KOSOVO
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CURRICULAR OVERLOAD IN PRIMARY AND LOWER SECONDARY EDUCATION IN KOSOVO

(Reality or perception?)

Prishtina, 2022

KOSOVO PEDAGOGICAL INSTITUTE

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Gratitude

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The study could not have been carried out without the cooperation, commitment and support of the IPK Scientific Council, who guided the study project, the scope of this study and approved it to follow the professional and scientific journey towards a special study with a special study topic.

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List of abbreviations

EE	Elementary Education
LSE	Lower Secondary Education
PD	Professional Assets/Departments
ASA	Academy of Sciences of Albania
WB	World Bank
EU	European union
DES	Department of Education and Science
MDE	Municipal Directorate of Education
CSN	Children with Special Needs
ITI	Educational and Training Institution
KPI	Kosovo Pedagogical Institute
IED	Institute for Education Development
CC/1	Core Curriculum for Preparatory Grade and Primary Education
CC/2	Core Curriculum for Lower Secondary Education
SGC	School Governing Council
KCF	Kosovo Curriculum Framework of Pre-University Education
SC	Subject Curriculum
PC	Parents Council
QAC	Quality Assurance Coordinator
MESTI	Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PISA	Program for International Student Assessment
CLO	Competency learning outcomes
LOS/T	Learning outcomes per subject/topic

LRS	Learning outcomes per stage for curricular areas
EMIS	Education Management Information Systems
PLS	Primary and Lower Secondary School
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
ISE	Internal School Evaluation

Introduction

The study *Curricular overload in primary and lower secondary education in Kosovo - (reality or perception?*), is a thematic, carried out by the researchers of the Pedagogical Institute of Kosovo, during the period April-August 2022. This study is a proof of the Institute's efforts to support new developments in education, with the aim of informing and guiding educational policies and practices.

The OECD report (2020), *Curriculum overload - a way forward*, was the reference for this study. This report was used to establish the aspects that will be explored for curricular overload in the context of pre-university education in Kosovo, the approach to research methodology and its implementation, based on the research project reviewed and approved by the Scientific Council of the Pedagogical Institute of Kosovo.

The report of this study, organized with an approximate structure of special studies that are published by KPI, is built in six chapters. Beyond the organization of the content of the report in separate chapters, this publication is preceded by the abstract for this study, which describes the research approach and presents the main findings of the study, which confirm elements of curricular overload in primary and lower secondary education, as well as provides the orientations for establishing an educational policy that should essentially have a functional strategy for the treatment and prevention of curriculum overload.

First chapter - Introduction, describes the context of the study and the situation in relation to the implementation of the curriculum reform. Further, in this chapter, the need for this study is analysed, namely the need to support the education system in Kosovo through such a study. It continues with the presentation of the problem of the study, which is based on various professional and scientific studies in setting the object, the purpose of the study and the research questions. Part of this chapter are also the references to the main concepts, which we estimate contribute to the common understanding of the aspects that are treated in this study.

Second chapter - Literature review, deals with the problem of curricular overload by authors and studies related to curricular overload. In relation to the object of the study, this chapter provides a summary of the findings reflected in various studies related to curriculum overload - the influencing factors, the impact of curriculum overload on the well-being of students, on the work and well-being of teachers, as well as strategies for dealing with it and reducing curricular overload.

Third chapter - Research methodology, presents the main aspects of the research methodology applied in this study, describes the research design, the qualitative approach applied in this exploratory case study. Other aspects, which are referred to in this chapter, are related to the study population and sample, research methods and instruments, the procedure of data collection and analysis, the ethical aspect of the study and the limitations of the study due to the circumstances of the context.

Chapter four - Results of the study, is the most special chapter of this study. This chapter presents important results and arguments related to the study. The results of the study, the main findings, in this chapter are organized in three parts. The first part examines the findings from the analysis of the curricula, with particular reference to the findings from the analysis of the Curriculum Framework document, the core curricula and the subject curricula, for grades 1, 3, 5, 6, 8 and 9. The second part presents the findings from the analysis of some factors related to the curriculum and their comparison with some countries of the region and of the OECD, with the context of Kosovo, related to: (i) the time of compulsory learning in primary and lower secondary education, (ii) the distribution of teaching time for curricular areas/subjects, (iii) the duration of the school year and vacations within a school year, (iv) the teaching time and student achievements in international and national assessments, (v) the average students in the classroom and teacher-student ratio, as well as (vi) teachers' working time.

The third part of the fourth chapter reflects the results from the perspectives of students, teachers, parents, school leaders, experts and coordinators in curriculum development. The results in this part are reported separately according to the groups of respondents participating in this study. The main

findings and their narrative description, according to the thematic areas explored, are accompanied by excerpts from the data collected through interviews, questionnaires and focus groups.

Fifth chapter - Discussion of the results brings the discussion of the results in relation to the object of the study and the research questions that guide the study. The first part of the discussion of the results includes the main findings and discussions of the relationship between curriculum expansion, teaching content and learning outcomes with compulsory teaching time. Then, it continues with the main findings and discussions about what was the main dilemma in this study, raised in many other studies as the main question: *Curricular overload is a reality or perception?* In this part, the perceptions of the curricular overload reported by the respondents of this study, who represented the main layers of the school community and other actors who have seen or experienced the curricular overload and its impacts, are discussed.

In the sixth chapter, the *conclusions and recommendations* from this study are presented. They are based on the main findings of the study and recommendations for educational institutions, emphasizing the elements that can bring a functional strategy for the treatment and prevention of curriculum overload, as well as developmental directions for the effectiveness of teaching, as one of the main actions for to guarantee the well-being of all students and the elimination of inequalities in learning.

We hope that the report of this study, its results, will be taken as a point of reference in the new developments related to the continuation of the curricular reform in pre-university education. This study comes in special times and circumstances, which we consider appropriate and coherent with the extension of the implementation of the curriculum in all classes of pre-university education in Kosovo and with the expectation of the next report from the PISA study (2022). These developments are seen as new opportunities to make the necessary revisions in aspects considered curricular overload and for other actions and interventions that ensure quality in pre-university education.

The publication of this study report will serve the educational community, readers and policy makers and other researchers in this area. Therefore, every suggestion, criticism and other help in this topic of study, the PIK welcomes with pleasure, as a form of cooperation for the improvement and advancement of Kosovar education. We believe that with this approach we increase the level of scientific examination and discussion, with responsibility and professionalism of important educational issues.

Nezir Çoçaj, director of Kosovo Pedagogical Institute

Summary

Different educational systems, in response to society's demands to adapt the curriculum implemented in schools to the rapid social, technological and economic developments, choose different approaches to curriculum revision. These approaches can result in curricular overload, the impacts of which are reflected in the well-being of students, teachers, and teaching effectiveness.

In order to find action strategies and appropriate measures to minimize the impact of curricular overload, professional literature studies that have addressed this issue show the need for exploring curricular overload as a separate research topic, from different dimensions and perspectives, such as and from different research approaches, depending on the contexts of educational systems.

This qualitative case study examines curricular overload in the context of primary and lower secondary education in Kosovo. The study aims to explore whether curriculum content in relation to expectations and teaching time present any aspect of student and teacher overload, as well as outline guidelines for addressing curriculum overload, to ensure the well-being of students and teachers and to support effective teaching.

For this study, content analysis of curriculum documents in primary and lower secondary education was used, with a more specific depth in subject curricula. Semi-structured interviews, questionnaires and focus group discussions with teachers, students, parents, school leaders, quality coordinators, experts and curriculum development coordinators were used to examine the opinion on curriculum overload, its impact and factors. .

The findings show how important such a case study was for the context of pre-university education in Kosovo. The results of the study confirm elements of curricular overload in primary and lower secondary education, with differences between education levels and classes, which result from multiple overload factors. Some factors present are: curriculum expansion, content overload and high expectations for students in relation to available teaching time, perceived overload from curriculum documents, use of textbooks, homework and student assessment. Also, the results of the study confirm the impact of curricular overload on the well-being of students and teachers and on the effectiveness of teaching.

The importance of the study is practical and theoretical. The recommendations of the study help to establish an educational policy that essentially has a functional strategy for the treatment and prevention of curriculum overload. This approach

can be applied when revising the curriculum, but also when guiding its implementation and the learning processes that influence and have fuelled the perceived overload the most. The well-being of students and teachers should be the primary reference in these processes.

Key words: *curriculum overload, overload factors, curriculum expansion, learning time, perception, well-being of students and teachers.*

Abstract

Different educational systems, in response to society's demands to adapt the curriculum applied in schools to the rapid social, technological and economic developments, choose different approaches to curriculum revision. These approaches can result in curricular overload, the impacts of which are reflected in the well-being of students, teachers, and teaching effectiveness.

In order to find action strategies and appropriate measures to minimize the impact of curricular overload, professional literature studies that have dealt with this problem, show the need for exploring curricular overload as a special research topic, from different dimensions and perspectives, as well as from various research approaches, depending on the contexts of the educational systems.

This qualitative case study examines curriculum overload in the context of elementary and lower secondary education in Kosovo. The study aims to explore if the contents of the curricula in relation to the expectations and teaching time, present any aspect of overload for students and for teachers, as well as to outline orientations for addressing curriculum overload, to ensure the well-being of students, teachers and to support effective instruction.

For this study, the analysis of the content of the curriculum documents in primary and lower secondary education is used, with a special depth in the subject curricula. In addition, semi-structured interviews, questionnaires and focus group discussions were used to examine the opinion of curricular overload, of those who have seen and experienced curricular overload and its impacts (teachers, students, parents, school leaders, coordinators of quality, experts and coordinators for curriculum development)

Findings from this study show how important such a case study was, for the context of pre-university education in Kosovo. The results of the study confirm elements of curricular overload in primary and lower secondary education, with differences between education levels and classes, which come from multiple overload factors. Some factors present are: curriculum expansion, content overload and high expectations for students in relation to the available teaching time, perceived overload of curriculum documents, use of textbooks, homework and student assessment. Also, the results of the study confirm the impact of curricular overload on the well-being of students, teachers and on teaching effectiveness.

The significance of the study is practical and theoretical. The recommendations of the studies help to establish an educational policy that basically has a functional strategy for the treatment and prevention of curriculum overload. This approach can be applied when revising the curriculum, but also when guiding its implementation and the learning processes that influence and have further encouraged the perceived overload. The well-being of students and teachers should be the primary reference in these processes.

Keywords: *curriculum overload, factors of overload, curriculum expansion, lesson time, perception, student and teacher well-being.*

CHAPTER I
Introduction

The development and revision of curricula is a process related to changes in education and aims to respond to the demands and directions of developments in society, in education, in science, in technology, etc. The development and revision of curricula is accompanied by changes in approach, in expectations for students, teachers and the educational system, in changes in teaching contents, but also in preparations for implementation in harmony with the directions of curriculum development.

Regarding the changes in the curricula, the preparations for implementation and the leadership of the implementation of the curriculum, many debates and discussions take place among the educational community, but also in different layers of society. They are related to the context, the real possibilities of implementing the curriculum, its expectations, overload, well-being for students and teachers.

Curricular overload is a pedagogical problem that has increasingly prompted the educational systems of different countries to deal with it, from different perspectives, including dealing with the factors influencing overload and the effects of overload.

This study, on curricular overload, is part of the study plan of the Pedagogical Institute of Kosovo for the year 2022, the most comprehensive done on the aspects of overload in the pre-university education curriculum in implementation. By means of this case study, analytical and descriptive, it is intended to clarify the most important issues related to curricular overload, the influencing factors and their effect on learning, which follow the implementation of the curriculum, with special emphasis on primary education and lower secondary education.

1.1. Context of study

The Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI), in 2016, after the piloting phase, approved the conceptual document of the curriculum reform, the Pre-university Curriculum Framework in Kosovo (KCF), which is based on the development of competencies (MEST, /KCF/,

2016). This document regulates the entire system of pre-university education and serves as an umbrella for commitments to increase quality and equality in educational services for all (Boshtrakaj, 2018).

Also, MESTI, after the curriculum piloting phase, in 2016, also approved the operational curriculum documents, the Core Curricula for three levels of pre-university education: primary education, lower secondary education and upper secondary education - gymnasiums.

Completion of the 2016 package of curriculum documents continued with the development of subject curricula/learning programs for each pre-university education class, under the leadership of the Curriculum Division, and teacher support at MESTI, a process which continued until 2021.

So, in the pre-university education in Kosovo, from the 2016/2017 school year, a new phase of curriculum reform began, the phase of implementing subject curricula/new teaching programs, designed on the basis of the concept of the curriculum based on the achievement of competencies (Mehmeti et al, 2019). In the 2021/2022 school year, the fifth grade (5) was the last grade of the extension of the curriculum implementation in all grades of pre-university education.

Now, the curricular documents in implementation, KCF, CC for levels of education, as well as the Subject Curricula (SC) for each grade, are a point of reference for the implementation of the curricula by all educational institutions (schools) and other bearers who have a role in the implementation of the national curriculum.

1.2. Need for this study

The school year 2021/2022, for the curricular reform of pre-university education in the Republic of Kosovo, is considered the year of completion of a phase of the curricular reform, since in this school year, in all classes of pre-university education, new subject curricula are being worked on, conceived in the spirit of curricular documents (KCF and CC) based on competences.

The extent of the implementation of the curriculum based on competences at the country level, in all classes, has reached a significant level of institutionalization, through the development of subject curricula for each class, the training of teachers for the implementation of the curriculum, the organization of the learning process based on the plan curriculum for each class, the implementation of the new student evaluation system, as well as the documentation of the schools' work in the implementation of the curriculum (Mehmeti et al., 2019).

The implementation of the curriculum is a continuous process, for which evidence, additional feedback information is always needed to make the necessary improvements for the successful implementation of the curriculum requirements, especially when a cycle or phase of the implementation of the curriculum reform is completed.

From the beginning of the implementation of the competence-based curriculum, specifically from the extension of the implementation of the curriculum in all schools of Kosovo, numerous dilemmas have been raised by the schools (principals, teachers, parents and students) about the possibility of its implementation, the requirements of higher education, the preparation of the system to implement all the elements of the curriculum, etc. According to Buleshkaj & Koren (2022), major curricular reforms, which aim to change the conceptual level of schooling, such as the Kosovo curriculum, the school community needs more time and support to absorb information and make their own interpretations how to best lead and implement the new curriculum.

Ambiguities, challenges and dilemmas for specific aspects of the content, approach and implementation of the curriculum reform in Kosovo, have been evidenced and reported in studies published in the last 6-7 years, such as Manninen (2014), Mehmeti & Buleshkaj (2017), Potera & Shala (2018), Boshtrakaj, et al. (2018), Mehmeti et al. (2019), Buleshkaj & Koren (2022), etc.). However, none of these studies addressed the issue of curricular overload and its effects on learning, on the work of students and teachers.

This raises the need for studies of different aspects related to curricular overload. This study also refers to this, the results of which are expected to

serve all institutions related to the curriculum implementation process, especially MEST, municipalities/MDE and educational institutions/schools to determine appropriate strategies and actions for handling and mitigating curricular overload.

1.3. Presentation of the study problem

The understanding of curricular overload has become an important area of research on a global scale, due to frequent changes in curricular reform, due to the tendency to expand the curriculum, increasing demands for changing the work approach from schools and teachers, but also due to the ever-increasing demands of students/young people for freedom from excessive information.

Different studies, both professional and scientific, by different authors and institutions, such as Bekteshi (2009), the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) (2010), Majoni, (2017), OECD (2020), etc., talk about curricular overload manifested by the addition of educational content in response to society's demands, increase of teaching content in relation to the annual teaching time available - the teaching plan, curriculum imbalance, challenges in the acceptability of the curriculum by teachers and school directors, stress of students and teachers from curriculum overload and time overload for learning, but also for the need to define possible strategies for dealing with and mitigating curricular overload.

In Kosovo, despite the fact that it has been five years since the extension of the implementation of the curricular reform at the country level, no comprehensive study or evaluation of the curricular overload has yet been done. As if there is no summary evidence for the preventive measures undertaken by the educational system, for the prevention or minimization of curricular overload.

Years ago, in 2009, the study of prof. Bektesh Bektesh on the Overloading of students with learning at school, but the empirical research for this study was carried out in the school year 1981/1982 (Bekteshi, 2009).

The studies of recent years, related to the curriculum reform in Kosovo, mainly have a concentration of thematic treatment, some of them have a description of the implementation and some try to measure the degree of implementation, challenges and difficulties in implementation (Manninen, 2014; Boshtrakaj, 2018; Mehmeti et al., 2019; Buleshkaj & Koren, 2022) saw a special focus on aspects considered curricular overload. On this basis, the KPI, within the professional and scientific studies plan for 2022, designed this special study, the issue of curricular overload, through which it aims to square the most important issues related to the curricular load in primary education and lower secondary and provide comprehensive and analytical information on this topic, which will be at the service of the educational community.

