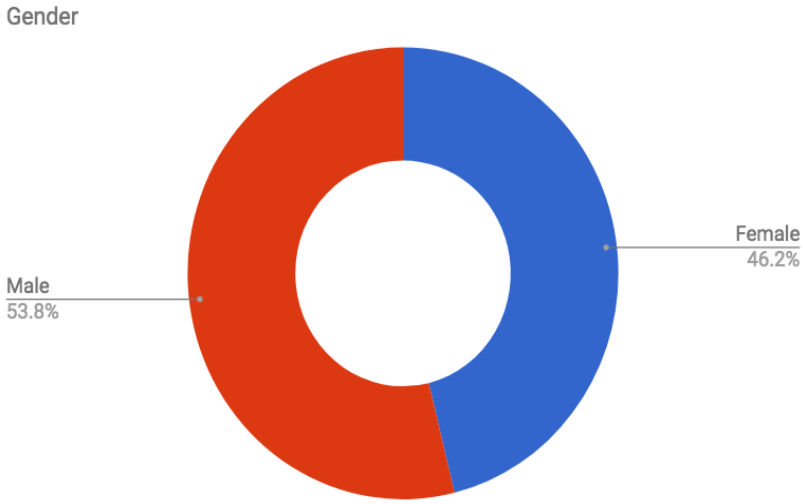

Fig. 9: Representation among gender of participating students in the two focus groups (n = 13)

Students were briefed on how to discussion would unfold and how they could interact. Great emphasis was put on having each voice heard during the discussion and to not hesitate to state candid views and comments. After an icebreaker activity where everyone introduced themselves, the researcher explained the context of the overall study. Anonymity was ensured and both focus groups discussions were audio recorded and later transcribed and translated into English.

4. Results

4.1. Review of Salient Policy Documents

The review of salient policy documents serves as the basis for initiating the assessment of ESD in Kosovo, starting in the broad context and narrowing down to the educational system and lower-secondary school level including its internal set-up and daily educational practice.

The Kosovo Constitution includes specific provisions on the environment. It recognizes "protection of environment" as one of the main values (Kosovo Assembly, 2008, p.2, article7) and "nature, biodiversity, environment and national inheritance as everyone's responsibility" (Kosovo Assembly, 2008, p.14, article 52). Yet, it falls short of specifying sustainable development such as found in the articulation within the European Union (EU) Acquis "A high level of environmental protection and the improvement of the quality of the environment must be integrated into the policies of the Union and ensured in accordance with the principle of sustainable development (*Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union,* 2014, p.C 326/403, article 37).

ESD has already been included in the strategic policy documents of MEST, but, then in turn, the Kosovo education system has been without an impact assessment `specifically regarding the effects of ESD. Matter of fact nothing explicitly related to sustainable development is stated or addressed in the evaluation report of KESP 2011-2016 (Ministry of Education Science and Technology Evaluation Report [MESTEP] 2015). Therefore, more research is needed to assess the effects of the top-down approach for channeling principles of education for SD from policy documents into the classrooms. For instance, the primary educational document which the system relies upon is the KCF. The experts of MEST of Kosovo regard KCF as a new competency-based curriculum (MESTKCF, 2011, p.35). The KCF was sought to foster a competency-based culture that would integrate cross-cutting issues, creative problem solving, interactive teaching and learning, and a focus on education that is student-centered (MEST, 2011, p.59). Teachers in the past would utilize minimalist strategies like setting objectives, lecturing and assigning desk work to prepare students for final examinations, whereas with the new competency-based program, designed by UNICEF, teachers needed to create strategic learning activities designed to lead to students acquiring specific competencies (Kadriu and Gougeon, 2014, p.413). So, this in a sense was a favorable prerequisite to ESD.

In Kosovo, the term 'competences for sustainable development' is not yet commonly used. In contrast, In Germany, the debate about ESD has resulted in the concept of "Gestaltungskompetenz" as the central learning objective (Seitz and Schreiber, 2005, Ch. 4, p.59; De Haan, 2006). "Gestaltungskompetenz" means the competence to design and shape. It is described as 'a forward-looking ability to modify and shape the future of our society in terms of SD, through active participation' (De Haan and Harenberg, 1999; De Haan, 2006; De Kraker, Lansu and Dam-Mieras, 2017, p.106)

In the same vein, competences for SD are a combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes, that enable individuals to effectively contribute to transition processes towards a (more) sustainable society, on the basis of their domain-specific expertise and more general academic competencies (De Kraker, Lansu and Dam-Mieras, 2017, p.107). Especially during such transition processes, the ability to deal with a diversity of perspectives is important. Thus, individuals are challenged to think, communicate, learn, and collaborate across the boundaries that divide these perspectives. Thus, the ability to cross such boundaries may be called 'trans-boundary competence' (Ibid). Its abilities and dispositions include holistic systems orientation, interdisciplinary, participatory, international, cross-cultural, cross-scale, future-oriented perspectives, and creative approaches to addressing sustainability problems (Ibid).

Today, there is insufficient research to draw any firm conclusions about whether ESD competencies are taught in school, whether through ESD a transition to a more SD is underway, or even if ESD may improve future employment of Kosovar students and solve the problem of youth unemployment amongst many other problems.

In addition to the KCF, MEST included ESD in the Education Strategic Plan for the period 2011-2016, however without explicitly calling it ESD. Its vision for the education system was: To create an inclusive education system and to provide all citizens in the Republic of Kosovo with equal access to quality education at all levels, a system which provides the people of Kosovo with lifelong skills for an advanced knowledge integrated into European society and to contribute to the long-term SD of the country through job creation and enhanced social cohesion" (Leal Filho et al., 2014, p.143; KESP 2016, p.9).

On a positive note, most recently, the Education Strategic Plan for the period 2017-2021, explicitly includes ESD since direct references are made to the Education for All (EFA) initiative, the UN SDGs (Goal 4), and the Education Framework for Action (Education 2030) of the EU (KESP, 2016, p.10). Its perspective is towards "creating a competitive knowledge society, based on European values with equal opportunities for all its citizens to contribute to sustainable economic and social development", and it sees its mission as the "development of an Education System based on quality, all-inclusiveness, and accountability, offering education and training of individuals by best international standards and practices." (KESP, 2016, p.32).

There is a lack of research assessing how and to what extent is ESD approached in schools in Kosovo and revealing proper applications of current ESD practices in Kosovar classrooms. Furthermore, little research is concerning the identity and breadth of issues dealt with in the curricula, whether students learn more about local or global ones, and whether common ESD topics include climate change, loss of biodiversity, etc.

In regard to one pillar of ESD, the environment, there is a lack of reliable data and a thorough understanding of the state of the country's environment. Ultimately, pledges and references to ESD are scattered among government addresses and policy documents and shows little policy connection or coherence which is necessary for reforming the education system.

The most important finding besides the fact that ESD is explicitly mentioned is also the system's weakness and liability to the practice of ESD in Kosovar classrooms. The National Development Strategy of Kosovo (2016-2021) or the "Plan for Sustainable Development", within the chapter for education, underscores the fact that the KCF is not yet adopted in all schools (NDSKS, 2016, p.12). In a first instance, the implementation of the curriculum was rolled out in a limited number of pilot schools, but nowadays only 10% of the all schools have adopted it. Moreover, there is still no assessment of the effectiveness of the new curriculum so that there can be any systematic changes to the education practice within the existing schools and the rest of the system that is soon needed to adopt it (Ibid). Also, the strategy underscores some problems such as the work of schools being based on outdated textbooks and the quality of teaching as major problems in the education system in Kosovo.

Almost half of teachers presently in service fail to meet the minimal qualifications or normative requirements to hold the office because they have not completed bachelor level studies, while the goal is by 2021 to have everyone meet the requirements (Ibid). On another front, the system's effectiveness is suffering from the lack of comprehensive monitoring and evaluation processes to measure success and quality of teaching and learning. This oversight and regular review would identify intervention areas and would provide institutions with the basis for seeking accountability from educational institutions. Unarguably, without this in place, there is hardly space for addressing the issues which thwart meaningful knowledge and skills to be taught (Ibid).

4.2. Results from IBS

The questionnaire addressed students' familiarity with ESD: whether they had heard about it (Fig.10). In this question, most respondents say that they think of long term development (58.9%), they think of ESD in terms of development that takes considerable time, while some students also think that this form of development is steady and constant without being subject to any changes; compared to the three other themes which share equally their weight of 13.7%. A group of respondents' link ESD directly to learning for personal growth, another group says ESD is an education policy without any understanding of what it entails or is about. Moreover, there is the group of respondents which in their answers directly link one or more concepts from each of the UNESCO five pillars of learning: learning to be and learning to do, learning to know, continuous or lifelong learning, learning to live together.

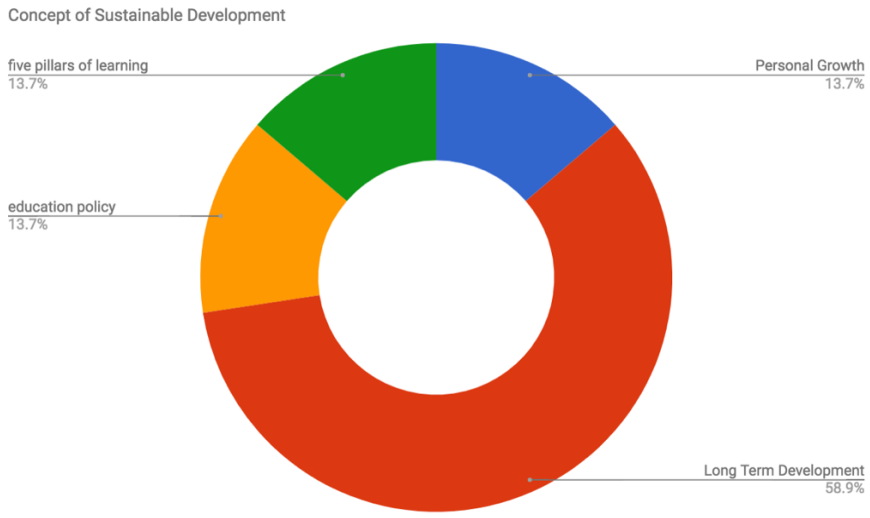

Fig. 10 What do students think when hearing the words / concept of SD (n = 74)

The next question asked whether the respondents think that SD skills are taught in school and applied in their education (Fig. 11). A strong indication here is the solid no answer (74.3%). This compared to merely 22.9% of respondents who think that they learn SD skills at school (Fig.11).

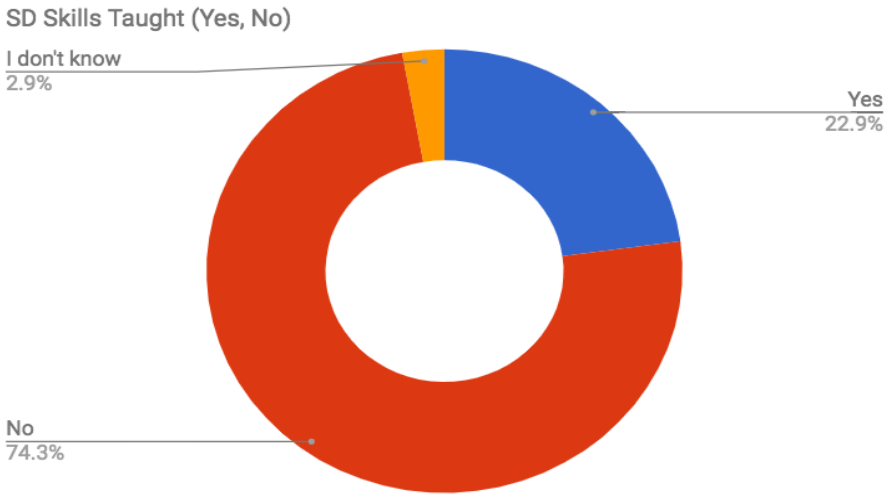

Fig.11 Whether students think that SD skills are taught in school (n = 74)

Delving deeper, four themes from the group of 'yes' answer respondents from Fig 11 above emerge in Fig 12. First, access to education (students learn about SD just because they go to school) with a share of 55.6% and reasoned by the idea that the education process is many years long and will, in essence, teach students SD skills throughout. Thereafter, they attribute their learning of SD skills a little to teacher background and their methods used (16.7%), to the content that they learn (16.7%), and to complemented education (11.1%) which stands for other learning environments such as with family, friends, etc.

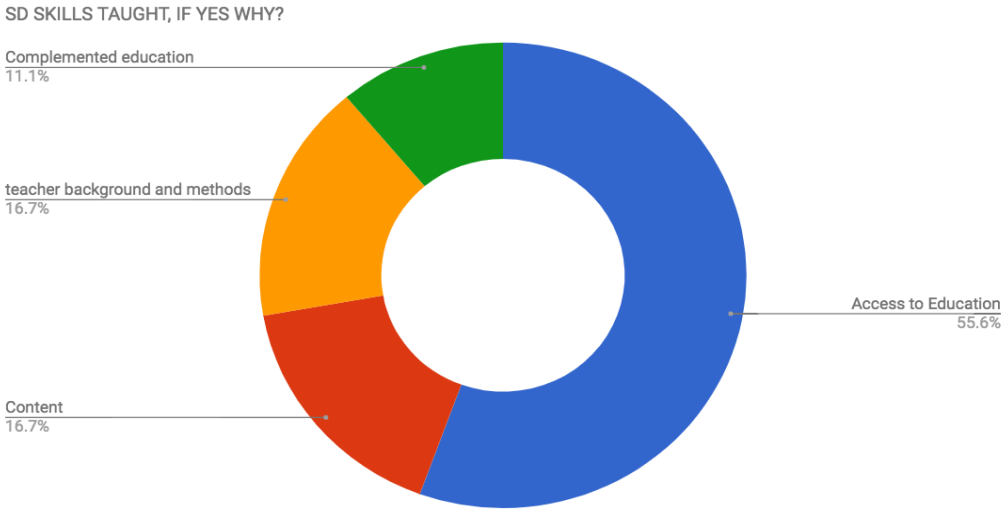

Fig. 12 Why do students think that skills related to SD are taught in school (n = 18)

Conversely, indications of why the skills related to SD are not found in Kosovar schools are shown in Fig.13, below. Here we see that most respondents point out to inadequate teacher background and methods used (30.8%), the lack of a specific course on SD (23.1%), infrastructural problems and inadequate school conditions in the physical space (17.3%). A significant number here admits that they have no clue (23.1%).

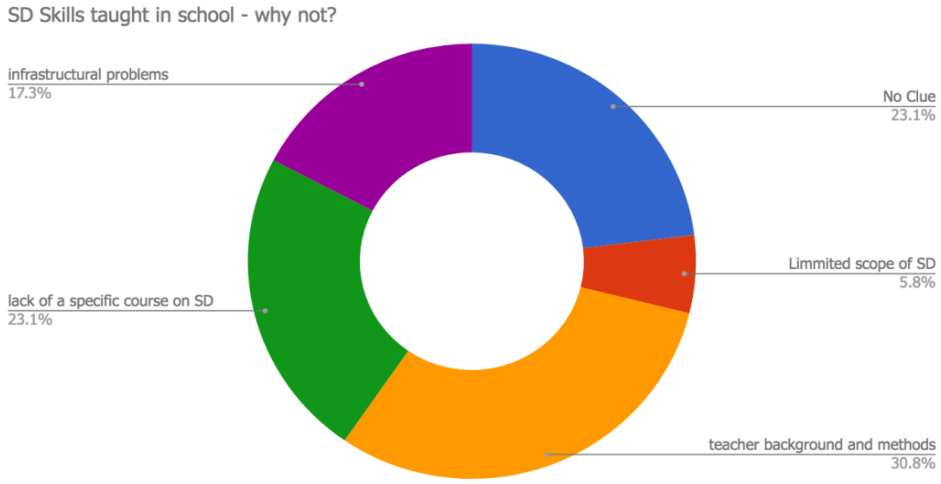

Fig. 13 Why do students think that skills related to SD are not taught in school (n = 52

Sixty-eight respondents stated their opinion on how they would want to influence classroom practice and methods. Three main aspects emerged: first 67.6% of respondents believe significant changes to teaching methods should be made. The majority from this group hint at abolishing outdated teacher practices

where teachers are at the center of the learning process; introducing more creativity in the process; having outdoor lectures and guest lectures, urgently changing the grading system; and introducing practical work to offset lessons based merely on theory (Fig.14).

Similarly, a fifth of all respondents' point to teacher background and preparation (19.1%) where most suggest more training for teachers especially in pedagogy and public speaking and better interpersonal communication skill is required. Another group of respondents' point at school infrastructure and equipment as major barriers (13.2%). They suggest that student numbers in one class need to be reduced dramatically. They point at the lack of laboratories and basic equipment.

A few from this group hint also at the wrong use of technology as a way to fill the gap in the lacking equipment such as the use of smartphones, some others point to assignments to prepare PowerPoint presentations which are presented to students very briefly and with no specific guideline instructions and thus the deliverables then confuse rather than facilitate the learning process.

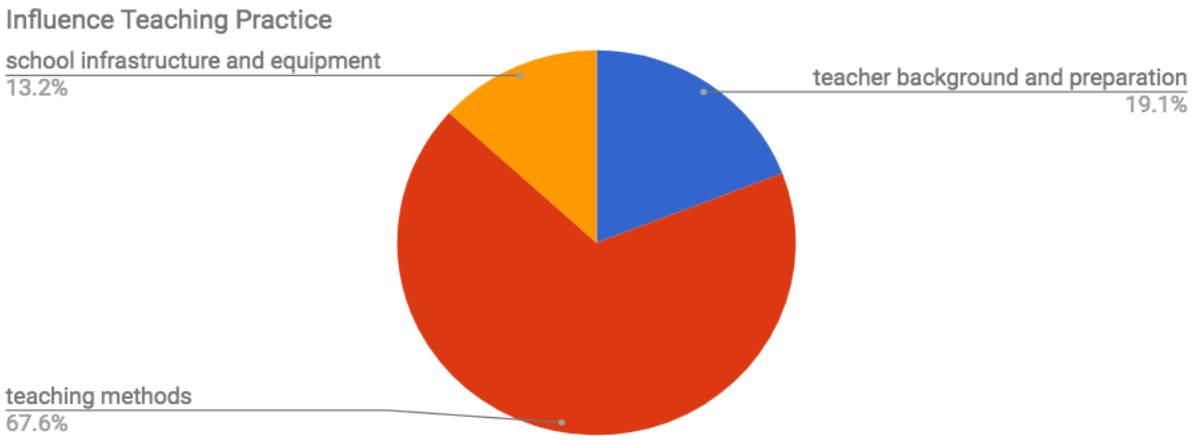

Fig.14 Students were asked if they had the opportunity to influence teaching practices in class what would be the things they would like to change (n = 68)

Asked about the 17 SDGs a worrying indication emerges, namely that 89.2% of respondents have not heard about the SDGs (Fig.15). By the same token, 94.6% of respondents were unable to list at least one of the topics related to the 17 SDGs (Fig.16).

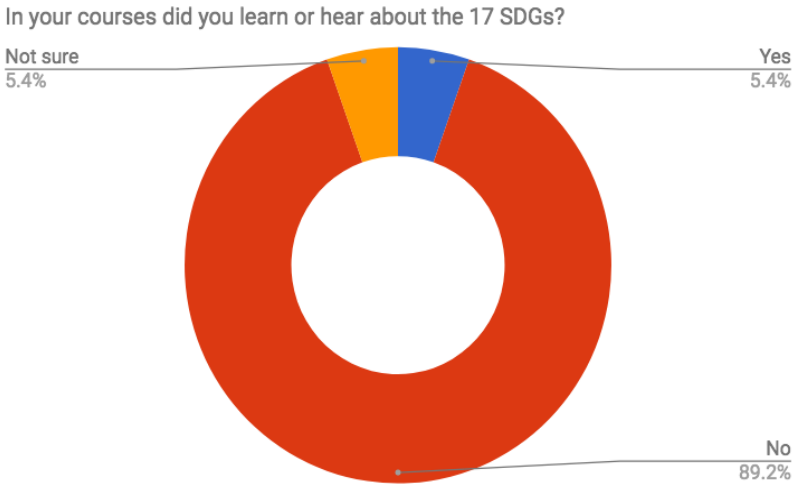

Fig. 15 Whether students have learned or heard about the 17 SDGS in their courses (n = 74)

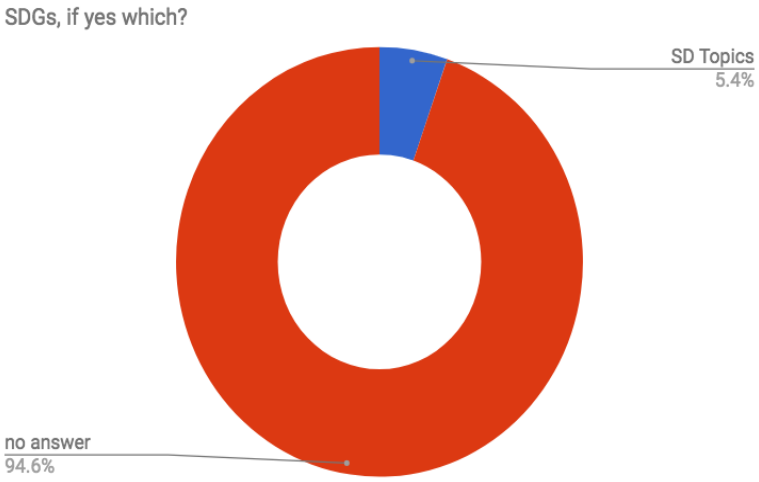

Fig. 16 Students were asked to list those SDGs they learned in their courses (n = 74)

Respondents were also asked about the most common teaching methods. Teacher lectures are believed to be one of the most common teaching methods in Kosovo, however, this is not decidedly validated through the present survey (Fig. 17).

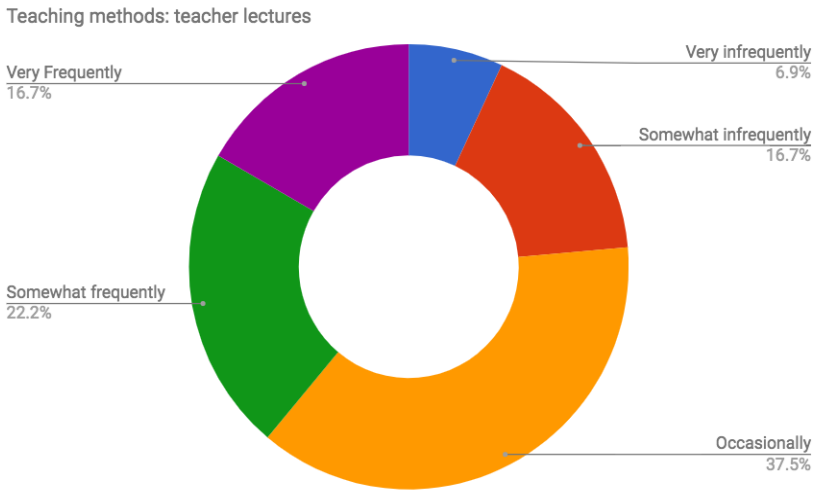

Fig.17 How often students think that the method of teacher lectures is practiced (n = 74)

Further, they were asked whether they would like to see more or less of these methods. 35.1% say they want more teacher lectures, 43.2% are neutral and have no preference (Fig.18).

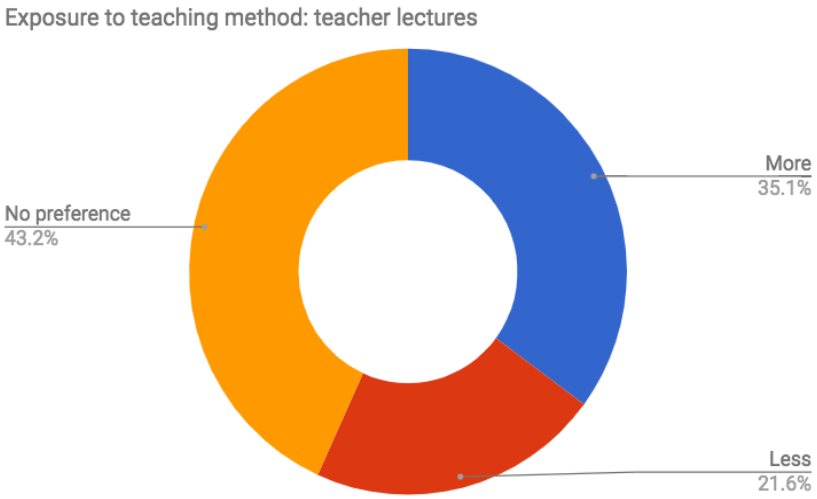

Fig. 18: Whether students like more exposure to the method of teacher lectures (n = 74)

As opposed to teacher lectures, which are one of the most traditional forms of teaching, the more contemporary method of group work is not being decidedly put at the forefront. Twenty-seven percent of respondents report that group work occurs somewhat infrequently, and 36.5% say occasionally (Fig.19).

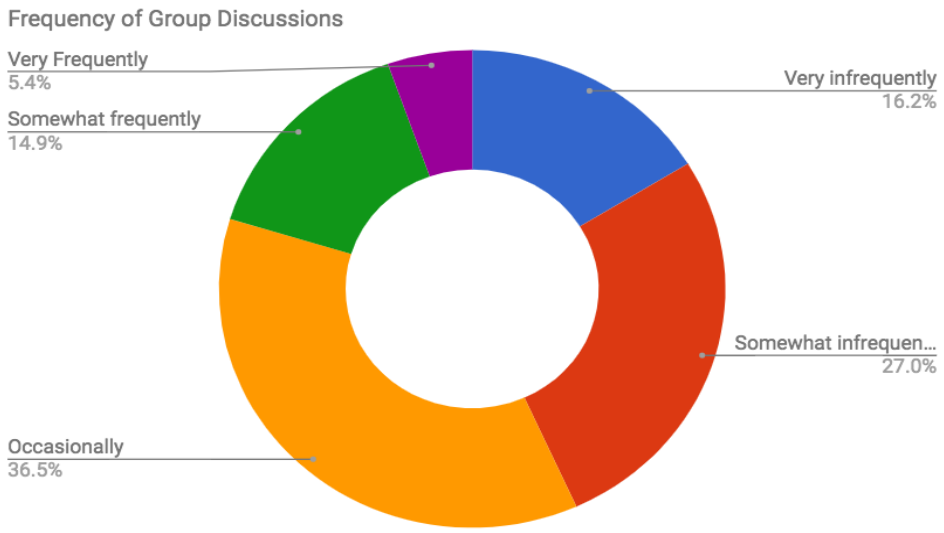

Fig.19 How often students think that the method of Group Discussions is practiced (n = 74)

However, 81.1% percent of the respondents want to see more group work (Fig.20).