1.4. Object and purpose of study

Object of the study. In this research, the object of the study is curricular overload in compulsory education in Kosovo, the aspects considered curricular overload and its effects on learning, on student achievements/results, on the well-being of students and teachers.

Since curricular overload is a complicated and quite complex problem (Bekteshi, 2009; NCCA, 2010; OECD, 2020;), which to be researched in a complete and comprehensive way requires a long time, we determined that this problem to research and study it in compulsory education in Kosovo, primary and lower secondary education, with a special focus on grades 1, 3 and 5 of primary education and on grades 6, 8 and 9 of lower secondary education.

We addressed the issue of curriculum overload from many aspects, from the analysis of curriculum documents (KCF and CC), with a deeper treatment of subject curricula, in relation to teaching time for curriculum areas/subjects, teaching contents, learning outcomes , approaches to cross-curricular issues, etc.

In line with the object of the study, we analysed the latest reports of the OECD, some of the indicators that allow to extract the elements of curricular

overload, beyond the teaching content and learning results, such as: compulsory learning time in primary education and lower secondary, or the lesson plan in primary and lower secondary education, the distribution of teaching time for curricular areas/subjects; the duration of the school year and vacations within a school year, the averages of students in the class and the teacher-student ratio, as well as the working time of teachers.

In order to better address the problem of this study, we took into consideration the opinions of the subjects of the educational community related to the development and implementation of the curriculum, specifically the opinions of students, teachers and parents, who are directly confronted with the curricular overload. Addressing the thoughts of the educational community was more than necessary to get answers to what is often debated as to whether curricular overload is perception or reality.

The discussion of the results, the main findings of the study, is related to the purpose and research questions of the study, as well as to the review of the literature on the problem of curricular overload.

Purpose of the study. Numerous studies have addressed curricular overload in different dimensions, putting more emphasis on overload factors, curriculum expansion, overload with teaching content in relation to the available teaching time, overload reported according to the perceptions of students and teachers, such as and the impact of curricular overload on student achievement and well-being, as well as on teacher efficiency and well-being (Bekteshi, 2009; Alexander & Flutter, 2009; NCCA, 2010; Majoni, 2017) OECD, 2020; etc.).

In this view, the main purpose of this study was to explore and address the problem of curricular overload in compulsory education in Kosovo, to investigate if the contents of the curricula in relation to expectations and teaching time - the lesson plan present any aspect of overload for students and for teachers, and determine an approximate size of the aspects of curriculum overload in relation to the official requirements related to the implementation of the curriculum.

Also, the purpose of the study was to reflect aspects of curriculum overload, reported from the views of representatives from the school community

(students, parents, teachers and school leaders) and those related to the development of the curriculum (designer and coordinator for the development of curricula), in an attempt to answer the much-discussed question in the educational community: *Is curricular overload "real" or "perceived"?*

Also, this study aims to contribute with orientations and recommendations for a new educational policy regarding the definition of strategies for dealing with and mitigating curricular overload and support for students and teachers in order to increase student performance and improve well-being theirs and the teachers'.

1.5. Research questions

To fulfil the purpose of this study, the following research questions and sub-questions have been defined:

1. How visible are the aspects of curricular overload in the set of curricular documents in implementation, in primary education and lower secondary education in Kosovo?

   1.1. Is there overload from the expansion of curricula, the addition of learning content, expectations for students and what is the ratio of overload to the mandatory teaching time?

   1.2. Is there curricular overload caused by the way of including cross-curricular issues within the curricula?

   1.3. What is the relationship between student outcomes in compulsory education and learning time?

2. How is the curricular overload perceived by the subjects of the school community, the subjects related to the development and implementation of the curriculum?

   2.1. What factors are driving the perception of curricular overload??

   2.2. How is the impact of curricular overload perceived on the results and well-being of students and teachers?

2.3.How do they envision possible solutions, strategies for dealing with and mitigating curricular overload?

1.6. Importance of the study

In Kosovo, over the years there have been studies and analyzes of the implementation process of the 2001 curriculum and the 2016 curriculum, carried out by various institutions and researchers in Kosovo (Peffers et al., 2005; Manninen, 2014; Boshtrakaj et al.; 2018; Mehmeti et al., 2019; Buleshkaj & Koren, 2022), which reflect different results and evidence for the leadership of the curriculum reform process, the implementation of the curriculum, the challenges in implementation, the needs for teacher support and in general of educational institutions etc. These studies indirectly touch on elements of curricular overload, but do not address them specifically.

Therefore, the importance of this study is special, it is practical and theoretical. The study, in the first place, will help the deeper understanding of the recognition of the problem of curricular overload, the factors influencing overload and the effect of overload on the achievements and well-being of students and on the efficiency and well-being of teachers.

Another important contribution of the study is the provision of orientations and recommendations for educational institutions regarding the definition of strategies for dealing with and mitigating curricular overload and support for students and teachers in function of their well-being and effectiveness in learning.

1.7. Key concepts

The study of curricular overload is complex and multidimensional, therefore the main concepts related to this research are addressed from the scientific viewpoints of the area of pedagogy, didactics and psychology. While the related concepts in this research are mainly referred from the definitions in the curricular documents in Kosovo, to contextualize with the professional language used in official documents for pre-university education in Kosovo.

Definition of the main research concepts

The main concepts are related to the concept of overload and curriculum, as an umbrella of the study, then to specific concepts, such as: curricular overload, curricular content, teaching time, well-being of students and teachers.

Overload – curricular overload. According to the pedagogical dictionary of prof. To Shefik Osman (1983), overload means putting a burden on the student, putting many tasks to learn, which he cannot carry, cope with. It is presented as excessive engagement with values that do not coincide with the age and intellectual abilities of the student, it is reflected negatively in the student's attitude towards learning and school (Osmani, 1983).

In the Dictionary of today's Albanian language, overload is defined as a load that exceeds the permitted amount or that is added to a normal load. Overload is also described from the aspect of adding things that are excessive or unnecessary, or difficult to acquire or cope with in a writing or a work. In relation to the overload of teaching programs and textbooks, it refers to the load of work or tasks that are heavier than what the student or teacher can usually handle - student overload, program overload (ASA, 1980).

Overload is a mismatch between capacity and load. Curriculum overload is also known as curriculum overcrowding or curriculum expansion (NCCA, 2010). Curriculum expansion refers to the tendency to include new learning subjects, requirements, and new learning content in the curriculum in response to new societal demands, without removing prior learning content or increasing instructional time. Thus, curricula become overcrowded over time (Alexandre & Flutter, 2009).

Content overload. In the pedagogical literature, the amount of learning content that the teacher develops from a curriculum area/subject is presented as a factor for student overload. It refers to the excessive amount of content to be taught within a given lesson time within a curriculum area/subject, or for a subject. In order to avoid content overload, various educational systems have taken into consideration that during the redesign of the curriculum, they should take extra care in establishing the general structure of the curriculum,

the number of subjects, the number of teaching topics, the quantity and quality of teaching time, but also the size and language of curriculum documents (OECD, 2020).

Teaching time - is a comprehensive concept, related to the curriculum, the teaching plan, which refers to the time for teaching and learning a particular subject or learning area during a level of education, a curricular level, a year and a week of learning. It includes compulsory and non-compulsory teaching time, time for carrying out curricular and extracurricular activities. Compulsory teaching time refers to the amount and distribution of compulsory teaching hours, according to the curriculum, which covers each grade and curriculum area/subject that must be provided by each public school and must be attended or attended in the settings formal class attendance, by almost all public school students (OECD, 2020), according to the year calendar for public schools in primary and lower secondary education, which is determined by the education systems of the respective countries.

Student well-being - is a complex, holistic term that includes aspects of psychological, social, cognitive and physical well-being dimensions. Student well-being is the result of the interactions between these four dimensions, which are distinct but also closely related to each other. Each dimension can be considered both as an outcome and as an enabling condition in relation to other dimensions and, together, indicate the overall quality of student well-being (OECD, 2017). In this regard, the school's commitment to providing an enabling learning environment for all students is a fundamental prerequisite for effective and sustainable student learning (KPI, 2016), along with the curriculum as the basis of orientations for the development of the learning process - educational and the consolidation of students' skills and competencies, and with the organizational and facilitating aspect of teaching and learning. Our study, among other things, also reflects the impact of curricular overload on students' well-being, reported by students themselves and other representatives of the educational community.

Teacher's well-being. According to Acton and Glasgow (2015), teacher well-being is defined as "an individual sense of personal professional fulfilment, satisfaction, purpose and happiness, built in a collaborative process with colleagues and students" (cited by Mc Callum et al, 2017). Teacher well-being refers more to teachers' ability to develop a positive but dynamic balance between teachers' resources and their environmental, social, individual, physical, mental, psychological challenges/demands (Benevene et al, 2020). Our study also reflects the impact of curricular overload on teachers' self-reported well-being.

Definition of concepts related to the area of study. Since the study covers compulsory education and issues of curricular overload at this level of education, the following section reflects some of the concepts of curricular documents that are related to the coverage of the aspects addressed in this study.

Curriculum framework - is the basic document that describes the main orientations and guidelines for the design and implementation of the pre-university education curriculum (education goals, key competencies, learning outcomes according to levels, etc. The curriculum framework of pre-university education in Kosovo is based on KCF, together with the Core Curricula for education levels, have gone through a pilot phase in the period 2013-2015 and were revised and approved in 2016 (MESTI, 2016).

Core Curriculum - is the basic document for a formal level of education, it has common requirements for all students in terms of key competencies broken down by curricular level, curricular areas/common subjects and general orientations. Currently, pre-university education in Kosovo has three core curriculum documents: Core Curriculum for primary education; Core curriculum for lower secondary education; and the Core Curriculum for upper secondary education - gymnasiums. Core curricula for one level of education are divided or organized into two curricular levels (MESTI, 2016).

Main levels of the curriculum - are formal sub-levels of education, which are related to the stages of children's development and the organization of the teaching, learning and assessment process. The curriculum of pre-university education in Kosovo is divided into 6 main curricular levels. In

primary education, the first level of the curriculum includes the preparatory class, grades 1 and 2, while the second level includes grades 3, 4 and 5. In lower secondary education, curriculum levels 3 and 4 are integrated, in level 3 are including grades 6 and 7, while grade 4 includes grades 8 and 9. Primary and lower secondary education, namely grades 1-9, is part of compulsory education.

Key competencies – holistic concepts that include knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. The six competencies envisaged by the Curricular Framework of pre-university education in Kosovo [1] derive from the general goals of pre-university education and determine the main learning outcomes, which students must achieve progressively and sustainably during the pre-university education system (MEST, 2016). Competencies in the curriculum are reflected as one of the organizational principles of the curriculum. The organizational principle for a curriculum defines the main directions that must be taken into account both in the area of program design and in the development of teaching activities in the classroom (Karameta, 2014).

Learning outcomes - in curriculum documents are defined as "Statements that describe what a student should know, believe, value and be able to do at the end of a grade or level". They express a range of domains, including: knowledge, skills, attitudes and values (MEST, 2016). In the context of the pre-university education curriculum in Kosovo, there are several types of learning outcomes:

- Key learning outcomes for competencies (must be achieved at the end of pre-university education – at the end of 12th grade);

[1] **Core competences of Kosovo's education are based on and linked to the eight main European Competencies for Lifelong Learning (the European Reference Framework).** The competences of Kosovo's education are:

- Competency in communication and expression
- Competency in thinking
- Competency in learning
- Competency in life, work and environment
- Personal competency
- Civic competency

- Learning outcomes for the main competences of the level (LLO) - must be achieved through all teaching subjects, until the end of each curricular level, a total of 6 curricular levels);
- The learning outcomes of the curricular area per curricular level (FLO) - must be achieved through all teaching subjects of the relevant area, until the end of each curricular level, (total 7 curricular areas);
- Subject learning outcomes of the topic (STLO) - must be achieved through teaching contents and various teaching activities, during a school year;
- The learning outcomes of the learning subject - are determined by the teachers of the relevant learning subjects (can be for 1-2 teaching hours.

Subject Curriculum/teaching program - is a document that describes the learning outcomes and content, the relevant teaching and assessment methodology, for a particular subject. For each grade of pre-university education in Kosovo, the subject curricula of each area/subject have been drawn up, they are integrated into a common document of the subject curriculum for each class, such as Subject Curricula/Teaching Programs - first grade, subject curricula/teaching programs - second grade, and so on.

Learning content - in curriculum documents are defined as the totality of knowledge, information, facts, situations, activities, etc., grouped in a subject or area of learning, which serves as a basis for the formation and development of new knowledge and competencies.

Elective curriculum - represents the subjects and curricular activities established at the school level, which students can choose according to their interests, talents and needs. The teaching time of the elective curriculum, in the context of education in Kosovo, differs from grade to grade and comprises about 4% of the teaching time in primary and lower secondary education..

Cross-curricular issues - important curricular content that does not belong entirely to just one subject or area of the curriculum, but is taught in several subjects. Common examples of cross-curricular issues in

Kosovo's pre-university education curricula are: peace education, human rights and civic education, gender issues, communication skills, education for sustainable development, intercultural education, etc.

CHAPTER II

Literature review

The issue of overload in teaching, as a concept and as a problem, has been and remains the focus of pedagogical theory and practice. In the current developments in education, the issue of teaching overload is addressed in multiple dimensions, it has become one of the main topics that must be addressed before any curricular reform.

Handling and addressing in a timely and appropriate manner the problem of curricular overload and influencing factors is an orientation of special importance in the efforts of educational systems and curriculum developers, to develop and implement a curricular system that focuses on first the well-being of the students, but also of the teachers.

In the pedagogical and didactic literature, in studies in the area of education, curricular overload has been treated from the aspect of quantitative overload, with the number of teaching subjects, the fund of teaching hours per class, but also from the aspect of overloading of teaching content and its impact on the work of students and teachers.

For this study, the review of the literature, but also the focus of the research, is oriented to the treatment of curricular overload from the perspective of curriculum development, the analysis of curricula in relation to teaching time and the elements related to it, for the realization of curricular requirements, as well as from the perspective of analysing the impact of curricular overload on the achievements and well-being of students and teachers.

2.1. Development - revision of curricula

The process of developing or revising the Curriculum/Teaching Programs goes through different stages, which complete the cycle of the change process and complete it in all the links of its development. Authorities in different countries follow different experiences. It is worth highlighting the experiences of different countries that are close, such as: England, Finland, Scotland, USA, Australia, etc. For example, in Australia the curriculum development process involves four stages: (i) Curriculum Form; (ii) Writing

the Curriculum; (iii) Implementation/implementation; and (iv) Evaluation and revision of the Curriculum (cited according to Devetaku-Gojani, 2011).

According to Tyler (1949), curriculum development should be viewed as a cycle: the quality and impact of curriculum functions should be monitored by carefully observing the results and data from these observations, which should be used to make the necessary revisions. Curriculum is a concept, always evolving (cited according to Karameta, 2014).

Curriculum development/revision is part of education reforms, a fundamental part of curriculum reform, which is mainly justified by policymakers in order to respond to the challenges society faces, or to adapt to developments in society, achievements in science and technology, as well as achieving the vision that society defines for the future.

This orientation of the reasons for the curricular reform is also found in the introduction of the KCF document, in which it is emphasized that the development of the new curriculum was made in order to face the challenges, such as: the need to build a knowledge society, integration in the digital age, increasing interdependence and mobility, learning to live together, sustainable development, diaspora and emigration (MEST /KF, 2016). The vision and rationale for reforming the new curriculum was based on the decision to improve the education system of Kosovo and align it with the requirements of 21st century schools (Buleshkaj & Koren, 2022).

According to Mehmeti, Buleshkaj & Lynn (2013), the necessary changes in the curriculum can be addressed in three different ways: (i) From a subject-cantered focus to a focus on learning outcomes and based on competencies; (ii) From the focus with the teacher in the centre to the focus with the student in the centre and (iii) From the didactic/lecture methodology to a more interactive and inclusive methodology.

The new curricula, in different countries or different educational systems, have in common a series of aspects of a general character and a set of orientations for each area of learning (Karameta, 2014). According to Mehmeti et al. (2019), new curriculum development trends show that curriculum documents differ from country to country. Differences are

observed in the structure of curriculum documents, as well as in goals, principles, organization of learning content, setting of learning outcomes, number of curriculum areas/subjects, etc.

According to the Progress Report of the Council of the European Union (2010), for the implementation of the work program for education and training, European countries are reforming their curricula, on the framework of key competences for lifelong learning, published at the end of the year 2006. The said framework emphasizes that curriculum reform for the improvement of competences needs a holistic, comprehensive approach, organizing learning in all subjects, clear teaching of competences, training of new teachers, didactic approaches, as well as including teachers, students and others actively (European Communities, 2007).