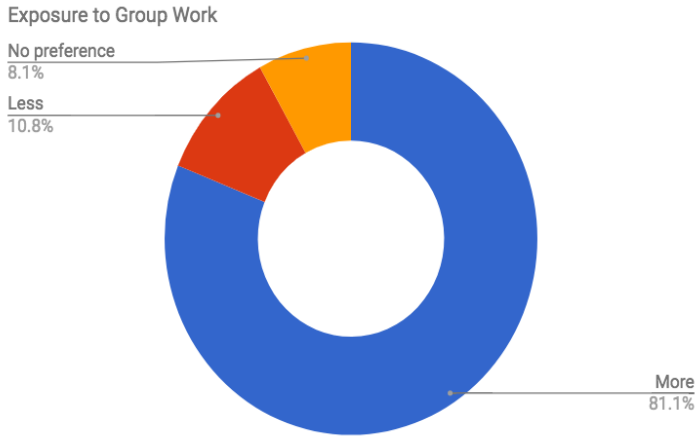

Fig.20 Respondents are asked about their exposure to Group Work (n=74)

Respondents are divided in terms of the frequency of homework as another commonly perceived teaching method. Most report that they do homework occasionally 36.5%;31.1% do it somewhat frequently (Fig 21). However, 54.1% of respondents' report that they would want to have more homework (Fig 22).

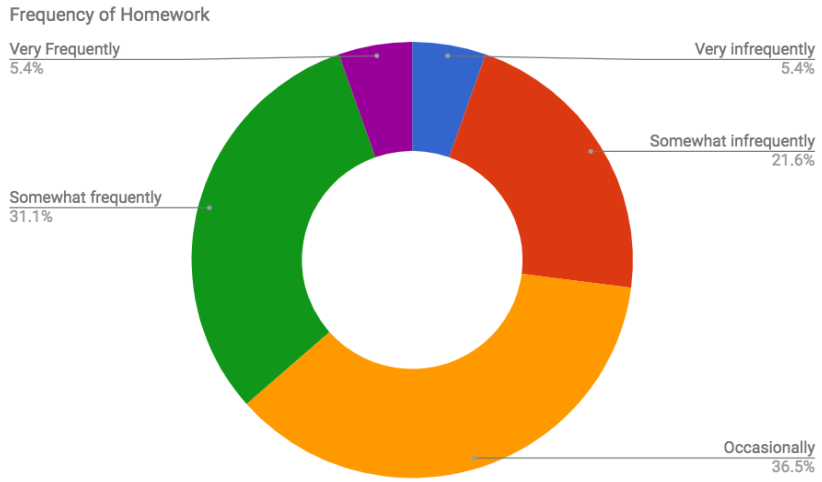

Fig.21 How often students think that the method of Homework is practiced (n = 74)

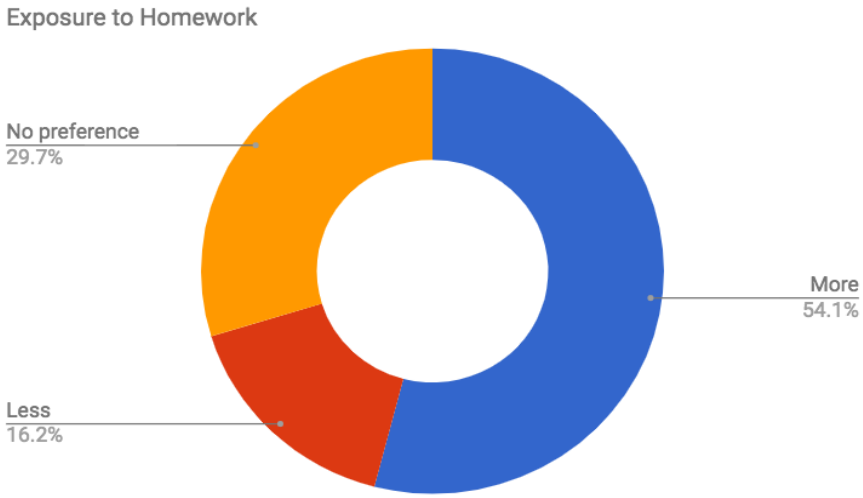

Fig.22 Whether students like more exposure to the method of homework (n = 74)

Respondents are clear in signaling the great absence of study visits. 74.3% of respondents report that study visits are organized very infrequently (Fig.23). 95.9% of respondents want to see more study visits (Fig 24).

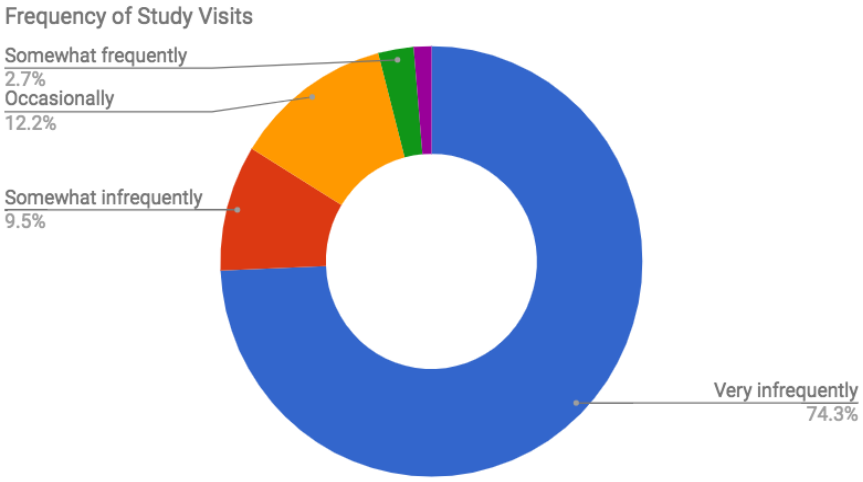

Fig. 23 How often students think that the method of study visits is practiced (n = 74)

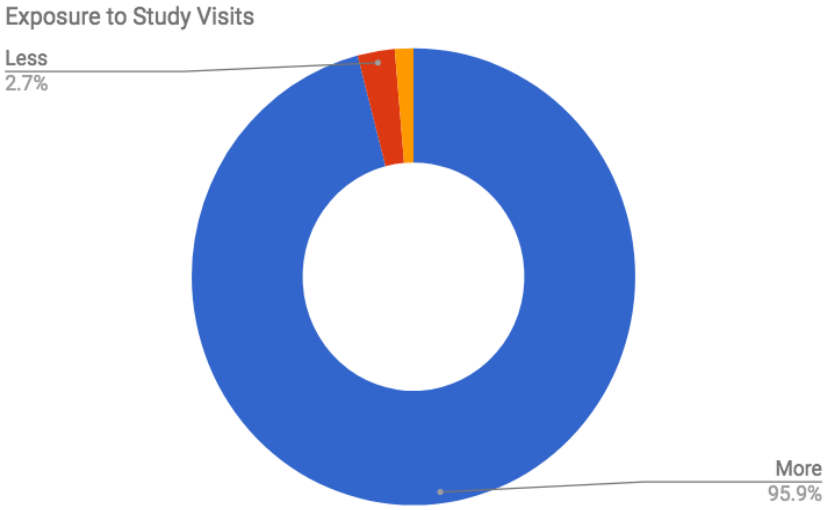

Fig.24 Whether students like more exposure to the method of study visits (n = 74)

Respondents were asked whether they can think of other methods that they like or dislike. 48.89% of respondents think that lots more methods need to be introduced such as visual lecturing, practical work, more communication, video, research studies and essays, debate, technology, laboratories. 33.3% think that no other methods are needed but to improve the ones already applied. About 17.78% think that that certain existing methods need to be abolished such as monotonous teacher lectures, or requiring some students to read in class and some others called upon to react to what was read (Fig. 25).

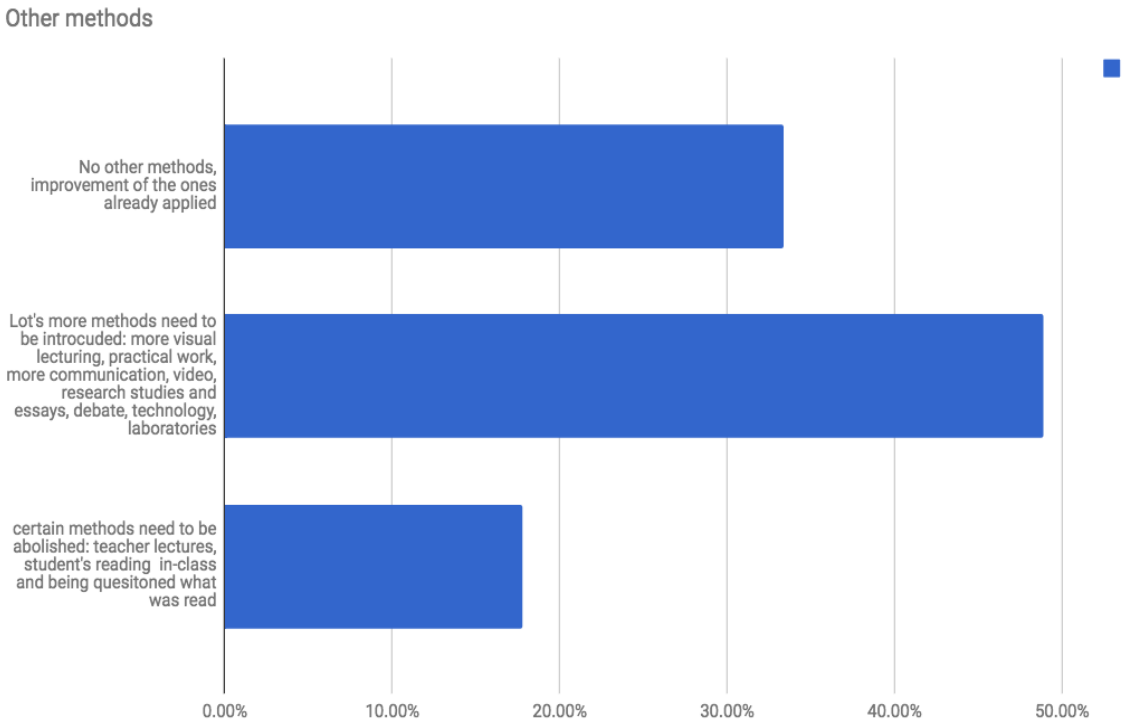

Fig. 25: What other methods students like or dislike (n = 45)

The next questions assessed the knowledge and awareness of important ESD topics and issues such as intergenerational responsibility, the development of the country, future of the planet, climate change, biodiversity and renewable energy.

Respondents were asked whether their courses teach them about the ongoing or future development of Kosovo and whether they learn how to contribute to it (Fig. 26). 51.4% of respondents report a no answer, 25.7% say yes and 23.03% of respondents are not sure.

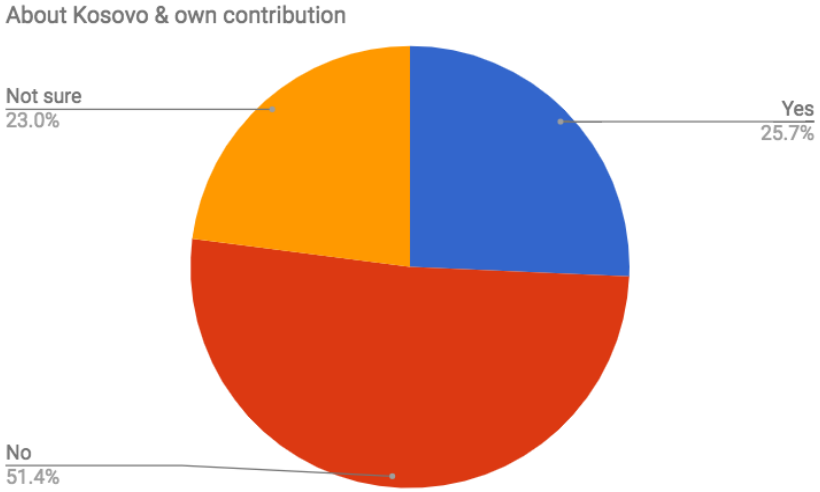

Fig.26 Whether students believe that their subjects teach them about Kosovo's (ongoing and / or future) development and how they could contribute to this development (n = 74)

However, a large proportion of respondents 62.2% report that in their courses they learn about the planet's future regarding the environment, society, and the economy **(**Fig. 27).

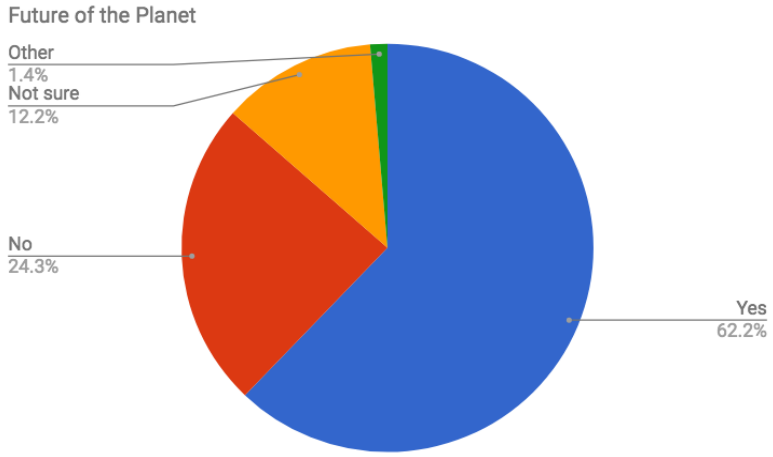

Fig.27 Whether students believe that their subjects deal with the planet's future regarding the environment, society, and the economy (n=74)

In contrast, a large proportion of respondents, namely 56.8%, feel that in their courses they do not learn about intergenerational responsibility (Fig. 28).