This is also what the OECD report (2020) says, which brings some changes to the education systems of the OECD countries in relation to the curriculum reform in pre-university education. According to the OECD report, curricula in different educational systems also differ in the competency-based approach and the number of core competencies, the approach to integrating subjects in curricular areas and the number of subjects included within a curricular area, cross-curricular issues, etc. (OECD, 2020).

The reform of the last curriculum in pre-university education in Kosovo, drafted in 2011 and revised and approved in 2016, was done on the framework of key competencies, with differences in the number of key competencies and in the approach to their development and integration in curriculum documents, up to subject curricula. So, the KCF in Kosovo is also built on the basis of competencies, through which it is intended to shift the focus from the pressure for the realization of the content determined by curricula and textbooks, to the development of the main competencies broken down through learning outcomes.

The development of the competencies defined within the curriculum is intended to be done through curriculum areas, elective subjects/modules, projects, curricular issues and other innovative forms of work with students, led by schools (Mehmeti & Buleshkaj, 2017).

On the other hand, the practical implementation of the curriculum is the final objective of the curriculum reform process, which largely depends on the commitment and readiness of teachers, but also on the support of school principals and support mechanisms that have a role and responsibility in supervision and support of schools for the implementation of the curriculum.

According to Marash (2009), the term implementation has to do with the practical use of a curriculum or teaching program, that is, putting into practice programs and teaching subjects. It is important to emphasize that the implementation of the curriculum cannot be done without students (Marash (2009). Also, it is important to say that the implementation of the curriculum depends to a large extent on the functionality and seriousness of the institutional and school-level mechanisms, which are related to the implementation of the curriculum.

Curriculum implementation becomes successful when teachers acquire the right experiences, knowledge, skills, ideas and right attitudes about the curriculum or teaching program that they will put into practice. Only when it is fully accepted by the teachers of a school and when the activities related to it become routine, it can be said that the curriculum has reached the stage of "institutionalization" (Marash, 2009). The "institutionalization" of curriculum implementation at school is also related to informing parents about the curriculum and their role in this process.

The success of curriculum implementation, in addition to being influenced by the leadership of curriculum implementation and the level of competence of teachers in the area of curriculum and in the practice of its implementation, is largely dependent on the strategies undertaken by educational systems to addressing and mitigating curricular overload as early as the curriculum design process.

The development/revision of curricula, in an effort to respond to the challenges facing society, achievements in science and technology, according to the OECD study (2020), can result in curriculum overload, which can include overload in learning content or excessive amount of learning content in relation to the time available for learning, curriculum

imbalance where some curriculum areas can be favored at the expense of other areas, etc. (OECD, 2020).

Referring to the reports of studies related to the curriculum, of comparative studies related to the curriculum (IED, 2011; Karameta, 2014; OECD, 2020), different educational systems, in an effort to normalize the curricular overload, have made the transition from the curriculum based on content in competency-based curricula, from subject-based to learning area-based curriculum, will enable learning to highlight and unify commonalities, avoiding fragmentation and lack of connection between subject content.

2.2. Curricular overload - influencing factors

The issue of curricular overload and the factors that influence curricular overload has been addressed and researched mainly in support of the international literature that deals with this problem, in the framework of different systems, which is almost present in most educational systems, but which is reflected and it is treated in different ways and approaches.

In the reports of various studies, curricular overload and the factors affecting curricular overload are treated in different ways (Bekteshi, 2009; Alexandre & Flutter, 2009; NCCA, 2010; Majoni, 2017; OECD, 2020, etc.), depending on the focus and the purpose of the studies. Despite different approaches to dealing with curriculum overload and its factors, almost all studies describe some factors that have contributed to curriculum overload in primary or lower secondary education, which mainly include the expansion of the curriculum, with its constituent elements, such as the increase in the number of teaching subjects, the addition of teaching contents in relation to the teaching time, or the lack of teaching time, the size and volume of the curriculum.

In the report of the National Council on Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA, 2010) on curriculum overload in primary education, three main factors are reported which can be identified as contributing to curriculum overload in primary schools, including the size of the primary school curriculum, revised in 1999, the expansion of the curriculum in recent years

and schools and classrooms rushed to implement the curriculum. For each of these three factors, the report identifies several dimensions of curriculum overload related to the respective factors, which are reflected as follows (NCCA, 2010):

Table 1: Curricular overload factors and dimensions of overload (NCCA, 2010)

Curricular overload factors	Overload dimensions
The size of the primary school curriculum	Development and implementation of the curriculum in primary school
	Curriculum organization
	Hierarchy of teaching subjects and teaching time
	Textbooks
Expanding the curriculum	Assessment
	Guidance for teachers/schools and additional support materials
	Initiatives and programs for schools
Rushed schools and rushed classes	School space, facilities and resources
	Lack of teachers' time/opportunity for curriculum planning
	Lack of time to communicate with parents
	Policy and legislation

The author of the study "Student Overload with Learning at School", Bektesh S, Bekteshi (2009), groups the factors of student overload with learning at school into four factors: (i) social factors; (ii) family factors, (iii) school factors; and (iv) factors arising from the students themselves. In relation to the school factors, where the elements of the curriculum are addressed, the loads coming from the curriculum and the teacher, the textbooks, the homework, the prior knowledge of the students and the working conditions in the school are specified.

On the other hand, according to the OECD report (2020), curriculum overload is based on four dimensions. Each dimension addresses specific aspects of overload, as described below.

Table 2: Overload dimensions and description of their elements (OECD, 2020)

Dimensions of curriculum overload	Description
1. Expansion of curriculum	It refers to the tendency to include new content subjects in the curriculum in response to new societal demands, without considering, appropriately, the subjects that should be dropped.
2. Content overload	It refers to the current dimension of curriculum overload, i.e. the excessive amount of content that needs to be developed and learned relative to the available instructional time.
3. Perceived overload	It refers to the perceived or experienced dimension of overload, as reported by students and teachers.
4. Curriculum imbalance	Refers to the disproportionate attention given to certain areas of the curriculum at the expense of other areas, without proper adjustments to low-priority areas.

The studies cited above, on the factors, dimensions of overload and their specifics, clearly show the complexity of curricular overload, clearly show that curricular overload is complex and influenced by many factors, emphasizing in particular the expansion of the curriculum and with the addition of learning contents in relation to their breadth, volume with the available teaching time, but also the aspects of the organization and implementation of the curriculum and the perceptions of the subjects of the school community that are directly related to the implementation of the curriculum.

This means that curricular overload goes beyond these basic content components of the curriculum, it is also related to how the curricula are organized for the levels of education and the respective grades, the format and size of the curriculum, textbooks, guidance for teachers/schools and materials teaching support, initiatives and support programs for the implementation of the curriculum, assessment of students, internal organization of schools, capacities and approaches to teaching practice, work with students, teachers and parents, school space and resources to implement creative approaches in organization of learning processes.

Policy and legislation related to the regulation of the education system, the preparation of teachers before the service, the employment and development of teachers, the allocation of teaching time for compulsory and non-compulsory learning, etc., are also seen as part of the curricular overload. Expanding the curriculum, adding learning content or overloading with learning content in relation to the available learning time, will be completed with some elements of the following treatment.

2.2.1. Curriculum expansion

Curriculum expansion is usually caused by the process of curriculum revision by educational systems, with the aim of facing the challenges that societies face today, such as integration in the digital age, increased interdependence and mobility, learning to live together, environmental education, media education, sustainable development, etc., but also due to pressure from interest groups and the needs of the changing environment.

Curriculum expansion can result in the addition of subjects, as reported by many education systems that have long lists of subjects, both in primary and lower secondary education, "the list of subjects has simply become longer long and nothing has been removed to accommodate new subjects" (Alexandre & Flutter, 2009).

Referring to the study reports described above on curriculum overload, especially the OECD study report (2020), curriculum expansion is not only related to the introduction of new subjects into the curriculum system, but

also to the addition of contents and time of learning in certain subjects to reflect changes in society, to respond to growing demands, e.g. for globalization, digital competences, as well as with the addition of new teaching topics, within the existing subjects.

Usually the expansion of the curriculum, such as the addition of teaching subjects, the increase or reduction of teaching time, teaching topics without changing the teaching time, are related to political decision-making by educational systems, which often have certain political agendas. Incorporating new learning topics into existing subjects and at the same time is considered an option that is less politically charged, but presents challenges for teachers (OECD, 2020).

Various educational systems, as a response to the growing demands of society, in state curricula have established a set of competencies recommended by the European Commission, all eight competencies, or modified by educational systems, that are considered critical for lifelong learning , as (European Commission, 2018): literacy; multilingualism; numerical, scientific and engineering skills; digital and technology-based competencies; interpersonal skills and the ability to adopt new competencies; active citizenship; entrepreneurship; cultural awareness and expression.

According to the OECD report (2020), various educational systems, in response to the expansion of the curriculum by society's demands and by other social developments, have decided to create a special subject to accommodate various changing social demands, thus avoiding the repetition of the same topics in different subjects, as well as translating social needs into cross-curricular competencies and topics and introducing them into existing subjects/learning areas.

In various educational systems, including in Kosovo, the development of curricula in pre-university education is based on the competency-based approach, as an opportunity to orient expectations for students in the development of key competencies, and as an opportunity to carefully manage the expansion of curricula.

2.2.2. Learning content overload

From the treatment made in the section on the main concepts of the research, we see that content overload refers to the excessive amount of content to be learned within a certain teaching time, within a curriculum area/subject or for a teaching topic. According to Bektesh (2009), learning contents are the main source of overload. Difficult, incomprehensible and overly broad content forces the student to quickly learn, absorb and remember a lot of marginal, indirect, worthless and unnecessary information that serves no purpose and they have no cognitive value in human life. Usually, such contents are not related to real-life situations and do not prepare an individual to face real-life issues.

Content overload is related to the setting of goals and learning outcomes that are set in curricula, which often do not coincide with the instructional time set for their achievement. According to the OECD (2020) study, content overload is often driven by unrealistic expectations to maintain breadth (the number of subjects and learning topics to be learned within a subject) and depth (the extent to which students learn the content within the space and time assigned to a given curriculum.

Also, according to the same report, additional sources of content overload may arise based on how they are translated into curricula, textbooks, assessment materials, and homework. Content overload is thus a relative concept, as it depends on who is using the curriculum, but content overload is the most frequently reported form of curriculum overload (OECD, 2020).

Overloading with learning content leads to superficial teaching, manifested in test/exam results (Peffers, et al. 2005). Achieving the necessary balance between breadth and depth in curriculum content remains an ongoing unresolved issue in educational reforms of many educational systems (Alexandre & Flutter, 2009).

On the other hand, according to UNESCO (2002), having fewer topics to cover in more depth in a curriculum often raises concerns about lowering standards of student achievement (UNESCO, 2002). However, learning fewer learning topics in greater depth about relevant topics helps students

develop higher levels of understanding and thinking that enable learning to be transferred beyond specific subjects to new learning areas and situations new problems (Coker et al., 2016). Schwartz et al. (2009), among others, argue that teaching fewer subjects in greater depth can improve not only students' academic achievement, but also their level of satisfaction with learning.

According to Peffers, et al. (2005), one way to deal with curricula overloaded with teaching content is to allow teachers (and students) the opportunity to choose the topics they want to teach from a range of topics offered in the curricula and not be forced cover all the topics listed in the curricula. In parallel with the construction of teachers' autonomy in the selection of teaching topics, it becomes clear that the volume of topics should be determined in relation to teaching pedagogy and learning outcomes, which become part of the assessment (Peffers, et al., 2005).

According to Bekteshi (2009), the phenomenon of overload is also caused by fragmentation, namely the lack of connectivity of teaching contents within the teaching subject itself, between different teaching subjects of the same area, class or different classes (Bekteshi, 2009). Therefore, it is important to address the curricular overload from the perspective of the approach to the implementation of the teaching contents of the subjects from a curricular area, as well as between cross-curricular issues.

Curricula that are currently implemented in pre-university education in Kosovo (from 2016 onwards) are based on competences, the organization of learning content starts from the concepts of curricular areas, the depth of which is determined by learning outcomes for curricular areas within a curricular level, then the organization of the teaching contents of the subject curricula is done with teaching topics, the depth of which is determined by learning results for a school year (MEST, 2016).

The school is expected to prepare students for lifelong learning, cultivating the natural curiosity of young people for new information, developing interest in learning and preparing students for independent learning (Boshtrakaj, 2018).

In various discussions with teachers from Kosovo, who are implementing the competency-based curriculum, concerns have been raised about the overloading of curricula with teaching content (subjects and teaching topics for subjects), learning outcomes that are difficult to achieve, but they have not been summarized and reported in a formal way and no professional and scientific studies have been done on the level and aspects of curricular overload with teaching content, which is what this study aims to do.

2.2.3. Overload of learning contents in relation to learning time

The problem of overloading the curriculum with teaching content, in the first place, is dealt with in relation to the teaching time, in terms of the number of teaching hours per class and subject, the time the student spends in learning, in school, in acquiring tasks and teaching contents, including the workload with working days during the school year, with teaching hours during the day, week and school year, with the duration of the teaching lesson, with the quality of the teaching time for learning at school, after school extracurricular activities.

In reports of comparative analyzes (IED, 2011; OECD, 2020) about teaching time in different educational systems, in terms of teaching weeks, the number of teaching hours per day in classes and different levels of pre-university education, the duration of lessons etc., there are approximations and differences in different education systems, with significant differences between subjects within an education system. In general, it is reported that the weekly teaching time or the number of teaching hours per teaching day has not changed in the last decade. Based on this, it is implied that the teaching time continues to be unchanged, against the fact that new teaching topics and learning outcomes that must be achieved have been added or integrated into the curricula, as well as new requirements for teachers have been added.

In the literature, there are differences regarding the connection or relationship between school time and student performance. According to Rivkin and Schiman (2015), increased instructional time has been found to

provide more learning opportunities and is associated with higher academic achievement, helping lower performing students catch up with higher performing students (cited according to OECD , 2020). However, according to Alexander and Flutter, (2009), Fitz Patrick and O'Shea (2013), OECD (2014) etc., more teaching hours do not automatically translate into better results and quality learning (cited by OECD, 2020).

Studies related to the relationship between learning time and student performance are mainly based on the results or performance of students in the international student assessment program (PISA), this relationship is also reflected in the performance of Kosovar students in PISA 2015 and PISA 2018. The quality of the use of learning time is considered to be one of the determining factors in the performance of students.

2.2.4. Curricular overload and textbooks

The textbook is a basic book for each area/subject, written on the basis of the curriculum and shaped from a didactic point of view, taking into account the psychophysical abilities of the students and the peculiarities of the subject (Kosovo Parliament, 2006). The textbook is a pedagogical value, traditionally verified enough from the point of view of its function and didactic value" (Ramaj, 2001).

In principle, textbooks, but also other teaching materials, derive from the curriculum, or they are developed for students and, as one of the sources of work for teachers in function of the implementation of the curriculum, a process which is often accompanied by numerous challenges, which are reflected during the implementation of the curriculum, are reflected in the work of the students, but also of the teachers, due to the non-compliance with the curriculum and due to the overload of the texts in different dimensions, such as the content, didactic apparatus, the difficulties of the requirements for students, the volume etc.

Curricular overload in textbooks is due to the large amount of learning content, topics/learning units with overloaded content, with difficult and

complicated content for the age and capabilities of students, with inappropriate language, scientific and linguistic errors. Students can be especially overwhelmed by the didactic apparatus of the textbook, which in some textbooks is excessive, broad, difficult, generalizing, indefinite (Bekteshi, 2009).

Various studies on the curriculum and textbooks in the context of pre-university education in Kosovo (Peffers, et al., 2005, Thaçi, 2012; Azemi, & Morina, 2013; Boshtrakaj, et al., 2019) speak of deficiencies in the regulatory framework for the design and evaluation of school textbooks, for significant deficiencies with didactic apparatus, as well as for problems and defects in terms of scientific accuracy, content load, didactic apparatus, treatment of gender aspects, but also for problems with content and methodology .

In the report of the Institute of Education, University of London, National plans and programs in Kosovo – Evaluation of the first steps (Peffers, et al., 2005) the problems related to the overload of school textbooks were highlighted, specifying the textbooks in the area of science. , which according to the report appear overloaded and promote more learning of knowledge than critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Also, according to the same report, both the curricula and the texts in the area of science, there is no clear focus on big ideas and theories, while the implementation of ideas in practice is mainly done in an abstract way and not in a contextualized way.