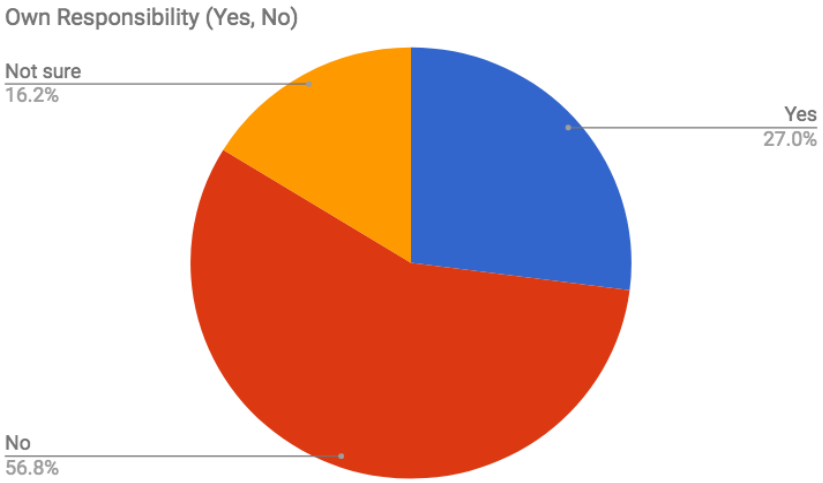

Fig. 28 Whether students believe that their subjects teach them about the responsibility of the current generation for future generations (n = 74)

The 27% that say that they are taught about intergenerational responsibility report three main themes as to how they learn about their own responsibility for the future generation. Almost 60% of them attribute learning about this predominantly in the biology course which contains chapters or sections about ecology and protecting the environment, on renewable energy, and ecosystems (Fig. 29). About 32% of them state that this is learned mainly from the pedagogical skills of teachers who through mostly informal talks about responsibility and comparative or inter-generational characteristics such as discipline, academic success, conditions, etc. About 1/8th of them (13.2%) links this lesson with other courses such as history and citizen education.

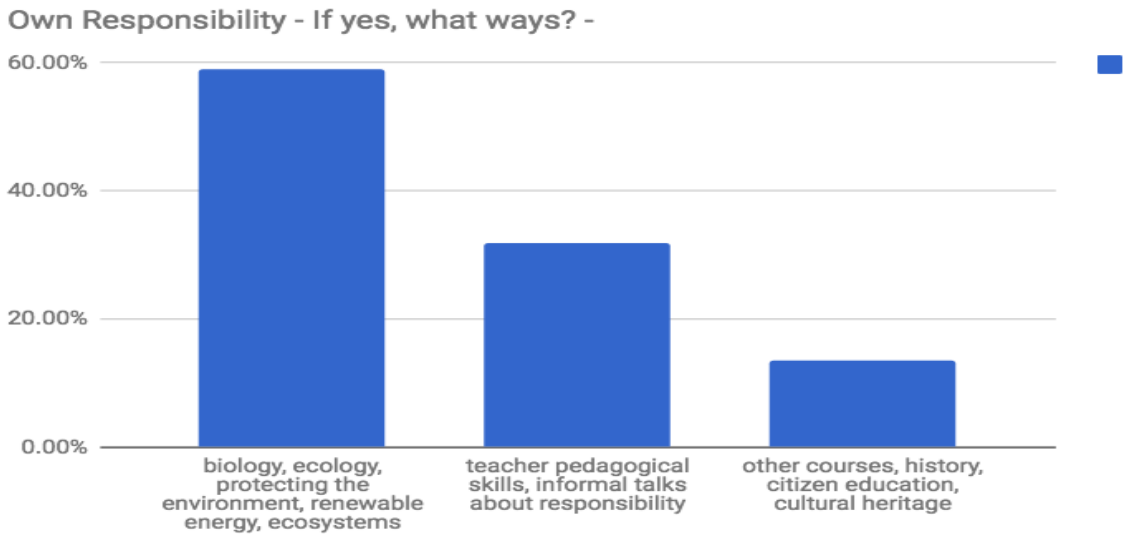

Fig. 29 In what ways students learn about the responsibility of the current generation for future generations (n = 23)

Nevertheless, a large majority of respondents (86.5%) report that in their courses they have heard or learned about important topics in ESD such as the issue of climate change (Fig.30), biodiversity (Fig. 31) and renewable energy (Fig. 32).

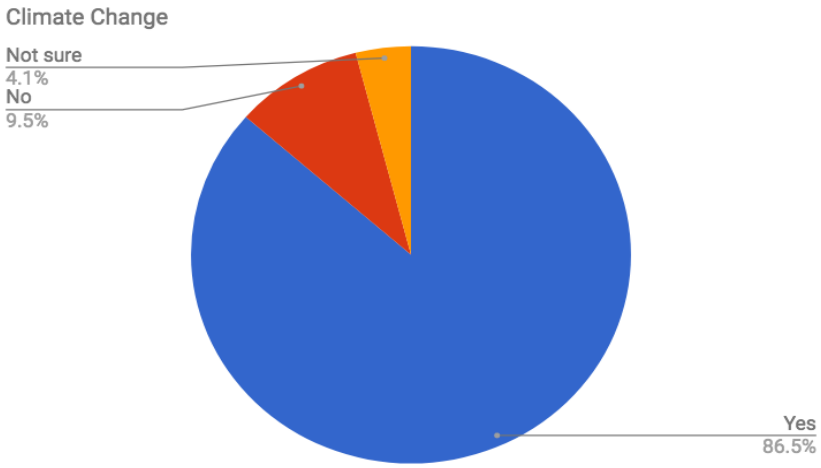

Fig.30 Students were asked if they learned or heard about Climate Change in their courses (n = 74)

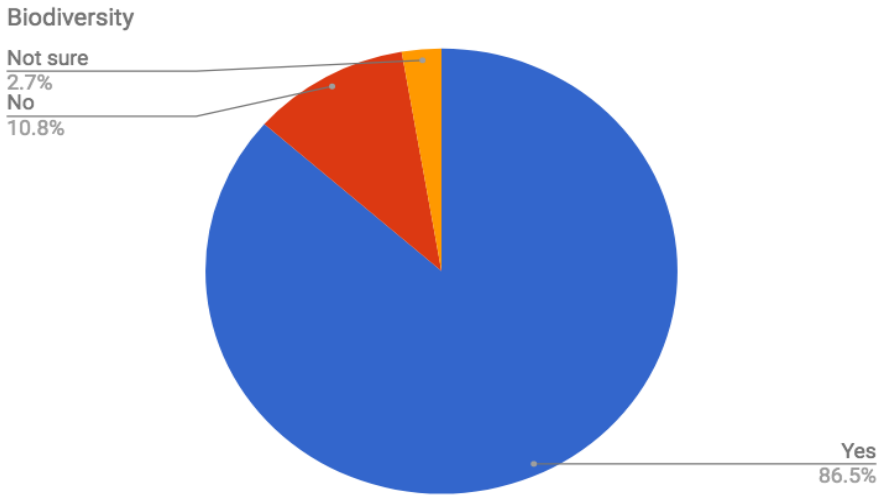

Fig.31 Students were asked if they learned or heard about Biodiversity in their courses (n = 74)

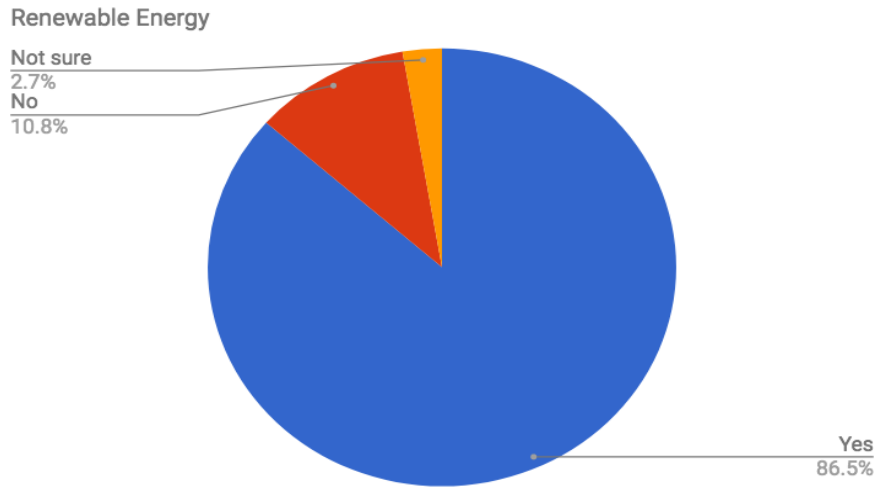

Fig. 32 Students were asked if they learned or heard about Renewable Energy in their courses (n = 74)

The final questions were shaped around soliciting more information regarding the use of information technology and the internet. First, respondents were asked whether teachers encourage or require the use of IT for the learning process (Fig. 33). 78.4% of respondents say that indeed IT is largely used to complement other forms of classroom learning.

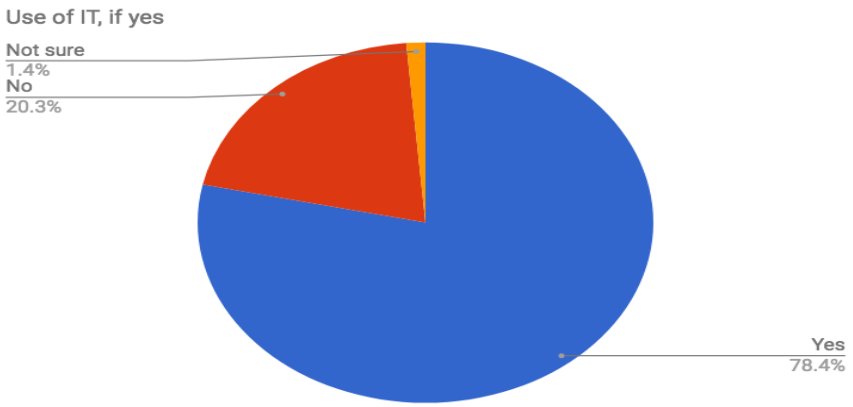

Fig. 33 Students were asked if teachers ask for or encourage the use of the internet and information technology as a supplement to the classroom and other forms of traditional learning (n = 74))

Delving deeper, the yes vote was further scrutinized, and when analyzing the responses two main themes emerged (Fig. 34). First, IT is used only sporadically; usually as an optional tool to fill the gap that other forms of traditional forms of learning leave (89.8%). A large number of responses from this group mentioned using Wikipedia for finding background information (research) or for preparing a paperback project or that is presented occasionally via PowerPoint presentations in class.

A common practice seems to be reading information collected randomly from Wikipedia or Google in front of the class without any criteria for referencing reliable (academic) data or without concerns about the plagiarism. Other means are using the dictionary and Google Translate for language courses, finding math exercises, etc. Rarely is it used for video presentations of practical aspects such as scientific experiments. Second, and although a minority group of respondents (10.2%), their responses are vital to understanding the discrepancy between the two identified themes.

This group describes a more advanced use of technology. This is attributed to the school conditions and the quality of teaching. Students in this bracket attend private institutions that seem to have intertwined technology in the learning process with many facets of using IT and the internet. For instance, the physical space and the use of smart boards are enabling visual and interactive lessons and encourage a greater engagement from students: This also happens in the digital realm through the use of google classroom and other platforms as a virtual classroom, where the discussions follow from after the physical meetings in school. Online, these students find timely and relevant information and announcements about their coursework, have homework instructions and assigned reading in one place. They have also access to a sophisticated grading system. They can submit work electronically and receive feedback more frequently from teachers and class peers without having to wait for the next class day when something is unclear. This fosters group collaboration and learning from each other's mistakes. Furthermore, these respondents point at the vast resources that their teachers and themselves make use of, such as free online learning tools.

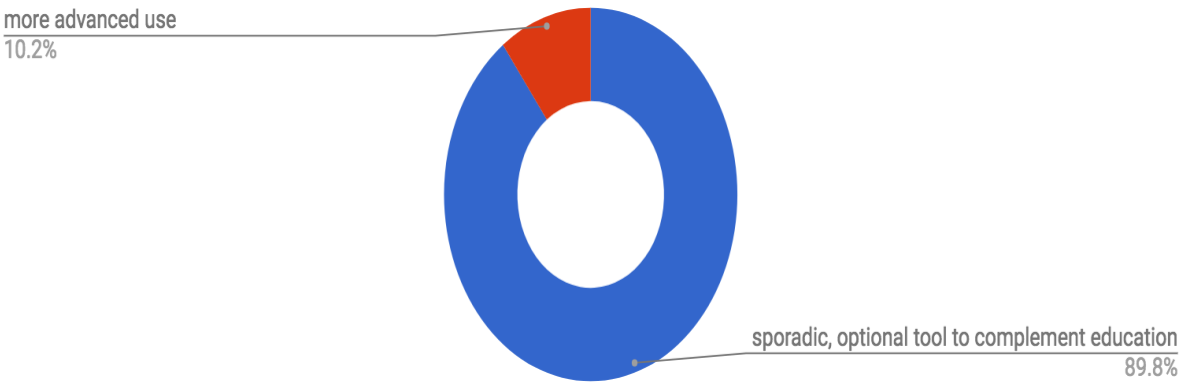

Fig.34 Students were asked to give examples how the internet and information technology are used (n = 49)

In the case of suggestions how to make better use of IT and the internet, respondents again hint at the two themes reflected in Fig. 30 as well. The majority of responses here point at specific or basic use of IT tools and the internet (53%) where some feature of the internet is mentioned in isolation. However, here we see 38% of responses in terms of making more systematic use of technology and connecting it urgently to the learning process (Fig. 35). In their responses, e-learning is mentioned (Khan Academy, Coursera, MIT OCW, etc., to connect the theoretical part found existing in the system with the practical part such as with YouTube, audio-books and podcasts, short movies and documentaries, movies, etc.