The burden of textbooks, as a specific element of curriculum overload, is dealt with more specifically in the study *Problems and shortcomings of textbooks - Analysis of the textbooks of Kosovo, of the Lower Secondary School cycle* (Thaçi, 2012). The study has a focus on the analysis of texts in the subjects Biology, Geography, History, and Civic Education. The study provides data on textbook loads with: (i) information, facts and figures; (ii) expressions, terms, abstractions and concepts; (iii) diverse and comprehensive content; (iv) a large number of pages – voluminous; (v) didactic apparatus and workbooks; and (vi) discrepancy with the age of the students.

Each of these aspects is a separate dimension that requires professional and practical actions during the drafting and revision of textbooks. It is important to ensure that the size, volume and quality of textbooks do not impede efforts to reduce content. The level of detail included in textbooks can also lead to confusion over what is mandatory and what is not (OECD, 2020).

The concerns raised by teachers about textbooks are reflected in the *Didactic Apparatus of textbooks* (Azemi, & Morina, 2013) and in the study *Quality of textbooks in Kosovo* (Boshtrakaj, et al. 2019). They are related to the lack of actuality, relevance and compatibility with the new curriculum, overloading with topics, text, facts, formulas, lack of reference to other sources for additional information, incompatibility with the cognitive level of the students, lack of connection/possibility with the information and students' prior experiences, lack of cross-curricular correlation; focus on information/facts and reproduction, inadequate, dysfunctional and unattractive illustrations for the student, etc. (PIK, 2019).

Similar concerns are at the centre of discussion in the teaching community and the wider education community for current textbooks designed several years after the implementation of the competency-based curriculum.

2.2.5. Curricular overload and homework

Homework is defined as tasks given to students by teachers, which must be done outside of class (Cooper, 1989). The results of studies related to homework vary based on many factors, such as the age of the group studied, the measurement of academic performance, the impact on the well-being of students, etc.

Studies also talk about changes in relation to the goals for which homework is given to students. Some of the most common goals of homework are practice, preparation for lessons, participation in lessons, parent-child relationships, personal development, parent-teacher communication,

assessment, public relations, politics, punishment, etc. (Epstein & Voorhis, 2001).

Studies show that when assignments are graded and play a role in the final grade, they are expected to improve exam performance. According to Andersen, this happens because students will be more motivated for the tasks that are graded and learn more from them and, as a result, exam results improve. However, graded assignments have additional costs for teachers and students. Teachers spend a lot of time grading assignments and providing appropriate feedback. As for the students, they have to go through a more productive learning process to find time to work on the tasks that are assessed (cited by Habili, 2018).

There are also discussions about the time it should be for the students to do their homework, so that the well-being of the students is not affected. Bekteshi (2009) treats the time for homework, which should not take more than half of the time of regular school lessons, the time for homework should be 0.5 - 1 hour for students of classes of primary education and 1-2 hours for students of lower secondary education grades.

There are also discussions about the role of parents' involvement in their children's homework, both in relation to supporting children directly in lessons and tasks, and in relation to creating the conditions and climate for learning at home and for engagement in doing homework.

Beyond the treatments above, various studies also treat homework as a special aspect of curricular overload, the level of difficulty of homework in relation to the age of the students, but also with the time for completing homework, where it is required very high engagement of students at home. The level of difficulty of homework is a very delicate aspect, which must be handled with care (Habili, 2018).

Homework is reflected as a factor of overload, depending on the conditions of educational systems, and a large part of them have made homework for students unavoidable, due to many contents in the curriculum and insufficient teaching time for their development in the classroom, or because

schools do not work beyond the compulsory teaching time. Or the removal of homework, with the extension of the time of commitment to school related to the tasks and lessons that were previously given as homework and lessons. Homework can also be a source of stress for students and their parents, reducing students' free time or time devoted to other activities, such as exercise, play, work, rest, etc. (Cooper, et al., 2006).

Studies related to homework for students, some of them cited in the OECD study (2020) on curricular overload, talk about the negative and positive sides of homework. On the positive side, supporters of homework emphasize that doing homework is referred to as an opportunity to maintain the continuity of lessons, as an opportunity that can improve the student's memory and thinking skills, develop the culture of independent work and the sense of responsibility, etc.

While, as a negative side of homework, their opponents emphasize the excessive amount of homework per day, the impact on the life and well-being of students, as well as the argument that the large amount of homework does not improve the academic performance of students. According to the report, Poland and Kazakhstan are among the countries/education systems that report facing a challenge of homework overload per student.

Homework time is related to the amount of homework and the difficulty of its requirements. Homework time is also addressed in the national survey by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2016). According to the report, students are required to spend considerable time doing homework assigned by teachers, in various subject areas (especially compulsory subjects), and this has an impact on both personal life (sleep and free time), as well as in family life (weekends, vacations).

This shows what is considered an imbalance in students' daily routine, as students are unable to balance their time between homework and rest due to the homework load. In general, too much time burdened with homework leads to sleep problems and fatigue. Regarding students' experience with homework, the report from the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2016) states that almost half of students (48%)

reported that they did not finish all their homework on time due to heavy load.

2.3. The impact of curriculum overload on student well-being

The practices of school organization, teaching, learning and other processes, related to the organization of educational processes in schools, are related to students, are made for students. So, the curricula, in the first place, are designed for the students and all the work around them is done to ensure a curricular system, which enables the students to develop a set of their competencies, in accordance with the opportunities and potentials for the development of them, for preparation for life, work, training for lifelong learning and for facing the challenges that societies face.

Student well-being is addressed in different studies and perspectives, from the perspective of addressing and promoting well-being from the curriculum (O'Neill, (Ed.), 2017), as well as from the aspect of the impact of the curriculum on student well-being (OECD, 2017), aspect related to our study.

OECD study (2017) "Student well-being in PISA 2015" addresses multiple aspects of student well-being, from the psychological, social, cognitive and physical dimensions of well-being. Each dimension reflects the role of the school, the organization of school life, but also the influence of the curriculum on the well-being of students.

The OECD study (2017), when addressing the psychological dimension in student well-being, specifies aspects of impact on well-being, such as students' sense of purpose in life, self-awareness, affective states, and emotional strength. Then, it specifies the aspects of support that positively affect the psychological well-being of students, such as motivation, self-efficacy, hope, etc., as well as the negative impact, which comes from anxiety, stress, depression, etc. For the social dimension of students' well-being, the study refers to aspects related to the quality of students' social life inside and outside school, in relation to students' relationships with their

family, peers and teachers, self-reported by students participating in the PISA 2015 study.

Regarding the cognitive dimension of student well-being, the OECD study (2017) refers to the level of knowledge that students have and their needs to participate actively in today's society, as lifelong learners, effective workers and citizens engaged. For this dimension, the study considers students' abilities to use academic knowledge to solve problems alone or in collaboration with others and high-level reasoning skills, such as critical thinking, the ability to deal with ideas from different perspectives. While, regarding the physical dimension of students' well-being, the OECD study (2017) refers to the health of students self-reported by students, in relation to physical activities and leading a healthy life.

So, students' well-being is reflected in different dimensions and is influenced by different factors. The impacts can be positive when students are not overloaded in learning, they receive the right support to develop maximally, but they can also be negative when there is the presence of curricular overload, lack of sufficient teaching time and lack of proper support in accordance with the needs and possibilities of the students. Therefore, students' well-being should be a priority in designing or revising the curriculum, especially when it comes to curricular overload, because well-being increases learning and vice versa affects as an inhibiting factor in the learning process.

An overloaded curriculum can put pressure on the well-being of students, in particular it can increase feelings of stress and pressure for students, which directly affect student performance (OECD, 2020).

In relation to teaching time, as a factor of curricular overload, studies related to teaching, student achievements, the PISA study, also reflected in the OECD report (2020), show that increased teaching time offers greater opportunities for learning and affects higher academic achievement of students, helps lower performing students to reach higher performing students. However, according to the same studies, many hours of study do not automatically translate into better results and quality learning, and that

the relationship between hours of study and student performance is not linear. According to the OECD report (2016), the time spent learning during the day, both in school and outside of school, i.e. learning at home, is not related to the academic performance of students. Consequently, this shows that the well-being of students in the cognitive dimension, in relation to learning time, is directly related to the quality of the use of learning time, primarily at school, but also at home (OECD, 2020).

Beyond the teaching contents and the teaching time, as described above, the overloading of students in learning comes as a result of other, different factors, such as: the teacher, textbooks, homework, the level of prior knowledge of the students, the conditions of work at school, family circumstances, as well as from other factors related to the student himself (Bekteshi, 2009).

Despite the fact that curriculum overload is increasingly recognized as a topic that needs to be studied more deeply, there are very few studies that document curriculum overload as perceived or experienced by students and teachers and its impact on student and teacher well-being.

The OECD (2020), in its study *Curriculum Overload*: *A Way Forward*, focuses on the analysis of various factors that drive perceived or experienced curricular overload, including: the number of subjects per class, the number of subjects and learning outcomes that must be addressed within a certain time, students' time for learning at school and at home, the frequency and types of assessments, textbooks, learning materials and homework, teachers' readiness for the implementation of the curriculum reform, etc. .
Some of the factors described above were a guiding reference to determine the focus of the study problem and the research approach we followed in this case study on curriculum overload in compulsory education in Kosovo.

2.4. The impact of curriculum overload on teachers' work and well-being

Teaching is a dynamic, demanding profession, challenging by multiple demands and frequent changes in legislation and curriculum, exposed to

stress, professional burnout, and the risk of a degree of burnout, which has prompted many researchers to study the well-being of teachers, especially in the last decade.

The expansion of the curriculum, new teaching contents, teaching topics for various cross-curricular issues, the inclusion of new requirements for teachers within the curricula, such as digital competence, inevitably affects the work and efficiency of teachers.

According to the study done by NCCA (2005), the addition of new teaching content in primary education, with the same teaching time over the years, has caused teachers to complain that they cannot cover the new subjects and content of the curriculum in the time available. It is not only the lack of sufficient teaching time for the development of teaching content that shows the dissatisfaction and concerns of teachers. Dissatisfaction and concerns from teachers appear even when they have insufficient competence for the subject they hold and special competences in teaching. When teachers do not have sufficient competence, or when they do not receive adequate training for a competence required by the system or for curricular changes, they are likely to feel overwhelmed and powerless (Rutherford, Long & Farkas, 2017).

The addition of subjects and teaching contents, especially in primary education, often means that teachers have a more special focus on the main subjects, such as Language, Mathematics, Science and leave aside the subjects of skills that positively affect the well-being of students. On the other hand, when teachers are attacked by curricular overload, the lack of proper training and the lack of special competences in a certain area, their work is reflected in the students, who do not receive the necessary support from their teachers.

So, the well-being of teachers in relation to the curriculum, in particular, is attacked by the expansion of the curriculum and the addition of teaching contents, the lack of teaching time for their effective treatment with students, as well as the lack of sufficient competence for lecturing and practicing in the classroom and to be successful in working with students. An overloaded

curriculum can put pressure on pupils' well-being, increasing the pressure on pupils to learn, which then directly affects pupils' performance (OECD, 2020). The performance of students then affects in different ways the well-being of teachers, it has a positive impact when the results of work with students are seen, an individual feeling of personal professional fulfilment, satisfaction is seen, but it also has a negative impact, which affects the loss of confidence in students, parents and in reducing the satisfaction for the work he does.

The tasks and responsibilities of teachers, beyond teaching as the main task and responsibility, in the organizational system of work of schools and educational systems, are numerous, including those related to planning, working with colleagues, parents, working with pedagogical and administrative documentation in school, engagement in extracurricular activities, etc. Additional commitments, beyond teaching and preparation for teaching, are likely to present an overload for teachers, which is then reflected in the decline of efficiency - the performance of teachers at work, in the presentation of stress, anxiety, fatigue and burnout of teachers, which directly affect their well-being.

It is important to reiterate that curriculum overload has an impact on teachers' work, but is not the same as excessive workload for teachers and school leaders. Many factors other than curriculum have an impact on teacher workload, such as changes in administrative structure or large numbers of students (Easthope & Easthope, 2000).

2.5.Strategies for dealing with and reducing curricular overload

As described above, curriculum overload has multiple implications in the educational process. It can be a stressful factor for students and teachers, it can be an obstacle in the learning process and it can greatly affect the learning results. Since it is almost impossible to completely eliminate curricular overload, both during the curricular reform and during its implementation, educational systems are suggested by researchers and institutional mechanisms, such as the OECD, which deal with this issue, to

undertake various measures, strategies to minimize and avoid curricular overload.

According to the OECD report (2020), the creation of a special subject is a strategy undertaken by various countries/educational systems to address the challenge of expanding the educational content due to societal demands, such as: Career education , work studies and entrepreneurial education; Health education, well-being, lifestyle; Media education; Skills and applied design and technology, informatics, etc. This strategy is undertaken in order to ensure that particular issues are distinguished, not "lost" among content within existing courses, and not to overload existing courses. In order not to misinterpret this strategy, it is important to make a clear distinction between unnecessary duplication and deliberate reflection on the same content in different subjects to further and deepen students' understanding of key concepts.

Another strategy, undertaken by various OECD countries, or an alternative approach to address the challenge of expanding learning content, due to social demands, as a basic element of curricular overload, is the translation of social needs into competences and cross-curricular themes and their introduction into existing subjects/learning areas. Some countries/educational systems have chosen to include core competencies in the curricula, introducing them into existing teaching areas/subjects. Some others have decided on cross-curricular topics. However, a large part of OECD countries/educational systems have decided on the dual approach of including cross-curricular competencies and topics in the curriculum. Regarding these approaches, the report provides some details for some countries, how they have integrated cross-curricular competencies and topics in their curricula. In line with this, some highlights from the approaches of countries such as Estonia, Ontario (Canada), Finland, Japan, from the OECD report (2020), show that:

> *Estonia includes cross-curricular competences in subject areas. For example, the study of mathematics is described as the development not only of mathematical competences, but of all other general*

competences. The Estonian curriculum for mathematics explains how general competences are taught through mathematics, (e.g. cultural values: mathematics is a science that unites different cultures and students can learn about the works of mathematicians from different countries and periods).

In Ontario (Canada) each curriculum subject includes a section called "cross-curricular and integrated learning," which describes how the subject content and expected competencies relate to other subjects. The section also provides specific examples of how cross-curricular learning can be organized. The government has decided that new subject areas will not be added, but the demands of society will be included in the existing curriculum, allowing the inclusion of cross-curricular competencies such as financial education.

The Australian curriculum is presented as a three-dimensional model, consisting of: 1) learning areas; 2) cross-curricular topics; and 3) cross-curricular competencies (i.e. general skills). The model suggests that students learn all three of these dimensions interdependently and organize them through an integrated approach, rather than as independent subjects.

In Finland, phenomenon-based learning has gained attention in curriculum design. In this approach, the development of competences is articulated through lessons based on phenomena or themes. In this way, the subjects are not separated, but, on the contrary, are divided into phenomena-based lessons that address a given topic with a holistic perspective, crossing the boundaries of subjects. This approach fosters students' competencies by encouraging them to understand, use and construct different models to interpret and explain human behaviour, the environment and related phenomena, using active learning pedagogies such as research projects, activities extracurricular etc.

Japan organizes the curriculum around three competencies: 1) knowledge and skills; 2) ability to think, to judge and to express; and

3) motivation to learn and humanity. The curriculum aims to develop these competencies not by adding new subjects, but by introducing them into existing subjects.

Before educational systems decide on the approaches or strategies they will undertake in addressing aspects considered curricular overload, such as expanding the curriculum, adding content, etc., the first suggested step is to identify the main challenges, with which education systems face in relation to curricular overload, then establishing strategies to address them. Thus, the OECD report (2020) reports some of the main challenges on this topic, reported by different countries/educational systems, such as:

- Large number of subjects or excessive amount of teaching content;
- Doubling of content across teaching subjects;
- Discontinuity in learning progress across different levels of education;
- Size and volume of curriculum documents;
- Difficulties in setting priorities or designing curriculum content at the local and school level.

In the same report, the strategies that the various educational systems have undertaken to address these and curricular overload are also reported, such as:

- Determining the right number of subjects and topics;
- Selecting topics as key concepts in an overloaded curriculum;
- Inclusion of cross-curricular competencies and topics in the curriculum;
- Removing duplication of content across classes and across different subjects;
- Intentional repetition of topics across classes, learning cycles and educational levels;

- Piloting efforts to address content overload and evaluating their impact on teaching, learning and wellbeing;
- Making curriculum documents more accessible, including teachers in the development process;
- Determining the basic content at the national level and giving autonomy to schools and local government to adapt the learning content;
- Developing the capacities of schools to design the teaching content.