Respondents also mention things such as each school having their own web-portal and student-portal, public access to the internet or a school intranet in which in-class activities could be enriched by online research saving also valuable time during the learning process. Schools should have their portals whereas students get information and can interact in different ways. Interestingly, respondents also point out a critical aspect to making systematic use of IT and the internet, that is the need to show a greater focus on foreign languages because lots of information is available on the internet in most foreign languages for i.e. English or German but very little in Albanian. A small minority view is represented in this topic where respondents claim that technology is not compatible with the education system in Kosovo.

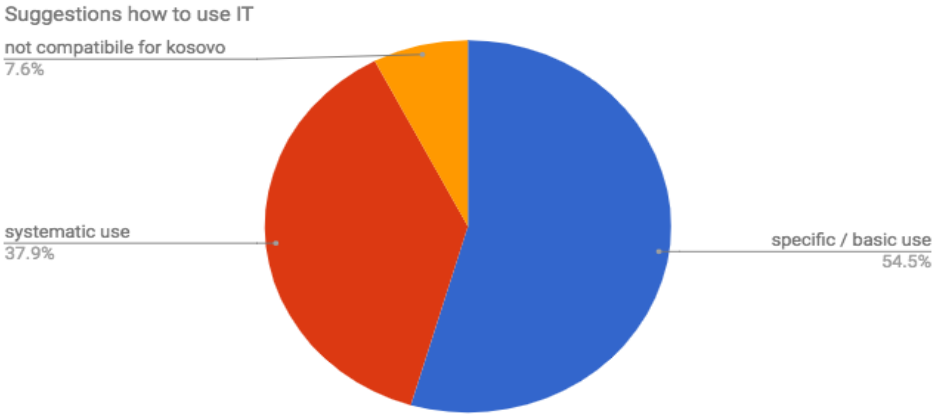

Fig.35 Students were asked to give suggestions how to use the internet and information technology (n = 66)

4.3. Results from FG

The substantive questions of the discussions of the focus groups tested the student's understanding of ESD, and generally the results turn out to be meagre understanding of it, and are akin to the disappointing results of the IBS. Almost 73% of comments painted a view in which whatever ESD is about, it is

practiced only a little if not at all in their education (Fig.36). The rest of the comments (about 27%) specifically dealt with reforming the education system as a process which takes a long time, so the results are not visible now.

4.3.1. How is ESD Perceived by Students

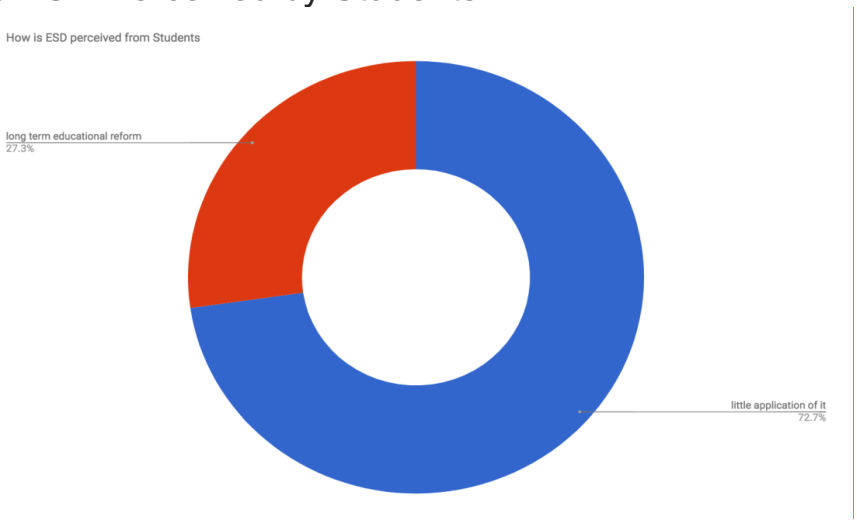

Fig.36 How do student participants see ESD (n = 11)

4.3.1.1. Long Term Educational Reform based on Development

Of the eleven comments on this question only two students discussed relevant points and were tied to how ESD is an educational reform that takes long time to implement, is tied somehow to lifelong learning, and is based on practices from abroad. This is in tune with most of the findings from IBS. Female student, age 16 from Prishtina, in grade 10: "I think that ESD is an education which can be a development or reform so that students in Kosovo learn more sustainably. I think ESD is about reforms drawn from other countries to base our development. Female student, age 18 from Prishtina, in grade 12: "The definition is not very clear to me but I think generally, that it is a long educational process that often one cannot spot or find at the now, but in the long run, it will impact someone positively. I think that it has to start in the elementary school and it continues without an end."

4.3.1.2. Little Application

More importantly, all but two comments indicated that students generally do not know about ESD as one female student, age 18 from Prishtina in grade 12, explains: "I hear about ESD for the first time. I think this is part of the reform to make our education more coordinated and overarching since at the moment a lot of teachers only focus on their own subject […] despite many reforms and changes in our education, there is no positive impact. When we think about education it is mostly the same with how our parents were educated, with how we are receiving our education, and most likely it will remain the same for our children as well."

Further responses show that there is agreement on this issue, male student age 16 from Prishtina in grade 10 says: "As a platform, it is not implemented. The system changes every year, at least in my school. We are subject to pilot projects, and although I agree that there should be reform, I think that it would be best to have a sustainable system".

Male student, age 18 from Prishtina, in grade 12 says: "Not only in our school but I do not think that ESD is practiced in any school in Kosovo. Our education fails to incorporate any form of awareness about

where we stand as learners in relation to our context and environment. Female student, age 16 from Prishtina, in grade 10 provides further context to the issue: "I do not think it is applied in our system due to the short length of subject hours, a large number of students in one classroom, usually 30-35 yet with cases of almost 50 students."

4.3.2. Teaching Background and Teaching Methods

In terms of whether teachers are practicing ESD and what methods they use to do so or not, 70.4% of students think that ESD is not practiced because of an outdated system (Fig.37). In their comments students mention also old teaching staff who utilize rigid and ineffective methodologies, have little or no interest for change, and quite often are unfair, vengeful, and authoritative. Conversely, 29.6% of student participants think that there are few exceptions. Each focus group pointed at two teachers who could serve as role-models for all other teachers; they are also young teachers (Fig.37).

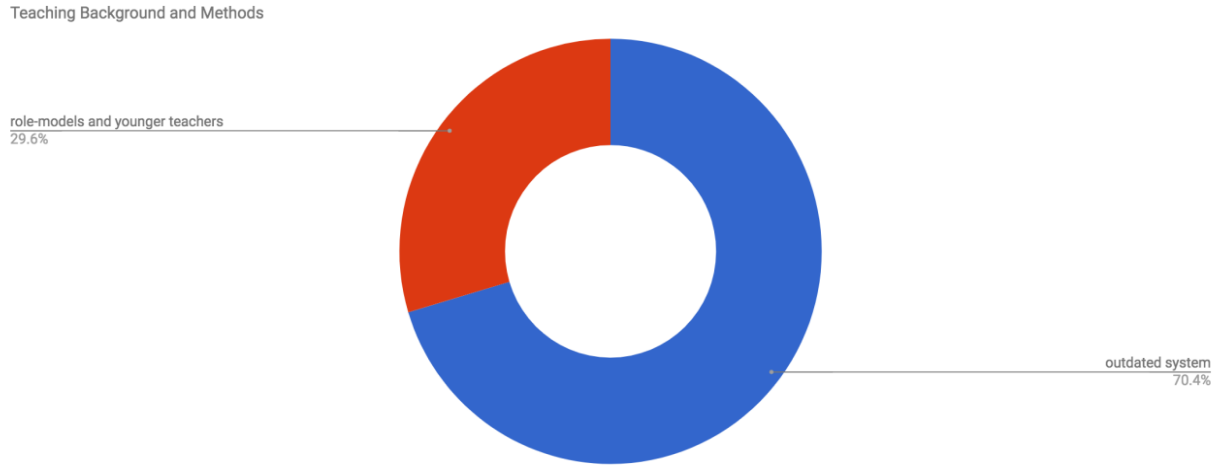

Fig.37 Perception of student participants in terms of teachers practicing ESD (27 comments in total)

4.3.2.1. Outdated System

Focus group data cement the view that the education system still largely remains outdated and is not reflective of the values and characteristics that ESD promotes and instills into the system. One female respondent, age 18 from Fushe-Kosove, in grade 12 says: "our generation is used to experimenting with reforms, despite that the focus still remains on teacher lectures. Our class has 47 students, and only two teachers try to engage everyone in the class and achieve that through unique methods. Otherwise, the system needs teachers with strong pedagogical skills for being able to engage all students and navigate the big classrooms so that no single student will feel left out. Today we see that most teachers are insensitive about these dynamics. They require discipline, deliver their lecture from the front of the classroom, and engage mostly their preferred students. So, in many ways, the system is creating detached students."

Male student, age 18 from Fushe-Kosove, in grade 12, believes that there are one or two teachers who make the difference. However, most subjects are not practical at all. Most teachers use these traditional teaching methods in which students predominantly listen to lectures, and are pushed to learn by heart for grades and not for the knowledge. Therefore, in a way, the system is not preparing us to apply what we learn in school and to think critically. The worst is that students create this habit from early on at elementary school, and they will continue this when they go to college and further. Ultimately, it is no wonder that youth cannot find jobs and generally have no prosperity in our country."

The following comments support the overall results of this study which provide confirmatory evidence that teacher training is largely inadequate and ineffective, teaching methods remain unchanged and

outdated. This is line with the findings from the review of salient policy documents and also the IBS results. Female student age 18, from Prishtina in grade 12, says, "I know that a lot of teachers go to trainings during the school year, during the summer break, but I am not sure if we see any positive impact from these trainings because it's not that these teachers change anything after completing these trainings. There are many teachers who teach a subject for which they are not really competent or knowledgeable. There are cases when teachers lecture through reading from the book, or request students to read part of a lesson from the book and then detach completely during that time."

Male student, age 18 from Prishtina, class 12, says: "There are many teachers of the old age, or who surpassed their youthful years and may not be prone to using the internet, or technological devices. So, I think that the challenge is now to look at how teacher training is being done. Often, we hear from teachers that they are going or have been going to a training organized by an NGO or an institution, and then when they come back they are not really sure what was it was about. There are some who tell us that 'it was a waste of time' and that they will not see any real benefit. So, looking at that training, teachers may learn about new methodologies and activities but come back and they do not know or may lack the interest and resources for applying them in practice. Therefore, I think that a careful and well-thought-out strategy has to be put in place where the pre-service training of teachers is of the highest standard, and then the in-service training should be a continuation and build further on top of the pre-deployment process".

Female student age 16, from Prishtina in grade 10, says: "This kind of change (ESD) has to start with teachers, they have to be more qualified. I strongly believe we have teachers which do not pass the minimum requirements, or they do not have pedagogical skills to pass on their knowledge to their students." Further, she adds: "There are many cases when a teacher does not want to adopt any method or curriculum outside of what they are used to doing. It's interesting how many generations can talk about the same methods used by a specific teacher."

Male student age 16, from Prishtina, in grade 10, summarizes this point: "I think the problem is that our teachers are too formal and authoritative, and of course, they need to be respected since they are administering over 30+ youngsters which can quickly reduce the learning process to nothing. Therefore, they keep a distance and frosted relationship with their students and I think that is why most the time at class is boring and does not spike the interest of students. That is why I believe that teachers need to have the skills to connect with their students and make the learning process attractive for them. This goes hand in hand with the choice of teaching methods because you cannot expect better results when the same ways of teaching are applied year after year. For instance, at a private school in Prishtina, students are tasked to do videos for an assignment in their physics subject, we do not experience that."

Similar to the response of the students above, and the findings in the IBS, there is overwhelming evidence for authoritative teachers and their subjects the students. Female student age 17, from Fushe-Kosove, in grade 12 says: "a lot of teachers feel the need to establish their authority in class. When students ask clarifying questions they take it personally as if they have not been able to lecture or explain something clearly. So, then this prompts tendentious answers from them, replying to the student which raises the question with an elevated tone and quite often with a rhetorical question of this sort: how is something so clearly transmitted not understood? So then with these kinds of reactions, we are put on the spot and even humiliated in front our peers, we are made clear that questions are not welcomed so one will be definitely discouraged to make any comment or question again." Female student, age 16 from Prishtina, class 10, says: "To be frank I am upset by this negative tendency of some of the teachers at my school which is unlike any of my previous experience in the elementary school. Teachers here try hard to put us on the spot and catch us in a bad situation. I believe that it is not fair at all and even it is sad to know that the ones who should be our mentors try this hard to cast us in a bad light, reprimanding us in such way that we are told that we are poised to fail. Why isn't there a healthy relationship that rather stressing our weaknesses could instead build on our strengths?"

Female student, age 18 from Prishtina, class 12, says: “Exactly, I think that any teacher has the authority but also the knowledge to outsmart any of his/her students, so it is a pity that this is used in a negative way when it has the potential for doing so much good. When teachers use their authority negatively, students are shamed in front of their peers, which in turn may disenchant them from the system and even lead to long-term problems I believe.”

Female student age 18, from Fushe-Kosove, in grade 12, says: “Teachers solicit our views and opinions, but their comments find only silence because no one is as willing to criticize them or their way of teaching. So, at the end of the day, for most teachers, it is just a mere formality that they solicit the views and feedback of students.

As the students’ comments below further show, and on the basis of the evidence currently available from this study, it seems fair to suggest that most teaching staff are old, are ill-equipped to perform modern teaching methods due to lack of effective training but also difficult teaching conditions with large number of students as the main impediment, which ultimately leads to favoritism, injustice, and lack of engagement of most students.

Female student age 18, from Prishtina, in grade 12, says: “Due to this problem of student numbers, teachers work with only their preferred students, you constantly see the same students being at the focus of the interaction in the class.”

Male student age 18, from Prishtina, in grade 12, says: “I see the old age of teachers as a problem. Most of them are educated in an old and outdated system from today. For instance, most of them do not know and are not trained well how to utilize technology. Furthermore, most of these teachers engage only a few students, especially those somehow known as their favorite students. There is also this tendency of engaging only the students in the front rows, as if others in the back are not that important.”

Female student age 18, from Prishtina in grade 12, says: “For three years I never saw a teacher who would lecture from the back of the class or any other position of the classroom other than where their seat or the blackboard is. There are times when teachers move around the class but that is only when we are doing any exercise in which the entire class is busy and there is absolute silence. I believe this should be challenged because our classrooms are generally large and the seats at the middle and at the back make you feel almost detached from the lecture, especially if you are uninterested from the learning process like many students which sit in these rows.”

The inability to find collaboration with MEST in this study and or finding relevant information through secondary data, prevents a thorough representation of active teaching staff and their age. Also, extensive in-class observation is required, and in various forms, to assess the grounds provided by the students that outdated teaching methods are still a dominant force. Disregarding that, this current research appears to validate this reality.

There is evidence suggesting that student may sometimes suggest a positive change in teaching methods like they experience it with other teachers but find deaf ears from other teachers. Male student, age 17, from Prishtina, class 11, says: “There were cases when students would say to a teacher: ‘can we do this activity X like we are doing it with teacher Z?’, and they would say ‘you continue doing whatever with teacher Z, this is my hour and I manage it as I see fit’.”

4.3.2.2. Teacher Role-Models or the lack thereof

The consensus view among students participating in the IBS and the ones in the FG that there is no basis for teachers to remain in the old and past. The findings from both the IBS and the FGs models abounds with examples of how a few teachers can serve as role-models as they are able and willing to tackle the difficulties they find in their job such as large numbers of students in class and engaging them all. Male student, age 18 from Prishtina, in grade 12 says: "We are 47 students in our classroom, despite that the chemistry teacher tries every hour to engage different students so that in this subject everyone connects with the lectures and different exercises." Male student, age 16, from Prishtina, in grade 11 says: "This teacher tries very hard to engage all students in the classroom".

Student point to exceptional teachers having their lessons and interactions with students clouded by positivity, more effective and enjoyable ways of learning, and requesting regularly student feedback about lessons learned and pace or effectiveness of a learning technique. Female student age 18, from Fushe-Kosove, in grade 12: "Our math teacher requests regular feedback and wants to know if we are satisfied with how we are progressing through the study material. But with her, it is different because she is a very friendly person and the way she communicates with us lets us know that our opinion matters." Male student, age 18 from Prishtina, in grade 12 says: "Most teachers make students the subject of their authority and reprimand them as if they do not know anything. This is unlike two teachers. What I like from the chemistry teacher is that he has developed a very special relationship with us. He talks to us as if he is on the collegial level with us and that makes us feel that we are taken seriously and our education is important. Whereas, the math teacher has also gifted abilities to connect with us, besides the substantive aspect of teaching math she has also powerful pedagogical skills with which she connects with us psychologically." Female student, age 18 from Fushe-Kosove, in grade 12, says: "The chemistry teacher is unique because he has a lot of patience with us. According to him, there is no wrong question from our side, and even if we do not understand an answer, he will try to explain it to us in different ways until we understand it. Other teachers make one feel dumb and made clear not to waste time with silly questions." Female student, age 16 from Prishtina, class 10: "Most teachers are negative towards us, but I do not understand why is it so difficult to be like our physics teacher? One day he was just passing by our class during lunch break, and stepped quickly in and greeted us warmly, and said you all represent the future of our young country. He made us feel very good and brought a smile to our face, and that means a lot and makes the day brighter. I think what needs to be done is to have new teachers go on study trips abroad and experience new teaching methods and come back equipped with knowledge and more positive attitude that they can apply here in Kosovo."

Most students agree that these exceptional teachers could serve as role models for the entire system and all other teachers could learn and put in more effort. Female student, age 16 from Prishtina, in grade 10, believes that "I can see it from our physics teacher today. He has acquired teaching experience in the UK and I am confident that if 50% of other teachers would be like him, our education would have been much more effective and appealing to all of us.

Also, more constructive and transparent grading is sought by students. Male Student age 16, from Prishtina in Grade 10 agrees: "The physics teacher is indeed an exception. Even in terms of grading and evaluating one's work, he is unique compared to his colleagues. In terms of assignments, he utilizes an evaluation rubric that he discloses with us which contains things such as critical thinking skills, whether the content is delivered clearly and eloquently if any sources have been used, etc."

Student think that technology is more embedded in the teaching style of younger teachers, since they are making innovative uses of technology. Female student, age 18 from Prishtina, in grade 12, says: "This situation with the old age of the teachers is concerning but we are also seeing that new generations are also incoming in the teacher sector. It is obvious that they have a different take on technology and their

points of view regarding education and many things in life are much different than the older generations."

Male student, age 16 from Prishtina, in grade 10, agrees with colleagues that teachers should be younger: "The generation born in the 50-60s have it more difficult to adapt or even reinvent themselves with these new ways of teaching. For instance, we have a few teachers who are into their thirties and they know how to create a special connection with us, they know how to make learning fun and spike critical thinking".

Female student, age 16 from Prishtina, in grade 10, says: "An exception to this argument related to the age of teachers, is the case with our physics teacher. He is quite old, but for me and for many he is the best. This because he has teaching experience in the UK, so now many of his skills are attributed from the system there. If only other teachers would follow suit, then the situation of our education would be much better. This teacher makes learning attractive, and that in a subject such as physics which does not appeal to most of the students, especially noting that we pursue a social concentration in our education."

4.3.2.3. Study Visits

Focus group data indicate that rarely there is any study visit outside of the classroom in order to complement the theory learned in class with real-world application. From two comments only on this topic, female student age 18, from Fushe-Kosove, grade 12 says: "Once in my elementary school as part of the civic education subject we visited a dairy product factory since we were learning about factories. There are also sometimes noble activities when we went out in the school garden to plant flowers but these were purely superficial activities to beautify our environment. From this activity, I am sure that tens of learning objectives could have been developed in regard to our biology, chemistry class, etc. For instance, the topic of photosynthesis could have been learned that day through practical application, but no we learn it from the book and no practical aspect is introduced to solidify the learning process.

Male student age 18, from Fushe-Kosove, grade 12 says: "We visit historical monuments in excursions at the end of the school year which is interesting, but we never went to an institution or utility or company to link anything about our theoretical learning of other courses."

4.3.3. Whether Education Changes the Way Students Think or Act

A majority of students believe that their education has an impact on the way they think and act, although they are not pleased with the level of impact (Fig. 38). The remainder of the responses (33.3%) point at the need for intervention in school conditions, and teaching methods, and especially hint at alternative means which teachers could use to appeal more to the students.

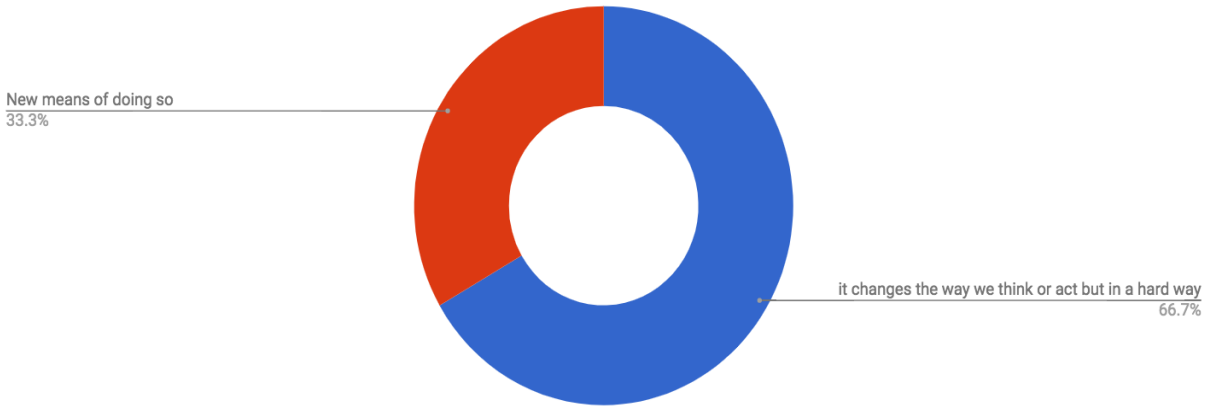

Fig.38 Perception of student participants in terms of whether their education changes the way they think or act (6 comments in total)

Data from focus groups support the majority view above. Female student, age 18 from Prishtina, class 12, thinks that her education has had a great effect in making her a caring person for her surrounding and where she wants to go in life. Yet, "I think generally this potential is underutilized and/or could have been much stronger", she says. Male student, age 18 from Prishtina, class 12: "I think that in this way of education we cannot reach a state in which we know clearly what to do in life. Still, a dominant way of teaching is the traditional lecture, and still there is nothing new in the teaching methods, and this old style does not require great efforts and it does not challenge one to think critically. So, the old idea still remains, finishing up on the topic as fast as possible and about learning content by heart, and the knowledge that we pick-up is potentially serving us in short-term but which we will not be able to apply in our lives." Female student, age 16 from Prishtina, class 10 agrees with her colleague, "We need more practical work, fewer theory, less teacher lectures."

4.3.4. Learning about the Development of Kosovo (Current or Future)

Student participants generally believe that they do not learn how to contribute to the development of the country, neither do they study anything related to it 87.5% (Fig.39).

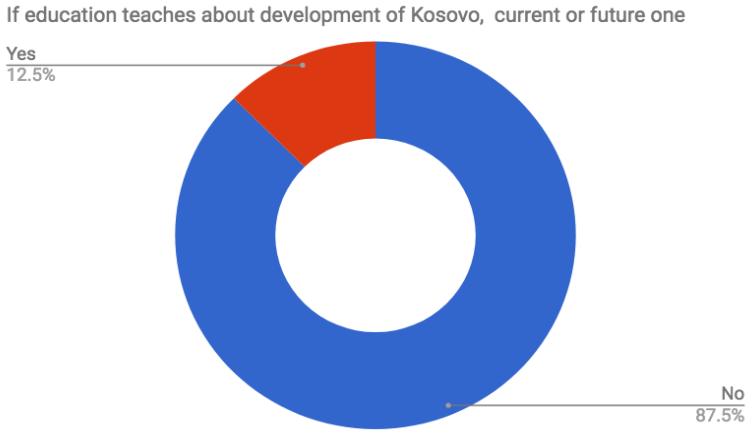

Fig.39 Perception of student participants whether education teaches them about current or future development of Kosovo (8 comments in total)

The focus group data on this topic reveals major weaknesses in the current education. Students point to many problems why they are not learning about the development of the country or how they could contribute to it. A few but three most important themes arise: favoritism, the negativity of teaching staff, systematic problems such as corruption, etc. Male student age 18, from Fushe-Kosove, in grade 12 disappointedly stated: "We are not taught about the development of Kosovo, and especially we are not educated to contribute in any way in the development. I seriously question the vision and objectives of our education, because year after year thousands of students are left stranded in the jobless markets of the country wondering where to go and what to do with themselves."

Female student age 16 from Prishtina, in grade 10, says: "Teachers have preferred students in the class, this creates an inferior situation in the classroom with the rest of the students". Male student age 16 from Prishtina, in grade 10, sheds light on the indications of corruption in the system: "The cases of nepotism and preferred students are ruining the system. There are cases when the head teacher has their child in the class or similar cases of family ties which at the end of the day give rise to favoritism and unfair situations. Meaning that a lot of students miss out on coursework, their knowledge is assessed more loosely while, in turn, they enjoy inflated grading. And this occurs with most of the teachers who fall in

line because if they treat these students differently it would be a sign of disrespecting their teacher colleagues."

Female student age 16 from Prishtina, in grade 10 says that "students are afraid to stand up against this injustice from their teachers because of fear of the complaints coming back as a boomerang in terms of grading. There was a case when I complained about the final grade in a subject for the first semester to my principal teacher, and many others from my class did the same. On the first lesson of that subject during the second semester, this teacher threatened us directly stating that [you seem to know how to complain but this semester you will learn how to beg for better grades]."

At the same time, there is the problem of pessimism cloaking the learning process which is reflected both in the attitude of teachers and among students. Male student age 16 from Prishtina, in grade 10, says: "most teachers resonate an aura of pessimism. In informal conversations, they instruct good students to find ways to go abroad because there is no perspective for them in Kosovo".

Moreover, another major problem is posed by the outdated learning content and course literature. As revealed by a female student age 16 from Prishtina, in grade 10: "Unfortunately, no subject is up to date with the real-time conditions governing our country, or what I think is even more important [is] that [it] would provide us with practical knowledge so that tomorrow we can contribute to the development of our country. It is sad how most of teachers encourage us to go study and live abroad."

4.3.4.1. Intergenerational Responsibility

There is a lack of focus group data on this topic Only three comments have been made, yet only one is relevant. Male student age 18, from Fushe-Kosove, in grade 12 said: "I think most of us are worried about our own future since even most of our parents are concerned about our future. I don't think that our education teaches anything about it [upcoming generations and their responsibility towards them]."