Orientations for institutional actions related to addressing curricular overload are largely related to strengthening the autonomy of the school and teachers, as a more efficient way to deal with curricular overload. Through school autonomy in the content aspects of the curriculum, teachers are primarily allowed and encouraged to choose the teaching topics they want to teach from a variety of topics and orientations offered in the curriculum. Likewise, all actions that draw attention to the expanded autonomy of the teaching profession can also help in dealing with overloaded curricula (Peffers, et al., 2005).

On the other hand, in relation to the workload and commitment, both for students and teachers, the OECD report (2020) also emphasizes some challenges, such as:

- Lack of compromises between the higher aim and focus on the essentials of the curriculum and student expectations;
- Mismatch between the teaching time allocated for a particular subject and the amount of curriculum content to be covered;
- Overload with homework;
- Overload of teachers and threat to their well-being.

In relation to these challenges, according to the relevant report, educational systems have taken actions to regulate learning time at school and at home, but also in regulating how content should be transmitted to students to meet their learning needs, and well-being, therefore to ensure the balance between

learning activities and other activities, which are equally essential for the cognitive, social and emotional development of students.

Whereas, for teachers, according to the relevant report, different educational systems are using the digitization of the curriculum as an additional option and teachers can use it from computers and other ICT devices and as an easier option for its adaptation with the needs of the students and focusing on the orientations of the school. In this regard, Australia practices the digitized curriculum to enable teachers and schools to focus on the orientations set by the school, e.g. in the development of critical and creative thinking skills of its students, consequently in the division of the curriculum according to priorities, areas and grades.

In the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA, 2010) report on curriculum overload in primary education, several curricular initiatives from different education systems, such as New Zealand, Scotland, Singapore, etc., are reported to respond to curriculum overload. Curriculum. Curricular initiatives include:

- Creation of websites to publish developments about curricula, experiences, lessons, case studies, etc.
- Schematic guidelines for curriculum development;
- Special projects for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the curriculum;
- Special programs for leaders of educational institutions related to curriculum implementation;
- Special projects and programs for the use of information technology in curriculum processes;
- Special projects and programs for teacher training,
- Programs for the creation of learning communities, the creation of a network of school principals, to enable schools to work together towards the implementation of the curriculum;

- Evaluation and self-evaluation programs and projects in connection with the general principles and values underlying the curriculum and approaches as they are transmitted in teaching and the overall work of the school;
- Seminars for Faculties of Education that prepare teachers.

In relation to the context of the curriculum developments in Kosovo, the approximate curriculum initiatives are set in the document Guide for the implementation of the new curriculum, 2016-2021, as an innovation in the last curriculum reform (MEST, 2016), which has not been evaluated and properly considered in the process of leading the implementation of the curriculum (KPI, 2019), therefore also in undertaking institutional actions to address the aspects considered curriculum overload.

CHAPTER III -

Research methodology

The third chapter presents the research methodology used in this study. The use of the research approach for this study, the development of the methodology and the preparation for this research, were made based on the purpose of the study and the research questions. Other issues that have been considered for this study are the review of resources, studies related to the issue of curriculum overload, approaches to dealing with student and teacher overload.

Review of curriculum documents and research reports that addressed the aspects that were the subject of treatment in this study, as well as the context of the curriculum reform in pre-university education in Kosovo, with special emphasis on primary and lower secondary education. The following section will reflect: the study design, the study population and sample, the study instruments, the data collection procedure and the data analysis.

3.1. Research design

The qualitative research approach was implemented for the realization of the study. Qualitative research in the broadest sense is concerned with how individuals or certain groups make sense of their world, as well as the world around them, and construct meaning in terms of their experiences. The basic idea of conducting qualitative research is that meaning is socially constructed (Saqipi, 2013), starting from the premise that reality is a social construct (Matthews & Ross, 2010).

The qualitative research approach is a means of exploring and understanding the meaning that individuals or groups describe a social or human problem (Creswell, 2009). Among other things, this research approach includes defining questions and procedures for conducting the study, collecting data, usually in a participant setting, analysing the data from specific to general themes, and then interpreting the data by researchers and report preparation.

Creswell (2009), in deconstructing the qualitative research approach, used the term worldview, which shapes research practice, to describe a set of beliefs applied by researchers in guiding their actions and conducting

research projects. Also, according to Creswell (2009), the four worldviews from which researchers operate are: post positivism, constructivism, advocacy and pragmatism. These aspects were points of reference in conducting this study.

This study follows the social constructivist worldview, which holds the assumption that "individuals seek to understand the world in which they live and work." They develop subjective understandings of their experiences and "meanings are varied and multiple". Rather than starting with theory, as in post-positivism, researchers inductively develop a theory or model of understanding (Creswell, 2009).

The research model is based on a case study. Usually case study research involves one case or a small number of cases, but each one is explored in detail (Matthews & Ross, 2010). This case study research is an exploratory case study and was intended to shed light on the topic of research on curricular overload in primary and lower secondary education in Kosovo, to shed light on whether there is curricular overload in the curricular documents in implementation, or is it more perception from stakeholders related to curriculum development and implementation. This will be shown by data and findings from the analysis of curricula in primary and lower secondary education, as well as data and findings from the exploration and examination of the perceptions of participants from the school community, curriculum experts and education officials involved in development and coordination of activities for curriculum development and revision.

The study was not intended to explore and search for a cause-and-effect relationship in the curriculum reform process and was not expected to explain the causes. The goal was a deep description of how things were in relation to the curricula in primary and lower secondary education in Kosovo, the aspects that are considered curricular overload, how they are seen and how they were experienced by the participants in this study. So, the aim was to shed light on the uniqueness of curriculum overload in the context of the Kosovo curriculum.

The study used qualitative data collected through content analysis of curriculum documents and research reports related to the object of study, semi-structured interviews, questionnaires and focus group discussions.

The qualitative case study methodology, implemented in this study, offered research opportunities for the object of study and aspects related to the object of study, as well as the opportunity to describe, from multiple sources of information, the degree of curricular overload, the influencing factors in the context of the Kosovo curriculum, as well as the possibilities for dealing with and reducing curriculum overload, with the lived experiences of the participants in this study as a point of reference.

3.2. Population and sample

The population of this study consists of teachers in compulsory education in Kosovo, namely in primary and lower secondary education (1-9), students of grades 8 and 9, parents who have children in primary and lower secondary education, school leaders in compulsory education, as well as education officials and curriculum developers. Due to the nature of the study, in order to explore in more depth the object of study and the research questions, the participating samples in this study were selected through a purposeful and convenient method, based on the roles related to the development of the curriculum and its implementation in the classrooms 1,3, 5, 6, 8 and 9.

The selection of the sample is related to the research approach in this study, to the qualitative approach. The selection procedure of the qualitative sample is purposeful, selected from eleven (11) schools that were chosen to be part of this study, which were leading schools in the process of extending the implementation of the curriculum to all schools in Kosovo. They represented public schools for primary and lower secondary education.

The criteria for the selection of schools, from which the sample of the school community was included, were the number of schools that were lead schools at the beginning of the implementation of the new subject curricula designed according to the competency-based curriculum, then the number of students in the schools and location of the school (village-city). The number of schools included in this study, according to the criteria above, is eleven (11) public schools, primary and lower secondary schools (PLSS), in eleven (11) municipalities of Kosovo.

As described above, like the selection of schools, the selection procedure of the qualitative sample was also purposive in terms of the representation of the school community. The aim was to ensure a comprehensive representation from the school community, with different experience in the organization and management of the school, in the learning process, in working with students/children, so that they were able to reflect their experience regarding the curriculum implementation process.

Thus, the **sample of school principals and QAC** is represented by 20 participants, of which 11 principals and vice-principals of schools and 9 quality coordinators. From this sample, 13 of them or 65% work in urban schools, while 7 or 35% work in rural schools. Also, from this sample, in terms of qualification, 12 of them or 60% have a four-year university qualification, faculty in teacher preparation programs, while 8 of them or 40%, in addition to faculty in teacher preparation programs, have also a master's qualification, mainly in Educational Leadership and Teaching programs and curricula.

The **sample of teachers** consists of 65 teachers. From the sample of teachers, 40 teachers, or about 62% of teachers, work in schools located in urban areas, while 25 teachers or 28% of them work in schools located in rural areas. The sample of teachers who teach in primary education, grades 3-5, consists of 25 teachers or about 38%, while in lower secondary education of 40 teachers or about 62% of the sample of teachers. Over 70% of the sample of teachers are leaders of professional activities for grades 3, 4 and 5 in primary education and for the curricular areas of Languages and Communication, Mathematics and Natural Sciences. Also, regarding the sample of teachers, about 21% of them have participated in the design of curricula or are trainers for curricula.

The **sample of students** consists of 30 students of grades 8 and 9, who have a role in the leadership of the class and the Council of school students. The sample of 8th grade students consists of 13 students or about 43%, while the sample of 9th grade students consists of 17 students, or about 57%. Referring to the residence of the students, 10 students or about 33% of the students live in the village, while 20 students or about 67% of the students live in urban areas.

The **sample of parents** in this study consists of 36 parents, of which 13 parents have their children in rural schools, while 23 in urban schools. In relation to the level of education their children attend, 16 parents have their children in primary school, 9 parents have their children in primary school and lower secondary school and 11 parents have their children only in secondary school low. From the general sample of parents, 7 are parents of children with special needs. Over 70% of parents have roles in school bodies, are parents in the Class Parents' Council, the School's Parents' Council, or are part of the School's Governing Council.

The composition of the sample of the respondents of the study, according to the characteristics from the positions described above, was:

Table 3. Position/role of the respondents included in the study (in number)

No	Position/role of respondents	Number
1	School principals/deputy principals	11
2	School quality assurance coordinators	9
4	Primary education teachers	25
5	Teachers of lower secondary education	40
6	Students from grades 8 and 9	30
7	Parents	36
8	Education officials and curriculum experts - who have a role in curriculum development	4
	Total respondents included in the study	**155**

3.3. Instruments for data collection

Qualitative data are usually collected when the interpretive epistemological approach is used and when the data collected are the words and expressions of the research participants themselves (Matthews & Ross, 2010). To fulfil the purpose of the study, related to the exploration and treatment of the problem of curricular overload in compulsory education in Kosovo, a list of guiding research questions was used, which were elaborated and used in the protocol for semi-structured interviews, questionnaire of open type for

expression of independent opinion, protocol for focus group discussion, as well as checklist for content analysis of curriculum documents.

3.3.1. Description of data collection instruments

Interviews. The semi-structured interview protocol, prepared in support of the guiding research questions, for obtaining the general opinion from representatives of the educational community, about curricular overload, influencing factors and its effect on students and teachers. The interview questions were designed to be as open-ended as possible. They were developed based on the main research questions and organized into four main themes: (i) Curriculum reform and the curriculum implementation process; (ii) Curricular overload – aspects/factors of overload; (iii) Impact of overload on students and teachers; and (iv) Ideas for strategies related to avoiding and reducing curricular overload - dealing with student overload in learning.

The use of a semi-structured interview approach was chosen as it facilitated an in-depth data collection throughout the interview process. Interviews were conducted with seven (7) teachers, of them four (4) classroom teachers and three (3) subject teachers from the curricular areas of Languages and Communication, Mathematics and Natural Sciences; three (3) school principals; two (2) officials of the Ministry of Education and two (two) experts of the curriculum who have been part of the development of the curriculum.

Questionnaire with open questions. The use of an open-ended questionnaire in this study, prepared in support of the guiding research questions, allowed data to be collected from a larger participation of study respondents who have knowledge of a topic of interest and who have experienced the implementation of the curriculum in the last two or three years, and use them during the thematic analysis of the aspects addressed in this study.

The questions of the questionnaire are mainly related to four main topics addressed from different perspectives, by students, parents and teachers, and

related to their knowledge or role on the respective topics and what is considered the practice experienced within the main researched topics. . So, the questions in the questionnaires, after the demographic data, are organized into four topics: (i) Curricular reform and the curriculum implementation process; (ii) Curricular overload – aspects/factors of overload; (iii) Impact of overload on students and teachers; and (iv) Ideas for strategies related to avoiding and reducing curricular overload - dealing with student overload in learning.

Questionnaires with open questions were completed with 58 teachers, 36 parents, 30 students, 8 principals and vice-principals of schools, as well as 9 quality coordinators in schools. The main reason to plan and include a large number of respondents in the research with questionnaires with open questions is related to the qualitative research approach from the views of the participants of the studies carried out by the Pedagogical Institute of Kosovo, to talk, listen, and read the experiences of prescribed by the schools on issues related to the implementation of the curriculum.

Focus group discussion. In the framework of this study, the focus group discussion was carried out based on the guiding research questions, which were used in the group discussion protocol, which enabled the teachers to collect additional data during the dictation with a focus group of teachers. , who represented their colleagues to describe the practice of implementing the curriculum and the aspects that were experienced in the process of implementing the curriculum, either as opportunities, advantages, but also challenges and overload in their work and for students in learning.

The focus group discussion with seven (7) randomly selected teachers, from the 11 schools included in the study, provided an opportunity to validate the preliminary data collected from the semi-structured interviews, the open-ended questionnaires and the main themes identified. . In addition, the focus group discussion with teachers provided an opportunity to better understand the attitudes of teachers on many issues considered curricular overload, as well as supported some of the conclusions in this study, related to the role of the school in dealing with curricular overload.

Document analysis

In order to provide evidence of the aspects considered curricular overload in the set of curricular documents in implementation, with more special emphasis on subject curricula, for classes of primary and lower secondary education, a checklist was used. The checklist included the main topics for the analysis of the content of the curricula, organized in three categories, according to the hierarchy of curriculum documents (KCF, CC and SC) and subcategories according to curricular areas, with a more specific depth in the curricular areas Languages and communication, Mathematics and Natural Sciences. The elements of the checklist were: learning time, curriculum goals, learning outcomes, learning contents/topics, cross-curricular issues, as well as methodological guidelines.

The content analysis of the set of curriculum documents was important, as it provided a context from which to view elements of curriculum overload.

The purpose of data collection from the content analysis of curriculum documents was to clarify the understanding of curriculum organization and find evidence to answer the research question.

How visible are the aspects of curricular overload in the set of curricular documents in implementation, in primary education and lower secondary education in Kosovo?

And, to the sub-questions: *(i) Is there overload from the expansion of the curricula, the addition of learning content, expectations for students and what is the ratio of the overload to the mandatory teaching time? (ii) Is there curricular overload caused by the way of including cross-curricular issues within the curricula? and (iii) What is the relationship between student outcomes in compulsory education and learning time?*

The subject curricula in implementation, analysed for this study, include grades 1, 3, 5, 6, 8 and 9. The above grades, on which the analysis of the subject curricula is focused, are seen more specifically because among them we have initial classes at education levels (first grade – beginning of primary education, sixth grade – beginning of lower secondary education), initial

classes at different curricular levels (third grade – level II and eighth grade – level IV) and two other classes, as well as two more classes, which are the final classes of the education levels, namely level 1 (fifth grade) and level 2 (ninth grade).

The sample of curriculum documents analysed meant that there was a limitation to the analysis of curriculum documents and curriculum areas. The findings were used to correlate some aspects of the curriculum with some countries in the region and in the OECD, as well as used for triangulation with data obtained through interviews, questionnaires and focus group discussion.

3.4. Data collection and analysis

The data for this study were collected based on the guide prepared for area researchers. The guide contained a brief description of the purpose of the study, the form of presentation to the respondents of the study, the instruments and method of data collection, as well as the dynamic plan for data collection. The data for this study were collected by the researchers of the Pedagogical Institute of Kosovo, during the period April-August 2022.

Interviews, questionnaires with open questions, were conducted in each school included in this study, in suitable spaces provided in advance by the school principals. In one school, 3-4 researchers participated, who in different spaces held meetings with sample respondents from the school and provided the data with the help of pre-prepared instruments. The conversations were recorded with the permission of the respondents who were interviewed, for a duration of 35-45 minutes. Questionnaires with open questions were completed in the presence of the researchers, lasting about 40 minutes.

Meanwhile, the data process, their processing and analysis were carried out according to the dynamic plan for data analysis, using the content analysis method for qualitative data. It was an interconnected process, in several steps, starting with the analysis of curriculum documents, the collection of

data from the respondents of the study, then their processing and interpretation for further stages.

We based the analysis of qualitative data on the method of content analysis (Gläser & Laudel, 2013), through classical content analysis, a process during which concepts and their frequency in a text are analysed according to the purpose and thematic areas researched and interaction of concepts within the examined data. Issues for consideration and discussion, as well as problems that arose during the interviews and open-ended questionnaires, as well as during the focus group discussion, were classified, interpreted and described during the data analysis. Initially, by the determined researchers responsible for a category of subjects included in the study, then by the research team, authors of this study, the content differentiation between the codes was made, as well as the frequency of each code was recorded to provide quantitative information about the topics raised from the respondents of this study.

This approach enabled the collected data to be grouped into thematic categories, related to the research questions, for which interpretations and descriptions were then made within a structure of themes and sub-themes that characterize this study. Thus, for this study, the content analysis method examines the most frequent terms and concepts (Vogrinc, & Saqipi, (2020).

3.5. Limitations of the study

Curricular overload is a complicated and quite complex problem. In the inability to deepen the examination of the curricular contents as a whole, in the vertical and horizontal aspect, in the study we analysed the basic elements of the contents of the curricula that give indications of curricular overload in relation to the teaching time and the real possibilities of realizing the curriculum in the school.

The study was carried out in a period when the educational community, in particular students, teachers and parents, have been confronted, in these last 2-3 years, with the circumstances and influences from the period of the Covid-19 pandemic, which have influenced to some extent the perceptions

theirs in some aspects addressed within the scope of the study - curricular overload.

Another element of the limitations of this study is related to the fact that in this study the subject curricula of all classes were not taken into consideration, as well as in the sample of the study from the school community only public schools were included and not even schools with teaching in the language of the communities. Therefore, generalizing the results of the study on curricular overload in compulsory education in Kosovo presents difficulties, when we take as a basis the influencing factors beyond the curricular documents, such as teaching, textbooks, school environment, etc.

Despite the limitations, this study remains a good source of information for all educational institutions related to the process of curriculum development and implementation, based on the analysis of curriculum documents, experiences of educational systems in dealing with curriculum overload, as well as perceptions of subjects from the educational community, who refer to their authentic experience with the curriculum being implemented. Also, the study provides a good basis of orientations and recommendations for educational institutions regarding the treatment and mitigation of curricular overload.

3.6. Ethical aspect of the study

The study was conducted adhering to research ethics for studies in the area of education, to obtain relevant data for the object of the study. For the study, the orientations of the OECD report (2020) were used for educational systems related to the research dimensions of the problem of curricular overload, always with adaptation for the context of this study.

Since the study used semi-structured interviews, open questionnaires with completion in the presence of the researchers, in advance the researchers engaged in this study agreed with the respondents of the study on the form of the interview, on the time and method of recording the interview, or completing the required data with an open questionnaire.

During the interviews and research visits to the schools included in the study, the necessary information for the study and its purpose was provided, as well as the complete reliability of the use of data from the interviews and open questionnaires, only for the purposes of the study, was ensured.

CHAPTER IV

Research results

The research results represent the teamwork efforts to answer the research questions of this study. The results are organized in three parts. The first part includes the main findings from the analysis of curriculum documents, analysis of subject curricula/syllabi. The second part includes the results from the analysis of some curricular aspects and comparisons with some countries of the region and of the OECD, which are more related to the compulsory teaching time in primary and lower secondary education. While, in the third part, the main findings from the processing and interpretation of the data obtained with semi-structured interviews and questionnaires carried out with respondents from the school community (teachers, students, parents, school directors and quality coordinators) are included as well as with experts and coordinators of the development of curriculum reform and in pre-university education.

4.1. Findings from curriculum analysis

The curriculum system of pre-university education in Kosovo consists of the conceptual pillar, defined in the document Curriculum Framework for Pre-University Education (KCF) in Kosovo and the operational pillar, expressed through the Core Curricula for the formal levels of education (levels I, II and III) and from the subject curricula for each grade.

Dimensions of curriculum overload, such as curriculum extension and curriculum content overload, are directly related to the set of curriculum documents associated with a grade, curriculum grade, or level of education. On this basis, an analysis of the curriculum documents was made, starting from the KKAP, to continue with a focus on the Core Curricula for primary and lower secondary education and a more specific analysis of the subject curricula in use in grades 1, 3, 5, 6 , 8 and 9.

The analysis of curriculum documents, according to their hierarchy, highlighted some important issues considered curriculum overload and the relationship between curriculum expansion, teaching contents and learning outcomes, with mandatory teaching time. The findings from the content

analysis of the set of curriculum documents in implementation are presented according to the hierarchy of the analysed curriculum documents.

4.1.1. Curricular Framework of Pre-University Education in Kosovo

The Pre-University Education Curricular Framework Document in Kosovo (KCF) is a conceptual document of the curriculum and the general organization of the pre-university education system. KCF is built on the basis of competences, referring to European competences, through which it is intended to shift the focus from the pressure for the realization of the content defined by curricula and textbooks to the development of the main competences, broken down through learning outcomes.

The integrated approach of teaching subjects in curricular areas, a total of seven (7) curricular areas, is an innovation, which has resulted in some deviations during the development of core curricula and subject curricula, initially in relation to teaching subjects. The decision to teach all curriculum areas, from the preparatory class (grade 0) to the twelfth grade (12), has led to the further breakdown of the curriculum, from the first grade of primary education, to start with a minimum of 10 subjects . This constitutes an expansion of the curriculum, especially for primary education, which is reflected as a dimension of curriculum overload at this level of education.

The KCF document has defined a total of 62 learning outcomes of the main competencies, which students must achieve during the pre-university education system. The language of the formulation of learning outcomes ensures the connection between outcomes and competences, ensures that the outcomes are progressively achieved through all areas of the curriculum. Among the learning outcomes, seven (7) of them begin with passive verbs, which can be considered as starting points in the learning outcomes in the Core Curriculum and in the subject Curricula that begin with passive verbs.

The descriptions made in the KCF document, about the features of the formal levels of pre-university education and the relations with the curriculum, as well as the descriptions about the main levels of the curriculum - their role in the organization and evaluation of educational

work in the school, are a good reference to avoid possible curricular overload. However, they do not provide orientations and instructions on how to handle and reduce curriculum overload in other phases of curriculum development and implementation.

Curricular overload is not a concept addressed in all the orientations given for the development of curricular documents that emerge from the KCF document, nor in the vocabulary established within this KCF document.

4.1.2. Core Curriculum

The Core Curricula are the first hierarchy of the three curriculum documents, originating from the KCF document. Pre-university education in Kosovo, at each of its levels, has a Core Curriculum document, in which the main competencies defined by the Curricular Framework are further broken down through learning outcomes, which are specific to each degree and curricular area of the relevant level of education.

Within each document of the Core Curriculum we find the description of the features of the curricular levels, the description of the main competencies and the results of the competencies for the curricular level, the description of the curricular areas and the learning outcomes for the curricular areas, the lesson plan, the descriptions of the general methodology, as well as aspects related to the student evaluation system. These elements were points of reference in the analysis of core curricula for primary education and lower secondary education (CC/1 and CC/2).

The Core Curriculum for the preparatory class and primary education of Kosovo (grades 0, 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5). The CC/1 document contains a total of 122 pages, part of which is also the glossary and the contact list of coordinators and deputy coordinators of curricula for levels of education and for curricular areas. The document is organized into two main curriculum levels, the first curriculum level, which includes grades 0, 1 and 2, and the second curriculum level, which includes grades 3, 4 and 5.

The description of the features of the curricular levels (curricular levels 1 and 2) is made on about two (2) pages of the UN document. The aspects covered in the description are treated in a very general way, emphasizing the general elements of the curricular scales, without guidance on how to use the descriptive elements of the curricular scales in setting competency outcomes, describing curricular areas and setting outcomes learning about curricular areas.

Like the description of the features of the curricular levels, the description of the six core competencies for these curricular levels is very general, but it has served as a good basis for determining the learning outcomes for the competencies for the two main levels curriculum of this level of education.

The competency learning outcomes (CLO), for the two main curricular levels of this level of education, are written in clear language, with elements that require various forms of measurement and observation to verify their achievement. In some cases, CLOs have a lot of text (3-4 lines) and a high level of requirements, which makes it difficult to achieve results for all students of the classes for which they are defined. For each competence, 6-9 learning outcomes are defined for a curricular level.

The number of learning outcomes for the main competencies of the first degree (1) reaches 44 learning outcomes, while in the second degree (2) it reaches 50 learning outcomes. So with a total of 94 learning outcomes for key competencies to be achieved by the end of fifth grade.

The description in the UN of the curricular areas is made with the same structure for each curricular area, a structure which contains the following elements: Introduction, purpose, topics and learning outcomes for topics, methodological guidelines, guidelines for the implementation of cross-curricular issues, guidelines for evaluation and guidance on learning materials and resources.

The elements described within the curricular areas have been treated in a very general way, not emphasizing enough the features of the curricular areas in each curricular level and the connection with the general description of the features of the curricular levels. There are cases when the general language of the description of any concept of the curriculum area is repeated

both in the first level of education (grades 1-5) and in the second level of education (grades 6-9), with very small descriptive nuances. As such, the descriptions for curricular areas do not sufficiently orient the developers of subject curricula for the placement of curricular elements that do not affect the overload of students, in particular, the format of the passages does not sufficiently orient teachers and schools in the planning and implementation of educational processes educational in the respective curricular areas.

The way the learning outcomes for curricular areas are set shows the specifics of the respective areas and the opportunities they offer for a wider range of learning activities for the development of the respective areas and the achievement of the learning outcomes. However, they differ greatly in terms of the breadth and depth of requirements within the learning outcomes. They do not differ much in the number of results, regardless of the percentage of teaching time for a curriculum area. For example, the curricular area Languages and communication has over 38% of the teaching time for curricular level 1, the learning outcomes for this curricular area are determined to be 24, while another curricular area, such as for example the curricular area Natural Sciences, has 14 results of learning, with about 5% of the teaching time at the same curricular level.

What greatly differentiates learning outcomes for curricular areas are the number of requirements within a learning outcome, regardless of curricular level. A large part of them, in a direct way, point to a curricular load in relation to the features of the curricular levels and to the teaching time determined for curricular areas. The following two-three examples of results show this trend of overloading with requirements within learning outcomes for curricular areas.

> ***Curricular area Natural sciences, Curricular level 1, result no. 1.6.*** *Identifies ways of orientation and movements in space and shows simple forms of interaction in the human-nature relationship, distinguishes some of the types of environmental pollution caused by different factors in the area where it lives and beyond, shows its role in conservation of the environment and undertakes useful actions that promote a clean environment (MESTI (CC/1), 2016).*
>
> ***Curricular area Natural sciences, Curricular level 2, result no. 1.6.*** *Describes the position of the Earth in the Solar System, the movements of the*

Earth, the Sun, the Moon, and other bodies of this system, the elements of the map, the content of the map, the legend of the map, the cartographic marks, the outline, the plan, the globe, the features of the natural elements of the natural environment (relief, climate, waters, flora and fauna), human/nature interaction, natural hazards, natural resources and objects of natural heritage, in particular those of the Republic of Kosovo (MESTI (CC/1), 2016).

Curricular area Life and work, Curricular level 2, result no. 8.1. *Is aware of the existence of individual diversity in the classroom, at school and in life, to improve the understanding, wishes and aspirations of others, managing situations and resolving conflicts constructively and peacefully (MESTI (CC/1), 2016).*

Another difference in learning outcomes that does not sufficiently guide subject curriculum developers concerns how to conceptualize (i) attitudes, values and beliefs; (ii) Skills and Abilities; and (iii) Specific concepts and knowledge related to the curricular area. In most curricular areas they are common, which means that all these basic elements of the curriculum are developed in both curricular levels. The development of a number of already from the first grade, or even earlier, from the preparatory grade, constitutes elements for expanding the curriculum and curricular contents.

On the other hand, in relation to the orientations and methodological instructions, in all the descriptions within the curriculum areas, there are few orientations and instructions on how teachers should approach the breakdown of the results of the areas into learning outcomes for topics and how to approach the naming of topics, or how to plan for the implementation of the curriculum, which model they should follow with the extension or distribution of learning topics within a class, in relation to the specifics of the respective level/class and the depth and breadth of the content of the respective topics .

Even the orientations and instructions for evaluation, as well as for teaching materials and resources, are general, almost the same, both in CC1 and CC2, with differences between areas, with some specifics for the respective curricular areas, within the format of the CC structure for this level of education.

The curriculum for the preparatory class and primary education in CC1 is divided into curricular areas in percentage and number of teaching hours per area/subject. The following table reflects the curriculum for the preparatory class and primary education, grades 1-5, according to CC1.

Table 4. Curriculum for preparatory class and primary education

Curricular areas	Teaching subjects		Level I - grades			Level II—grades				Tot. Gr. 1-5
			Gr. 1	Gr. 2	**Tot. Gr.1-2**	Gr. 3	Gr.4	Gr.5	**Tot. Gr. 3-4**	
1. Languages and communication	1. Mother tongue 2. English language	Gr. Preparatory: During a week, students develop content from all areas	8	8	**16**	8	8	8	**24**	**40**
2. Arts	3. Artistic education 4. Music education		2	2	**4**	2	2	2	**6**	**10**
3. Mathematics	5. Mathematics		5	5	**10**	5	5	5	**15**	**25**
4. Natural sciences	6. Man and nature		1	1	**2**	2	2	2	**6**	**8**
5. Society and environment	7. Society and environment		1	1	**2**	2	2	2	**6**	**8**
6. Physical education, sports and health	8. Physical education, sports and health		2	2	**4**	2	2	2	**6**	**10**
7. Life and work	9. Skills for life		1	1	**2**	1	1	1	**3**	**5**
10. Elective part			1	1	**2**	1	2	2	**5**	**7**
Total – Weekly hours		18[2]	21	21	**42**	23	24	24	**71**	**113**

Source/MEST (2018 /2021): Subject curricula/learning programs for grades 1-5

[2] For the preparatory class, the organization of the lesson plan remains the competence of the teacher (educator). It is important that the students must go through all areas of the curriculum - the teaching subjects within the week, namely within 18 hours.

Compared to the curriculum from the Curriculum Framework - White Book (DES, 2001), implemented until 2016, the curriculum in implementation has the same number of lessons for primary education, a total of 113 weekly hours, in all grades primary education, grades 1-5. However, there is a significant difference in the number of subjects in classes 1 and 2, because now at least 10 subjects are taught, while according to the preliminary plan, classes 1 and 2 had 7 subjects each. The following table presents the curriculum by subjects and the weekly number of lessons per subject in primary education, implemented in the years 2003-2016.

Table 5. Curriculum for grades 1-5, implemented in the years 2003-2016

Curriculum areas	**Teaching subjects**	Grades					**Total weekly hours gr. 1-5**
		1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	
1. Languages and communication	1. Mother tongue	7	7	7	6	5	**32**
	2. English language	/	/	2	2	2	**6**
2. Arts	3. Figurative education	2	2	1	1	1	**7**
	4. Musical education	2	2	1	1	1	**7**
3. Mathematics	5. Mathematics	5	5	5	5	5	**25**
4. Natural sciences	6. Man and nature	/	/	1	2	2	**5**
5. Social studies and civic education	7. Civic education	/	/	1	2	2	**5**
	8. History	/	/	/	/	2	**2**
6. Physical education and sports	9. Physical education and sports	2	2	2	2	2	**10**
7. Technology	10. Handwork	1	1	1	1	1	**5**
11. Elective art/ - Elective curriculum		1	2	2	2	2	**9**
Total – Weekly teaching hours		20	21	23	24	25	**113**

Source/MEST (2003, 2004, 2005, 2006): Plans and teaching programs for grades 1 - 5.

According to these data, compared to the previous table, it can be seen that with the new curriculum in implementation, three subjects have been added in grades 1-2, such as English Language, Man and Nature and Society and Environment.

As for orientations and instructions for actions and initiatives to address eventual curricular overload, just like in the KCF document, they are also missing in CC1. Curricular overload is not part of the general orientations for primary education, orientations and definitions for curricular fields at this level of education, nor in the vocabulary established within this CC1 document.

Core Curricula for lower secondary education (grades 6, 7, 8 and 9). Lower secondary education is organized in two main curricular levels, which are a continuation of the levels of primary education, namely in the third level (grades 6 and 7) and the fourth level (grades 8 and 9). The structure of the content of the chapters of the CC (II) for lower secondary education is the same as the CC of other levels of pre-university education. The UN document contains a total of 126 pages, including the glossary and the contact list of curriculum coordinators and deputy coordinators for education levels and curriculum areas.

The findings from the analysis of the Core Curriculum for this level of education show the same thing with CC1, regarding the features of the curricular levels. Thus, the features of curricular levels 3 and 4 have been treated in a very general way, emphasizing the description of the levels with the general elements of Level 3 – Further development and orientation and the general elements of Level 4 – Reinforcement and orientation, without guidance on how to use the descriptive elements of the curricular levels in the further development of the curricula for these two curricular levels.

The general descriptive language is also used in the elements described for the six main competences for these curricular levels, but with a difference compared to CC1, emphasizing the competence of communication and expression, the competence of thinking and the competence of learning, as basic competences for other competencies (MEST, 2016 (CC/2).