4.3.5. Role of Information Technology (IT) and the Internet

In regard to the role of information technology (IT) and the internet, student participants were divided in their opinions. A large group (35.7%) believe that major infrastructural problems and existing conditions prevent using IT and the internet (Fig. 40). 42.9% think that despite the hard conditions working solutions could be made, yet they doubt the intentions of those responsible because they do not see a serious connection with IT and the internet. A minority view here points at innovative teachers who go the extra mile to make lessons more interesting by relying on tech tools and more interactive coursework.

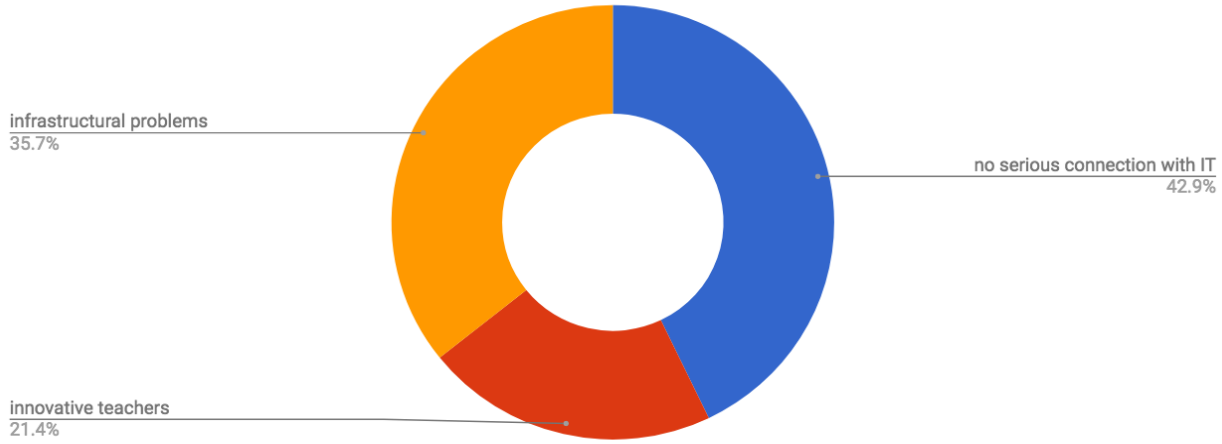

Fig. 40 Perception of student participants if information Technology is used (28 comments in total)

In addition, one female student Age 18, from Fushe-Kosove, grade 12, points to the fact that due to the old teaching staff they do not know how to work with technology:" I think I would request most of the old teaching staff to file for early retirement. But to not have this as an option, I would introduce a test for proficiency for teachers to see they are apt to teach in the modern setting guided by technology."

Male student, age 18, from Fushe-Kosove, grade 12, makes the comparison between Kosovo and its 'analogous' system and incompetent teachers with another education system where technology is deeply embedded from the earliest educational levels: "In Finland, even pupils in the earliest days of school are being exposed to gamified programming courses. Last year we had an assignment in our technology course which is based largely on theory and not practice. We asked our teacher to build a model of what we were reading in class, and the teacher told us sincerely that he never programmed that model because there is not enough Albanian material on the internet to understand the steps of doing it."

5. Discussion

5.1. Limitation

Caution should be exercised in generalizing the results of this study covering a small sample of upper secondary education students. The sample cannot be in any kind considered representative of the distribution and diversity of opinions of the population out of which the sample was taken.

Therefore, the views in this study are indications. But they are relevant and important indications. They shed some light on the surface level, but at the same time prepare the groundwork for further in-depth research on how ESD can be practiced better in the education system in Kosovo. While the expected survey results are not representative in the statistical sense, they can be considered indicative for a large segment of the Albanian-speaking students. Furthermore, because Albanian speakers represent a very large segment of the population, the research findings may – with caution, hypothetically, to be further investigated – also apply to students from non-Albanian-speaking communities.

Caution should also be exercised in using the indications deriving from this study as a representation of attitude on substantive aspects of the study related to ESD. Also, a larger pool of student participants would be needed to establish a more representative view of gender attitudes towards ESD. Looking more closely in terms of the methods used for generating primary data, in the IBS the majority of responses were from women, while in the Focus Groups men are in the majority. Despite the opposing pattern which occurred by mere chance here, the overall majority of participants of this study are women (70%). Nevertheless, further research is needed with larger base of participants to determine if women as opposed to men in Kosovo are more drawn towards ESD, development studies, SDGs, environmental education, or a survey which would test their view and feedback on their education.

5.2. Main Findings

On the basis of the ESD framework, the review of salient policy documents and the results from the IBS and the FGs the strong suggestion emerges that currently an ESD-related educational policy is in place in Kosovo. However, it remains restricted to a 'pilot level framework', which is largely unimplemented in educational practice throughout the 36 schools across the country which were represented in this study, with the exception of the few private schools included in this study. Moreover, the opinions of young people (secondary school students), reveal a number of indicators that, while serving serve as a benchmark for further research, underscore the following themes.

There appears to be little knowledge about SD, ESD, SDGs. Similarly, there is little or no experience of ESD in the actual classroom. I did not expect this finding at all. My study is based on the assumption that the respondents were likely to display a positive attitude or in-depth knowledge of ESD and its principle, because they had been and are exposed to non-formal environmental education and socially relevant projects implemented by civil society, such as PIKS NGO and other local and international organizations. But this assumption turned out to be incorrect. Therefore, this and related findings provide important insights for improving of the work of PIKS NGO, whose work is shaped around SD, in promoting the SDGs, and in running projects related to ESD. Further research in this area may include a larger basis of student participants in the focus groups and to assess in greater detail their involvement in informal education and social good projects as to validate the claim above.

Another major study finding is the students' harsh critique on teacher background, behavior and performance. And I am not alone in my view that coursework based on outdated teaching methods represent difficult terrain for the practice of modern ESD competences to take root. Outdated teaching methods that do not include or achieve any of the ESD competencies (De Haan and Harenberg, 1999; De

Haan, 2006, p.22, De Kraker, Lansu and Dam-Mieras, 2017, p.106) or the ESD five pillars (UNESCOBKK, 2017).

The responses make it clear that students want to see younger teachers with stronger professional and pedagogical backgrounds, who could also more naturally integrate IT and the internet in the teaching/learning process. There is overarching evidence that the focus is still on teacher (frontal) lectures, reading in class from the book, lack of practicality, lack of group work, lack of study visits, lack of project work, lack of debate, and lack of critical thinking. The identified problems with teacher backgrounds and methods have been extensively researched now for two decades, especially the small number of trainers and their inadequate qualifications to train, mentor and monitor teachers during the implementation of the curriculum in the classroom is prevalent (KESP 2016, p.25). Therefore, without opportunities for teachers to acquire skills to apply group work, problem-solving and project activities inside and outside of school, they will most likely continue with the lecture method and students will continue to memorize the material (Pupovci, 2002).

Moreover, there is significant disapproval of teacher backgrounds and teacher intentions due to 'authoritarian', 'frontal', and 'directive' teaching methods in place (Pupovci, 2002). The findings paint a grim situation in school where there is a lack of conditions and resources, but also a lack of imagination and generally things being stuck in the past despite the many reform initiatives in the (recent) past. All students agreed that the lessons are based on teacher lectures, and periodic or sporadic questions posed to a few students. Further, lack of group work and the lack of opportunity for students to speak out and open up for debate, especially when presented a new topic, is reported.

Students' observations and views also illustrate that the coursework literature is outdated. Some of them perplexedly report, for instance, about the informatics course in which they learn about applications such as Microsoft Access 2004 which is more likely than not no longer used anywhere in the world. This is the norm for many courses. Students stressed the fact that their coursework literature does not contain any relevant facts about their country and its development. This suggests that the education of youngsters lacks coherence and that major reform and systemic change is needed. The most important findings from the IBS and the Focus Groups validate the expectations that were set from the start of the research, namely that the system is generally marked by a lack of trust and reliability among the students.

In this sense, the voices of the students do not differ that much from the opinions of the experts who are advocating for reform and qualitative changes. Sahlberg & Boce (2010) and UNESCO (2009) affirm that upgrading teachers' professional knowledge and skills, renewing textbooks and providing schools with new technologies are necessary conditions for substantial educational reforms in countries of the Balkan. Special assistance to teachers on student-centered approaches and the use of the outer classroom is urgently needed. At present, Kosovo is far from fulfilling basic services to all its citizens, yet the set goals related to ESD are seen as a path to a durable future (Kabashi-Hima, 2011, p.10-18). Unless education policies give high priority to supporting teachers in fulfilling ESD, the country's ambitious educational goals will not be reached.

The research suggests that pressing and important topics in ESD such as climate change, biodiversity, renewable energy are to a certain degree covered in the biology course, students report hearing or learning about them. However, students' responses indicate that the lessons on these topics are meager, often complex problems are covered only on the surface level and are described without up-today information as to what challenges they represent, and most importantly issues are not presented holistically to see where they stand in context to other problems and systems. Male student age 18 from Prishtina in grade 12 said: "When we learn about something like coal, we learn it as a chemical element, but we do not learn about its specific application in our country or how harmful it is to the environment."

Moreover, students report that they do not learn anything about intergenerational responsibility, and the development perspective of the country and what role they play in that. Rarely they might discuss informally with a teacher, and in those cases, it is quite frequent that teachers show their pessimism and encourage students to seek opportunities to go study and live abroad.

Information Technology (IT) and the Internet are reported to be used sporadically without any strategy or systematic use. Students report on the lack of school conditions and infrastructure to facilitate the use of modern equipment and methods. They forcefully demand a more systematic use of information technology and the internet to further their education, including innovative systems such as smart boards, and online platforms such as Google Classroom, Coursera, MIT OCW, Khan Academy, etc. In addition, students underscore the necessity for schools to have by now their own web portals and subsequently, student portals where students can get all the most important information on their coursework and can find have access to the literature, grading, group discussions, etc.

To sum up, the results indicate that Kosovar secondary school students have little knowledge of ESD and related issues. This finding strongly suggests that ESD-related policy reform so far has had little effect on the educational conditions practice in Kosovo. At the same time, a significant number of students, while not knowing much about ESD, have strong opinions about the deficiencies of the current educational system, which does not seem to be compatible with or can sustain a ESD-inspired 'platform'. There is compelling reason to believe that ESD is implemented to a significant degree in private institutions as opposed to public education. More thorough research is needed to validate this finding and determine the disparity between private and public education. Similarly, more research is needed to assess the gap between the pilot schools which have already implemented the KCF, believed to be only at 10% of all schools in Kosovo (NDSKS, 2016, p.12), and to also explore the different school conditions marking the public education sector and determine then what kind of investment is needed especially in terms of material conditions and teacher performance and practices as based on ESD and in terms of unfolding and implementing relevant system-wide and integrated technology platforms.

In the first chapters of this study, it was pointed out that the goal for Kosovo's development is based on economic growth and the youthful society. With that in mind, humanity must harmonize economy with natural systems which require creativity, knowledge and the participation of every member of society (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe [UNECE], 2017, p.2). Currently, the education system in Kosovo, at least at the upper secondary level, seems to fail in educating students equally and adequately. While curricula should aim at a significant shift in students thinking, knowledge, only concentrating on knowledge will not fulfil the requirements needed for ESD. Knowledge must be complemented by understanding and creativity and by practical skills in order to impart ESD competence, and be completed by appropriate values.

The Balkan countries in general, and Kosovo in particular, are facing severe and urgent environmental problems. They have, therefore, a strong need for SD. In response, ESD should be integrated into all levels of the educational system (Spahiu, Korca, and Lindemann-Matthies, 2014, p.2768). It has been pointed out that ESD should relate to the specific characteristics and circumstances of a region, and should be tailored to the needs of local people (Spahiu, Korca, and Lindemann-Matthies, 2014, p.2768). Further work is needed to unravel the specific classroom conditions and other more general local characteristics which are at play in these and other schools in and around Kosovo.