Learning outcomes for competencies, for both main curricular levels of this level of education, are written in clear language, with elements that require different forms of measurement and observation to verify their achievement. For each key competence, 8 to 10 learning outcomes are defined for a curricular level. The number of learning outcomes for the main competencies of the third degree (3) = 50 learning outcomes, while in the fourth degree (4) it reaches 48 learning outcomes. So with a total of 98 learning outcomes for key competencies to be achieved by the end of ninth grade.

The description in CC of the curricular fields, as in CC1, is made with the same structure for each curriculum field, as in CC1, with a structure that contains the following elements: Introduction, purpose, topics and learning outcomes for topics, methodological guidelines, guidelines for the implementation of cross-curricular issues, guidelines for assessment and guidelines for learning materials and resources.

Even in CC2, the elements described within the concepts of curricular fields are treated in a very general way, not emphasizing enough the features of curricular fields at each curricular level. There are cases when the general language of the description of any concept of the curricular field is repeated from the preliminary level of education, from CC1, with minor descriptive differences. As such the descriptions of curriculum areas do not seem to provide sufficient guidance for developers and implementers of subject curricula.

Learning outcomes for curricular areas in CC2 reflect the specifics of the respective curriculum areas and the opportunities they offer for a wider range of learning activities for their achievement. The same, as in CC1, also in CC2, learning results per curriculum areas (LRA) do not differ much in number of results for a curricular level, regardless of the percentage of teaching time for a curricular area. There is no criterion or standard for setting the number of learning outcomes for areas, to be an additional orientation for developers and users of classroom curricula, as well as for other purposes, such as for the design of school textbooks.

LRAs in CC/2 differ in terms of the number of requirements within a learning outcome and the starting point of reference for the allocation of curriculum area learning outcomes to a curriculum level. In the curricular field Languages and communication, LRA are organized according to basic skills, in other curriculum areas LRA are organized according to the concepts of the relevant curricular field and the learning outcomes that must be achieved by the end of grade 9, then based on their learning outcomes are broken down for a curricular scale.

Even in CC2, another difference in learning outcomes concerns the way concepts are established for: (i) attitudes, values and beliefs; (ii) skills and abilities; and (iii) specific concepts and knowledge related to the curricular area. In most curricular areas they are common to both curricular levels, do not reflect the change from level to curricular level, scope, depth, and orientation to measurement and verification in their achievement or mastery.

As for the methodological instructions, referring to the descriptions within the curricular fields, it is seen that they have general language, close to CC1, without sufficient orientations with the specifics and features of the curricular levels at this level of education, but also of the curricular fields themselves. , in relation to field concepts and learning outcomes for curricular level, the extent or distribution of teaching topics, the depth and breadth of the content of relevant topics, within a class or curricular level.

Even the orientations and instructions for evaluation, as well as for learning materials and resources, are general, with CC1, with small differences between areas, with some specifics for the respective curricular areas, within the format of the CC structure for this level of education.

The curriculum in CC2 for lower secondary education, grades 6-9, is divided into curricular fields, in percentage and number of teaching hours per field/subject. The following table reflects the curriculum for grades 6-9 of lower secondary education.

Table 6. Curriculum for lower secondary education

Curricular areas	Teaching subjects	Level III			Level IV			Tot. Kl. 6-9
		Gr.6	Gr. 7	Tot. Gr. 6-7	Gr. 8	Gr. 9	Tot. Gr. 8-9	
	1. Mother tongue	5	5	10	5	4	9	**19**
1. Languages and communication	2. Foreign language	2	2	4	2	2	4	**8**
	3. Second foreign language	1	1	2	1	1	2	**4**
	4. Musical art	1	1	2	1	1	2	**4**
2. Arts	5. Figurative art	1	1	2	1	1	2	**4**
3. Mathematics	6. Mathematics	4	4	8	4	4	8	**16**
4. Natural Sciences	7. Physics	2	2	4	2	2	4	**8**
	8. Chemistry	/	2	2	2	2	4	**6**
	9. Biology	2	2	4	2	2	4	**8**
5. Society and environment	10. History	2	2	4	2	2	4	**8**
	11. Geography	2	2	4	2	1	3	**7**
	12. Civic education	1	1	2	1	2	3	**5**
6. Physical education, sports and health	13. Physical education, sports and health	2	2	4	2	2	4	**8**
7. Life and work	14. Technology with ICT	2	2	4	2	2	4	**8**
Elective part	15. Elective part	2	1	3	1	2	3	6
Total – Weekly hours		**29**	**30**	**59**	**30**	**30**	**60**	**119**

Source/MEST (2018/2020): Subject curricula/learning programs for grades 6 - 9.

Compared to the curriculum from the Curriculum Framework - White Book (DES, 2001) and the lesson plans and programs for classes and subjects, which were implemented until 2016, the curriculum for the current curricula in implementation has a small difference in the number of teaching hours for lower secondary education, a total of 119 weekly hours now, while in the previous curricula there were 117 weekly hours, i.e. one hour more per week in grades 6 and 7. The second foreign language subject has been introduced with one hour lesson per week within the teaching time for the English language subject, as well as the teaching time of the elective curriculum has been reduced to 3 hours per week, or about 33% less teaching time for the elective curriculum. Meanwhile, the teaching time has been increased for the subject of Mathematics, in the 9th grade and in the subject Technology with ICT for grades 6, 7 and 8. The following table presents the lesson plan according to the subjects and the weekly number of lessons per subject in lower secondary education, implemented in the years 2003-2016.

Table 7. Curriculum for grades 6-9, implemented in 2003-2016

Curricular areas	Teaching subjects	Grades				Total weekly hours (4 years)
		6	7	8	9	
1. Languages and communication	1. Mother tongue	5	5	5	4	19
	2. English language	3	3	3	3	12
2. Arts	3. Musical education	1	1	1	1	4
	4. Figurative education	1	1	1	1	4
3. Mathematics	5. Mathematics	4	4	4	3	15
4. Natural sciences	6. Physics	2	2	2	2	8
	7. Chemistry	/	2	2	2	6
	8. Biology	2	2	2	2	8
5. Social studies and civic education	9. History	2	2	2	2	8
	10. Geography	2	2	2	1	7
	11. Civic education	1	1	1	1	4
6. Physical education and sports	12. Physical education and sports	2	2	2	2	8
7. Technology	13. Technology with ICT	1	1	1	2	5
	14. Elective learning – Curriculum determined by school	2	1	2	4	9
Total – Weekly teaching hours		**28**	**29**	**30**	**30**	**117**

Source/MEST (2003, 2004, 2005): Educational plans and programs for grades 6 - 9.

From the data in the table, it can be seen that there is a minimum increase of 2 teaching hours per week at this level of education and there is an expansion of the curriculum with a new subject, the addition of the second foreign language subject.

Even in CC2, in terms of orientations and instructions for actions and initiatives to address eventual curricular overload, just like in the KCF document, in CC1, they are missing. Curricular overload is not part of the general orientations for lower secondary education, it is not part of the orientations and definitions for the curricular fields at this level of education, nor in the vocabulary established within this CC2 document.

4.1.3. Findings from the analysis of subject curricula/learning programs

The structure of the subject curricula is the same for each grade, based on the guidelines in the Core Curricula. After entering into each document of the subject curricula, the teaching plan, of the corresponding level of education, is included, which ensures a coherence in orientations to take into account the teaching time for each field/subject and for each class. Each document of the subject curricula of a class is accompanied by a decision on the implementation of the subject plan and program, issued and recorded by the cabinet of the minister.

The programs of each teaching subject are built on the basis of the results of competences, concepts and learning outcomes of the relevant curricular field. The content of the subject curriculum/learning program of a learning subject includes the following aspects:

- Introduction;
- Purpose of teaching the subject in the relevant class;
- Concepts of the area, learning topics and learning outcomes;
- Methodological guidelines;
- Instructions for the implementation of cross-curricular issues;

- Guidelines for assessment;
- Instructions for learning materials and resources.

The amount and depth of instructions and orientations provided for subject curricula/learning programs differs between subjects, including within a curricular area, with nuances of maintaining the specifics of the subject, but also depending on the approach that the curriculum design groups have worked on subject.

The differences in the instructions and orientations of the subject curricula are observed in the language of the description of the purpose of the subject curriculum in the respective class, in the number of learning outcomes, especially in the subjects that have the same amount of weekly lessons, in the instructions for implementation of cross-curricular issues, as well as in other guidelines. More detailed instructions and orientations are reflected in the English language curricula in each grade. In English language curricula, the number of learning outcomes determined to be achieved during a school year is greater compared to other subject curricula, regardless of the weekly fund of lessons.

In the document where the subject curricula of a class are integrated, the lesson plan and the weekly number of lessons are reflected. For the optional part - the curriculum defined by the school, there are no orientations and suggestions for the possible choices within a class. General orientations are reflected in the Core Curricula of the respective levels of education, in chapter IV Elective Curriculum, in the relevant Administrative Instruction for the elective curriculum and in the relevant guide for the training of teachers holding the elective curriculum.

In 2019, the Kosovo Pedagogical Institute published the study: *Competency-based curriculum - Experiences during implementation, challenges and opportunities, as well as the needs for continuous support of teachers*. The published report brings some valuable findings, which are related to the elements considered as curricular overload. They are supplemented with some additional findings from this study, which are summarized and reported as follows:

- The descriptions within each part of the structure of the subject curricula differ both in the language of the formulation and the extent of the instructions, as well as in the number of pages, regardless of the teaching time that the teaching subjects have based on the teaching plan;
- The number of topics and learning outcomes in subject curricula is reflected with marked differences, despite the same teaching time for different teaching subjects, or even different teaching time;
- The writing of learning outcomes for educational topics has differences in structure, organization, use of active or passive verbs, which reflect the action that students must perform within the framework of educational activities, special activities, tasks, etc.;
- The connection of the learning outcomes of the subject (LOS) with the learning results per curriculum areas (LRA) has not been done for all the teaching subjects of the respective classes;
- The content and language of methodological instructions and other instructions, with marked differences, with repetition in programs of different classes and with generalizations that do not sufficiently guide the work of teachers in the process of planning and implementing the curriculum in the respective class;
- In the subject curriculum, there are minimal instructions and orientations for the approach to the development of competencies and the reference document for the results of the main competencies at the relevant curricular level;
- In the subject curricula/learning programs for the class, as well as in other curriculum documents, there are no orientations and instructions for actions and initiatives that should be taken at the school level, for the eventual addressing of curricular overload.

An obvious difference in the programs of learning subjects, a difference which contains elements considered curricular overload, are the structuring,

content and number of learning topics and results for learning topics, in relation to the learning time that is allocated for learning subjects according to the official plan of teaching for primary and lower secondary education. Some of the main findings related to these aspects are reflected in the following part of this report.

4.1.4. Some specific findings from the analysis of subject curricula/learning programs in primary education

The general findings reported above apply to most primary education subject curricula. Some specific findings, which are reported in the following section, are related to teaching topics and learning outcomes for teaching topics (LTL), which are fundamental determinants of curriculum implementation and which, referring to the literature, are considered the main aspects of curricular overload.

The subject curricula in primary education contain an approximate number of pages, or with small differences, from 94 pages in the first grade to 121 pages in the fifth grade. So, a total of about 510 pages for subject curricula in grades 1-5, which includes general information and curricula for each subject in the respective grade. Learning outcomes in subject curricula occupy the main space in subject curricula.

After the introduction, the purpose of the subject is reflected in each subject curriculum, sometimes described with one or two paragraphs, sometimes with a list of several goals. There are specific examples that the subject goals in the relevant class focus on concrete specifics, such as one of the goals of the Mathematics subject in the first grade is mathematical formation through integrated learning and in the context of everyday life[3]. Or one of the goals of the subject Society and the environment in the first grade is for the student

[3] More broadly on the aims of the Mathematics subject for the first grade, see the curriculum of this subject.

to gain knowledge about himself, the community and the environment where he lives [4].

The way of setting the goals of the same subject, which is taught in different classes, in some subjects is seen as an element of possible overload for subject curricula, in relation to the class in which the relevant subject is taught and the specific features of the class and of the curriculum level. They often do not have two or three specific subject goals for the respective grade, as reported in the previous paragraph, of what students should gain from the subject curriculum in the respective grade. E.g., *The development of knowledge and understanding of scientific and technological concepts through the investigation of biological, physical, chemical and geographical processes in the environment* is one of the seven learning goals of the subject Man and nature. This learning goal of the subject Man and nature is part of the curriculum in the first grade and is repeated with the same wording in every subject curriculum, up to the fifth grade[5].

Following the subject objective, subject curricula reflect learning topics and learning outcomes. In subject curricula, learning topics are not described in the same way that domain concepts are described in core curricula. The coverage, depth and breadth of the treatment of teaching topics of a teaching subject, within a class, are determined by the learning outcomes.

Learning outcomes for learning topics (LOT) are organized in the subject curricula in an approximately the same format in all learning subjects, they in the vast majority of cases do not have a number ranking index, which from a practical point of view is considered to be facilitated the work of teachers during the planning for the implementation of the curriculum - in annual plan, plan for teaching periods, weekly plan and daily plan. The LOS index is considered to be a relief to textbook developers and other users of subject curricula.

[4] More broadly on the objectives of the subject Society and the environment for the first grade, see the curriculum of this subject.
[5] More broadly on the aims of the subject Man and nature, see the curricula of this subject for grades 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.

As expected from the CC analysis, the number of topics and learning outcomes in the subject curricula is different, due to the specifics of the subjects. However, there are significant differences in subject curricula that have the same teaching time determined by the official curriculum. The following table reflects some comparative data for the teaching subjects of grades 1, 3 and 5, in relation to the number of teaching hours for a teaching week and the number of teaching topics and LOS for the entire school year.

Table 8: Number of hours per teaching week, number of annual topics and number of LOS - annual in subject curricula/learning programs - grades 1, 3 and 5

Teaching subjects	Number of hours per teaching week			Number of annual topics			Number of LOS – annual		
	Grades			Grades			Grades		
	1	3	5	1	3	5	1	3	5
1. Albanian language	7	6	6	24	30	22	33	50	54
2. English language	1	2	2	18	24	24	187	215	190
3. Figurative education	1	1	1	16	14	23	41	57	42
4. Musical education	1	1	1	11	9	8	22	22	26
5. Mathematics	5	5	5	11	14	11	72	94	90
6. Man and nature	1	2	2	9	11	10	31	49	56
7. Society and environment	1	2	2	6	11	9	21	36	35
8. Physical education, sports and health	2	2	2	11	7	7	41	20	21
9. Skills for life	1	1	1	6	6	5	27	30	31
10. Elective part	1	1	2	They are determined by the school, namely the teachers who teach the elective curriculum.					
Total	**21**	**23**	**24**	**112**	**126**	**119**	**475**	**573**	**545**

Source/MEST (2018/2019/2021): Subject curricula/learning programs for grades 1, 3 and 5.

From the table above, it can be seen that there are significant differences in subject curricula that have the same teaching time and different teaching times, determined by the official curriculum. As is the case with the Albanian language subject, where the maximum LOS reaches 54 learning outcomes in the 5th grade, with 6 hours of teaching per week, while in the English language subject a maximum of 190 learning outcomes in the 5th grade -, with 2 hours of teaching time per week. These differences reflect the specifics that the mother tongue (Albanian language) has with the English language, despite the fact that these two subjects belong to the same curricular field, with common concepts and common results for the curricular field Languages and communication.

Differences with the same teaching time within a curricular field, in the field of Arts, are observed in the teaching subjects Figurative Education and Music Education. The difference is reflected in the way the learning topics are set and in the number of LOS, where about 70% of the learning results from these two learning subjects, in grades 1, 3 and 5, are from the subject of Figurative Education. The language of formulating the requirements within the LOS is approximate, in the Figurative Education subject, in the formulation of the LOS, the conjunction of is mainly used, before the verbs that indicates the action that the student must do, and there is a considerable number of LOS with passive voice: to know , to understand (in grades 1-4). These differences are expected to be reflected in the work of teachers, since these two subjects are mainly taught by classroom teachers who also teach other general subjects.

There are cases when the number of LOS placed in the subject curriculum is equal to the number of results of the corresponding curricular field, which are placed in the curriculum of the same grade, such as the case of the subject curriculum Skills for life - 5th grade. Or there are cases when the number of LOS in the fifth grade is 50% smaller than in the first grade, as is the case in the subject Physical education, sports and health.

In addition to the difference in the number of results, despite the fact that some subject curricula have the same teaching time, in some LOS there are also differences in the number of requirements and their depth within a learning result, in relation to the age of the students, etc. *E.g., in an LOS, in the subject Man and Nature, first grade, students are asked to describe the*

physical properties of materials in everyday life, including: flexibility, transparency, hardness and magnetic properties.