5.3. Compendium of Recommendations

I. *Perform a thorough evaluation of all educational reform implemented since year 2000, with specific aspect on educational reform based on sustainable development curricula;*

II. *Review existing pre-service and in-service training in an ESD framework and ESD-related competences for teachers, especially for those teaching in most critical levels between transitioning students from educational levels;*

III. *Introducing a specific chapter on ESD, and the most recent learning objectives for the SDGs in selected courses and integrating ESD/SD as a holistic lens in all subjects which are taught or learnt at all levels of education, including also in the Faculty of Education;*

IV. Full review of teaching content related to ICT curricula; *More strategic efforts from relevant stakeholders such as the PMs office, MEST, school principals and administrators to harmonize Kosovo IT Strategy with the Education Strategic Plan 2017-2021 and thus effectively integrate IT and internet platforms in the education system in Kosovo, especially from the earliest levels of schooling*

V. *Inter-agency and donor efforts to aid MEST in improving school conditions and fill the gap in equipment and introducing digital and integrated platforms such as intranet and various databases which are used by the Government of Kosovo; and local charity e-learning platform such as "Zgjoi", and international services such as "Google Classroom", "Coursera", "Khan Academy", "TechAcademy", etc.;*

VI. *Exploring the teaching methods of role models or unique teachers as discussed in this study. Further research in the form of a case study to detail their methods and then to establish a higher standard and new requirements for teaching practitioners;*

VII. *Teaching interns should be given more opportunity to learn from a breadth of teaching practices related to ESD. One aspect of this could be going on study visits and short-term residencies abroad to get a feel of 'foreign' concepts, ideas, and school settings, and then let teachers (students) develop their own takes on ESD-related pedagogy and to experiment/practice in the Kosovar schools, followed by thorough evaluation of such measures;*

VIII. *School online portals for continuing the learning process outside of the classroom. Bringing the education system and Kosovar youth closer to the digitalized world;*

IX. *More support to student associations, including provision of funds, and training on fundraising so as to enable student led initiatives;*

X. *More dedicated efforts and resources from relevant stakeholders in establishing alumni networks and career services in each school;*

XI. Strategic collaborations with public institutions, agencies, organizations and private companies to tie together education with practical work. Any of the following aspects could enrich the education process significantly;

a. *Study tours relevant for all subject taught at school*
b. *Guest speaker programs where field experts regularly provide gest lectures in schools*
c. *Developing in collaboration with education experts timely and relevant case studies based on specific Kosovar institutions, or companies*
d. *Establishing internship programs for summer break periods and time after graduation*
e. *Establishing a fund based on corporate social responsibility which would be dedicated to invest in new and improve old/existing school laboratories*

6. Conclusion

The results of this study show that official policy in Kosovo makes reference to ESD, yet educational practice remains far from living up to what is desirable and doable in terms of ESD. By and large, this study suggests there is a large gap between the rhetoric of ESD in the education system in Kosovo and the actual practice in schools. Further research is hence needed to provide a more in-depth and representative analysis of ESD in the Kosovo education practice. Noting that the majority of respondents of this survey are recent secondary school graduates and students graduating this school year, it is hoped that the findings of this study and the recommendations can be taken into consideration when addressing the current educational challenges, thus enabling a much more ESD-connected education system for the generations currently at school and for upcoming ones. On logical grounds, there is a compelling reason, supported by the results of this research, to record and listen to the voice of the students in reforming the education process. Their observations, views, assessments and perspectives reveal an educational reality (of material conditions and teacher performance and practices) which may remain unobserved or little reflected. Bringing in the voice of the youth seems to be essential in order to grasp the complexity and urgency of Kosovo's education challenges. Further research in this area needs to include a more representative number of young people so as to strengthen the many indications deriving from this study.

Ultimately, the perception of the people about strengths are important, and it may not be as much what young people think or wish needs to happen. Internal and external pressures dictate Kosovo changes, yet it is important to recognize the opinion of young people, they are marginalized and have been left out of the decision making about the future of the country. More importantly, youth will determine what Kosovo will be in 10-20 years and therefore they should be heard more strongly and more often.

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Annex 1: IBS Questionnaire

ESD IN Kosovo: Voices of Youth

You are invited to take part in this Study on Sustainable Development Education in Kosovo. The study is conducted by Lander Islami as part of his Master's Degree in Sustainable Development at Uppsala University in Sweden.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the state of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in Kosovo, from the perspective of students. The education system in Kosovo has been subject to many reforms, and the Principles of ESD are included in ministerial policies and curriculum. Over the last few years, many research studies and reports have evaluated the ESD practice in Kosovo. However, an assessment of the voices of youth regarding this topic seems to be lacking. Therefore, this project contributes to filling this gap in the research field.

ESD is an education that is based on the ideals and principles that underpin sustainable, environmental, economic and social development. ESD has to do with all levels and types of learning to provide quality education and promote sustainable human development - in particular, learning to create continuous learning and learning, learning to live, learning to Living together, learning to act, and learning to transform oneself and society.

Participation in this Study?

You should participate in this study only if you are a high school student or you have completed this education level in the last two years.

Outcome of the Study?

Any data you provide will be treated with complete confidentiality and anonymity. All efforts will be made to avoid your identification in the published study. Your answers will be compared with the answers of other students participating in this study, so for example your thoughts will be referred to as: '20 students believe that X 'or' only 10 students disagree with X but Y '.

Timing

Filling up this survey will take you approximately ten to fifteen minutes.

Approval and Further Information

This study was approved by the academic supervisor as well as the Department at Uppsala University where Lander Islami is a student and will later defend this thesis study.

Thank you for your contribution to this study.
Lander Islami
Uppsala University, Sweden
Contacts: islamilander@gmail.com

Questions:

1)Where do you live?
2) What is your gender?
3) What is the name of your school?
4) What is your age?
5) In which grade are you?
a) x
b) xi

c) xii
d) recently graduated (within past two years)

6) Please describe in your words what you think when hearing about the concept of 'Sustainable Development'? (Please provide a short answer with a maximum of 50 words)

7) Do you think skills related to your understanding of Sustainable Development are taught in school? If yes, why? If not, why? (Please provide a short answer)

8) When learning a new topic, there are different teaching methods. In your opinion how often are these methods practiced: teacher lectures?

Rarely if not Never
1
2
3
4
5
Often if not dominating method

9) Would you like more or less exposure to this method?

_____More
_____Less
_____I have no preference

10) When learning a new topic, there are different teaching methods. In your opinion, how often are these methods practiced: Group work, discussions with your class peers

Rarely if not Never
1
2
3
4
5
Often if not dominating method

11) Would you like more or less exposure to this method?

_____More
_____Less
_____I have no preference

12) When learning a new topic, there are different teaching methods. In your opinion, how often are these methods practiced: Homework / Take home Projects

Rarely if not Never
1
2
3
4

5
Often if not dominating method

13) Would you like more or less exposure to this method?

_____More
_____Less
_____I have no preference

14) When learning a new topic, there are different teaching methods. In your opinion, how often are these methods practiced: Study visits, outdoor activities, field work

Rarely if not Never
1
2
3
4
5
Often if not dominating method

15) Would you like more or less exposure to this method?

_____More
_____Less
_____I have no preference

16) Is there any method we did not mention here and that is quite common, and how do you like it or not?

17) Does any of your subjects teach you about Kosovo's (ongoing and / or future) development and how you could contribute to this development?

_____Yes
_____No
_____I don't know

18) Does any of your courses' deal with the planet's future regarding the environment, society, and the economy?

_____Yes
_____No
_____I don't know

19) In your subjects do you learn about the responsibility of the current generation or generation for future generations?

_____Yes
_____No
_____I don't know

20) If your answer to question 12 is yes, can you please explain in what ways do you learn about the responsibility of the current generation for the next generation? (Short answer, maximum 50 words)

21) In your subjects, did you learn or hear about the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?

_____Yes
_____No
_____I don't know

22) If your answer to question 14 is yes, please list those SDGs you have learned in school?

23) In your subjects, did you learn or hear about the topic of climate change?

_____Yes
_____No
_____I don't know

24) In your subjects did you learn or hear about Biodiversity?

_____Yes
_____No
_____I don't know

25) In your subjects, did you learn or hear about the topic of Renewable Energy Resources (for example: hydropower, solar energy generated by solar PV panels, wind energy generated by wind turbines, etc.)?

_____Yes
_____No
_____I don't know

26) If you have the opportunity to influence teaching practices in your class / subject, what would be the things you would like to change?

27) Do teachers ask / encourage the use of the Internet and information technology as a supplement the classroom or other forms of traditional learning?

_____Yes
_____No
_____I don't know

29) If your answer to the previous question is yes, please give an example of how it is used? (Short answer, maximum 50 words)

30)Regardless of your answer to questions 20 and 21, please suggest any idea how the Internet and information technology can be used in your education?

Annex2: FG Protocol and Questionnaire

ESD IN Kosovo: Voices of Youth

Welcome Note

My name is Landër Islami, I am pursuing a Master's degree in Sustainable Development at Uppsala University in Sweden, and I will be facilitating this focus group for the purposes of my thesis. All of you have received handouts. I would appreciate it if you could read through this handout and then sign it, if you agree to participate in this study. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

Discussion Entry Point

I am conducting a study about improving the practice of ESD in Kosovo. With this meeting, I hope to learn how you see the situation and how it can be improved.

The aim of this project is to explore the state of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in Kosovo, from a student's perspective. The education system in Kosovo has for a number of years undergone reform. The principles of Education for Sustainable Development have been incorporated in ministerial policy and in the curriculum. Throughout the past years, numerous research papers and reports have assessed the practice of ESD in Kosovo. Yet, an assessment of the voice of youth regarding this topic seems to be lacking.

This project contributes towards filling that gap in the research. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is education that is based on the ideals and principles that underlie sustainability. ESD is concerned with all levels and types of learning to provide quality education and foster sustainable human development – learning to know, learning to be, learning to live together, learning to do and learning to transform oneself and society.

I would like to talk with you about your experiences, thoughts, and opinions as students at the high-school level in Kosovo. For your information, I will be recording this conversation for the purpose of having a thorough account of this event. I do not wish to lose any of your thoughts and ideas. Therefore, I would be grateful if you could speak up and deliver your comments clearly. What is being said and recorded here is purely anonymous and you will not be identified in the recordings or finished thesis.

As a facilitator, I will moderate this discussion. Everyone will be given the chance to have a say, and I would like to invite everyone to listen to each other and be respectful of each other's views. Please feel free to respond to each other and to speak directly to others in the group. I am interested to know your candid views and your personal experiences.

So, please feel free to speak your mind and be as honest as possible. Throughout the discussion I may ask clarifying questions and ask probing questions. Of course, I will also keep an eye on the clock so that we do not exceed the time available.

If it is OK with you, I will turn on the recorder and start now.

----------Start of recording ----------

a. **Ice-Breaker**
b. **Can you tell us your first name, your age, and class year?**
c. **Context of the Study**

For a number of years, the Kosovo Education System, has undergone reform, using different international standards. The curriculum is now based also on Education for Sustainable Development. Throughout the past years, numerous research papers and reports have assessed the practice of ESD but from different perspectives. But the voice of youth on this topic has rarely been heard. My work is trying to fill that gap.

Therefore, today I want to understand what you think about ESD, how it is working or not working in the classroom, and how its practice could be improved.

d. Questions

1. How do you see Education for Sustainable Development yourself? Why do you think that way? Please explain? Can you say it in other words?
2. Do you think it is important for Kosovo? Why yes? Why not? Please explain?
3. Does it happen in the classroom? Why yes? Why not? How does it happen?
4. Do you think this education is transforming your way of thinking or your way of acting? Why? Please explain? What do you mean?
5. Do you think teachers are practicing ESD? Why yes? Why not? Explain? Describe? Give Details?

f. Extra questions, if time permits

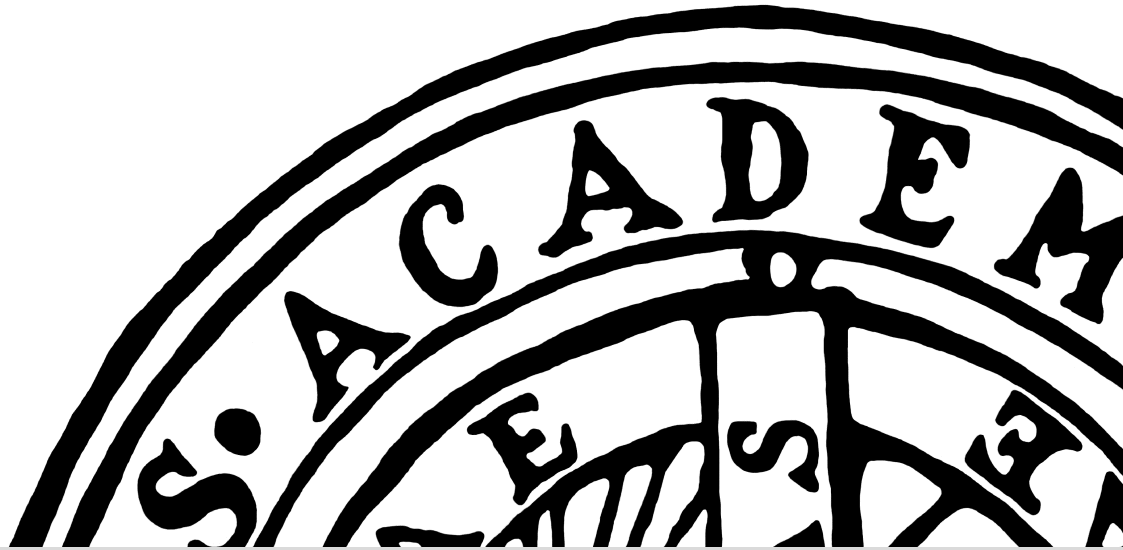
6. How do you see the role of the Internet and information technology in your education? Is it being used? Are you satisfied with how it is being used? Why yes? Why not? Please explain?
7. Does your education teach you about the on-going and/or future development of Kosovo and how you could contribute to it? Why yes? Why Not? Please explain? What do you mean?
8. Does your education teach you about the responsibility of the current generation for future generations? Why yes? Why not? Please explain? What do you mean?

Closing Remarks and Final Q&A

----------End of recording ----------

Annex 3: List of Acronyms

2030 Agenda – 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
DESD – Decade for Sustainable Development
ESD - Education for Sustainable Development
EU - European Union
EUICC - European Union Information and Cultural Centre
FG - Focus Groups (FG)
GDP - Gross Domestic Product
IBS - Internet Based Survey
ICT - Information Computer Technology
KCF - Kosovo Curriculum Framework
KESP – Kosovo Education Strategic Plan
MDGs – Millennium Development Goals
MEST - Ministry of Education Science and Technology
MCYS – Ministry of Culture Youth and Sports
PIKS - Prosperity Initiative in Kosovo NGO
PM - Prime Minister
SD - Sustainable Development
SDGs - Sustainable Development Goals
UNDESD - Decade of Education for Sustainable Development
UNECE - United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNESCOBKK - UNESCO Office in Bangkok
UNICEF -United Nations Children Fund
UNGA – United Nations General Assembly
UNLD - United Nations Literacy Decade
UNMIK - United Nations Mission in Kosovo
UNNSC – United Nations News Service Centre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