Or in certain cases, the LOS[6] Or requirements are higher than the learning outcome of the curricular area, or that go beyond the requirements of the area outcomes (LRA), as shown in the following example, in the subject curriculum Man and nature, grade 4.

The concept of the curriculum area (level 2): MATTER, PROPERTIES AND TRANSFORMATIONS

Learning outcome of the area: Identifies and researches natural and artificial materials used in everyday life according to their properties and transformations. *(must be reached by the end of grade 5)*

Learning topics	**Learning outcomes of the subject by topic (LOST) – gr. 4**
Materials, their origin, composition and properties Pure substances, mixed substances and solutions Air and its components	• Distinguishes materials based on living and non-living nature (metal, mineral, organic and composite materials); • Compares different materials according to density, thermal and electrical conductivity, according to hardness and relates them to their use; • Classifies materials based on composition into: pure materials and mixed materials; • Distinguishes mixtures and solutions; • Demonstrates the separation of mixtures by the method of filtration and decantation; • Compares the solubility of different substances in water and the dependence of solubility on temperature; • Explains that the aggregate state of the material depends on the external conditions, especially the temperature;

[6] In more detail, see the subject curricula/learning programs for grades 4 and 5, MESTI (2020, 2021).

	• Distinguishes the main components of air (nitrogen, oxygen, carbon dioxide), and demonstrates any of them by means of an experiment; • Interprets the importance of oxygen for breathing as well as the importance of protecting the air from impurities.

The concept of the curriculum area (level 2): Electric and magnetic interaction **Learning outcome of the area:** 1.5 Describes the interaction of bodies, materials and living beings. (must be reached by the end of gr. 5)	
Learning topics	**Learning outcomes of the subject by topic (LOST) – gr. 4**
Electric and magnetic interaction	• Builds the simple electroscope and with it distinguishes bodies that are charged and not charged with electricity; • Explains atmospheric electricity and protection from it; • Demonstrates with two electroscopes conductors and separators of electric current; • Builds the simple electric circuit, illustrates its scheme and describes the role of each component part; • Distinguish between conductors and electrical separators with the help of the electrical circuit; • Demonstrates the closing of the electrical circuit with an aqueous solution of salt; • Identifies everyday appliances in the home that work with electricity, short circuit and danger from electric current; • Explains with a demonstration the magnetic action of magnets in environments and

distinguishes substances that are magnetized from those that are not; • Constructs the simple electromagnet and demonstrates its magnetic properties.

As can be seen from the table above, some LOS are very high expectations in relation to the age of 9-year-old children who start learning in the fourth grade or 10-year-old children who start the fifth grade. They (LOS) have a risk of being reflected in school textbooks. The chain of students' workload can be reflected even more, in cases where the competence of teachers is lacking to simplify the learning contents, to practice interactive learning activities and to connect the lessons with situations from everyday life.

There is a discussion raised for further study regarding the depth and coherence of the learning outcomes for the subject, in relation to their vertical and horizontal development, as for example one of the outcomes of the mathematics subject in the first grade, where it is specified that the student by the end of the first grade *reads and writes numbers from 1 to 20*. Limiting the issue of reading numbers only up to 20 does not seem to suit the age of the students, because it limits them to read numbers only up to 20, just as it is difficult to achieve the other mathematics result in this grade, which specifies that the student until the end of the first grade *solves linear equations and inequalities with one unknown (using the additive and multiplicative properties).*

Another aspect, which is considered to be curricular overload, is the way of handling and placing cross-curricular issues within each subject curriculum in primary education. In the current subject curricula, orientations and guidelines for the implementation of cross-curricular issues are addressed after the methodological guidelines. Orientations and instructions for cross-curricular issues are given in different forms in the subject curricula, in the form of general descriptions, only with the placement of issues of cross-curricular issues in the relevant subject curriculum, without any special description, as well as with placement of cross-curricular issues and more

descriptions of the aspects of their coverage within the relevant subject curriculum. The following table reflects the differences in the way of handling and setting cross-curricular issues within each subject curriculum in primary education.

Table 9. Differences in the presentation of cross-curricular issues in the subject curricula of primary education.

Teaching subjects	Cross-curricular issues [7]		
	Grades		
	1	3	5
1. Mother tongue/Albanian language	A	A	A
2. English language	A	A	A
3. Figurative education	C/6	C/6	B/5
4. Musical education	C/2	C/2	C/2
5. Mathematics	A	A	A
6. Man and nature	B/2	B/5	C/2
7. Society and environment	B/5	B/5	B/5
8. Physical education, sports and health	B/4	A	A
9. Skills for life	B/5	B/4	B/5
10. Elective part	They are determined by the school, namely the teachers who teaches the optional curriculum		

Source/MEST (2018, 2019, 2021): Subject curricula/learning programs for grades 1, 3 and 5.

As such, in the form of how the curricular issues are decided and handled in the corner curricula, they do not sufficiently orient teachers and schools in planning and carrying out educational processes to enable the development of competences

[7] A – indicates that the form of description is general; B – shows only the number of cross-curricular issues placed in the relevant subject curriculum, which are not described; C- indicates the number of cross-curricular issues, which are described within the relevant subject curriculum; and D – indicates that the relevant subject curriculum does not have any data on cross-curricular issues.

and in this way are considered as an element of overload curriculum, both in the development of subject curricula and in planning the implementation of the curriculum by teachers.

4.1.5. Some specific findings from the analysis of subject curricula/learning programs in lower secondary education

As with primary education curricula, the general findings reported for subject curricula in the section above apply to most lower secondary education subject curricula. Some specific findings, which are reported in the following section, are related to learning topics and learning outcomes for learning topics (LLP), which are fundamental determinants of curriculum implementation and which, with reference to the literature, are considered the main aspects of curricular overload.

Subject curricula in lower secondary education contain page numbers, with slight differences from grade to grade, from 175 pages in the sixth grade to 229 pages in the ninth grade. So a total of about 800 pages for subject curricula in grades 6-9. The subject curricula for each grade contain general and specific information for each curricular subject. The learning outcomes in the subject curricula occupy the main space in the subject curricula in these classes.

As in the subject curricula of primary education, also in the subject curricula in lower secondary education, the way of setting the goals of the same subject that is taught in different classes, in some subjects is seen as an element of possible overload for the subject curricula, in relation to the class in which the relevant subject is taught and the specific features of the class and the curricular level. This is due to repeating the same goals of the subject curriculum from grade to grade, without specifying what the students should gain from the subject curriculum in the respective grade.

In relation to the teaching topics, the same as in the subject curricula of primary education, the teaching topics in the subject curricula of lower secondary education are not described, as the field concepts are described in the core curriculum of this level of education (CC/2). In this regard, only the

Civic Education subject is different, as within the methodological guidelines, the activities with students are described with specifics for the teaching topics, in grades 8 and 9, and through the description of the activities with students, to a large extent, the aspects of coverage of teaching topics, which are also broken down with LOS. In other subjects, the coverage, depth and breadth of the treatment of teaching topics of a teaching subject, within a class, are mainly determined by the learning outcomes.

Subject learning outcomes (SLT) are organized into subject curricula in a roughly the same format across all subjects, with differences in English and the second foreign language (German/French). LOS in the vast majority of cases do not have a number ranking index, which from a practical point of view even for this level of education is considered to facilitate the work of teachers during planning for the implementation of the curriculum, but it would also be a relief for textbook developers school and other users of subject curricula in lower secondary education.

The number of subjects and learning outcomes in the subject curricula of lower secondary education is different, due to the specifics of the subjects at this level of education. However, there are significant differences in subject curricula that have the same teaching time determined by the official curriculum. The following table reflects some comparative data for the teaching subjects in grades 6, 8 and 9, in relation to the number of teaching hours for a teaching week and the number of LOS teaching topics throughout the school year.

Table 10: Number of hours per teaching week, number of annual topics and number of annual LOS in subject curricula/learning programs - grades 6, 8 and 9

Teaching subjects	Number of hours per teaching week			Number of annual topics			Number of LOS – annual		
	Grades			Grades			Grades		
	6	8	9	6	8	9	6	8	9
1. Mother tongue	5	5	4	31	34	30	48	45	58
2. English language[8]	2	2	2	32	32	32	190	270	174
3. Second foreign language	1	1	1	3	16	16	24	37	41
4. Figurative art	1	1	1	3	7	12	42	43	79
5. Musical art	1	1	1	18	13	14	23	27	32
6. Mathematics	4	4	4	18	23	11	110	65	63
7. Physics	2	2	2	14	10	9	70	71	66
8. Biology	2	2	2	8	8	6	42	62	67
9. Chemistry	/	2	2	/	7	4	/	80	61
10. History	2	2	2	10	17	16	40	50	60
11. Geography	2	2	1	4	15	10	52	114	85
12. Civic education	1	1	2	10	6	9	32	31	66
13. Physical education, sports and health	2	2	2	8	7	8	31	16	17
14. Technology with ICT	2	2	2	10	8	8	58	68	60
15. Elective part	2	1	2	They are determined by the school, namely the teachers who teaches the elective curriculum					
Total	**29**	**30**	**30**	**169**	**203**	**185**	**762**	**979**	**929**

Source/MEST (2018, 2019, 2020): Subject curricula/learning programs for grades 6, 8 and 9.

[8] The learning outcomes for the English language subject reflect specific, more learning outcomes per learning unit, which in other learning subjects are determined by teachers during lesson planning.

From the table above, it can be seen that, in relation to the learning results, there are significant differences in the subject curricula that have the same teaching time and different teaching times, determined by the official curriculum. A comparison of the differences from the table above is made for several subjects, with the same teaching time, 2 hours of teaching per week in grade 8. The differences in the number of results of these subjects are reflected in the following figure.

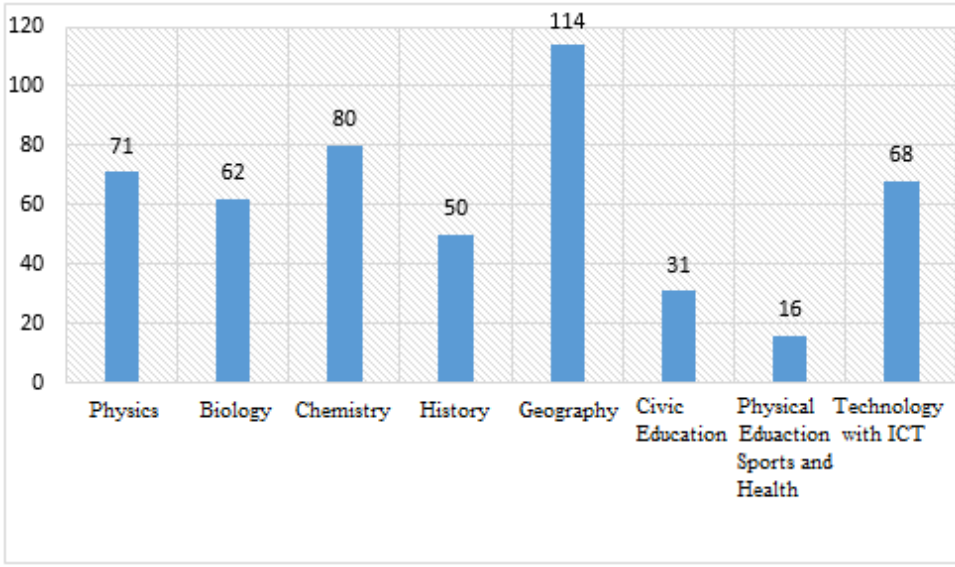

Figure 1. Number of LOS for teaching subjects with 2 teaching hours per week (grade 8)

From the figure it can be seen that there are marked differences in the number of learning outcomes in subjects with the same teaching time (2 hours per week [9]). We have cases with 16 learning outcomes for the whole school year (Physical Education, sports and health) and with 114 learning outcomes (Geography). In the first case, the small number of results may have reflected the workload of the teachers for determining the teaching units based on LOS. Whereas, in the second case, the coverage of all LOSs

[9] English language also has 2 lessons per week, but it is not included in this comparison, since the differences in this subject are highlighted in all classes, both in primary and secondary education.

with teaching units may have reflected the workload for teachers, based on the annual number of hours (72 annual hours) and the number of 114 LOSs.

There are significant differences in relation to the number of learning outcomes in two subjects of the same curricular field, the Society and the Environment field, for the same teaching time: History 2 lessons per week = 50 learning outcomes for the whole year; Geography 2 lessons per week = 114 learning outcomes for the whole year. On the other hand, the number of teaching topics for these two subjects is approximate.

In addition to the number in the learning outcomes, in relation to the weekly number of teaching hours, also in relation to the formulation of the learning outcomes for the learning topics of the subject, there are differences in structure, organization, use of the active verb, use of the plural or the singular in results etc. The element of overload is reflected in the demands and expectations for students in some LOS, of different subjects.

The description of learning outcomes for learning topics (RLL) differs even within a curriculum area, in different subjects, for example in the subject Biology, 6th grade, this is how a LRL looks like:

> *Distinguishes between the terms organism, population and living community. The organism is a living being. Population is defined as a group of plants or animals of the same type that live and reproduce in a certain place and time. A community consists of many populations living in a particular place. (Biology, 6th grade).*

The LOS above, goes beyond the requirements to draft a LOS, which must have the goal or object, action or active verb, criterion and condition. The result also has explanations for the content of the result. On the other hand, in the Physics subject, 6th grade, from the same curricular field, we have results more concentrated only in LOS requirements, such as:

> *Shows examples of cyclic processes of matter and bodies in nature (Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Geography) and of human recycling. (Physics, 6th grade).*

This approach to the development of LOSs does not reflect the integrated approach in the development of curricula, which is not expected to reflect the integrated approach in the development of school textbooks either.

Even in the curricular field Society and the environment, significant differences are reflected in the scope and depth of LOS, in some cases with requirements of approximate content, which are seen as an unnecessary overload for students, but also for teachers. Like what:

- *Explains the relationship between man and the environment, such as: the consequences of climate change on the environment and on health, natural and man-made hazards and ways of sustainable management of natural resources (Geography, 6th grade).*
- *Describes the main causes and forms of environmental pollution and explains the multiple consequences of pollution, both for humans and other living things (Civic Education, 6th grade).*

As with LOSs and teaching topics in primary education, also for LOSs and teaching topics in various lower secondary education subjects, there is a discussion raised for further study regarding the depth, scope and coherence of the topics, teaching and learning outcomes for subjects.

Another aspect, which is considered to be curricular overload, is the way of handling and setting cross-curricular issues within each subject curriculum in lower secondary education (grades 6-9).

The orientations and instructions in the subject curricula, for the implementation of cross-curricular issues, are addressed after the methodological instructions. They are given in different forms:

- in the form of general descriptions;
- - only by setting the names of cross-curricular issues in the relevant subject curriculum, without any special description;
- - by establishing cross-curricular issues and by describing the aspects of their coverage within the relevant subject curriculum.

Table 11. Differences in the presentation of cross-curricular issues in the subject curricula of lower secondary education.

Teaching subjects	Cross-curricular issues [10]		
	Grades		
	6	8	9
1. Mother tongue	A	A	A
2. English language	A	A	A
3. Second foreign language	A	A	A
4. Figurative education	B/5	B/5	B/5
5. Musical education	C/4	C/4	C/4
6. Mathematics	A	A	A
7. Physics	C/2	C/2	C/2
8. Biology	C/3	C/2	C/2
9. Chemistry	/	C/2	A
10. History	B/5	C/2	B/5
11. Geography	B/5	C/2	C/5
12. Civic education	C/5	B/5	C/5
13. Physical education, sports and health	C/4	C/6	C/5
14. Technology with ICT	B/5	B/9	B/8
15. Elective part	They are determined by the school, namely the teachers who teaches the elective curriculum		

Source/MEST (2018, 2019, 2020): Subject curricula/learning programs for grades 6, 8 and 9.

[10] A – indicates that the form of description is general; B – shows only the number of cross-curricular issues placed in the relevant subject curriculum, which are not described; C- indicates the number of cross-curricular issues, which are described within the relevant subject curriculum; and D – indicates that the relevant subject curriculum has no data on cross-curricular issues.

The table above reflects the differences in the way of handling and setting cross-curricular issues within each subject curriculum in lower secondary education. In the form of how the curricular issues are decided and handled in the corner curricula, they do not sufficiently orient teachers and schools in the planning and implementation of educational processes to enable the development of competencies and, in this way, are considered as an element of curricular overload , both in the development of subject curricula and in planning the implementation of the curriculum by teachers.

4.2. Findings from the analysis of some factors related to the curriculum and their comparison with some countries in the region and the OECD

The analysis of some curricular aspects, in some countries of the region and the OECD, has focused on six aspects: (i) Compulsory learning time in primary and lower secondary education; (ii) Distribution of teaching time for curricular areas/subjects; (iii) Duration of the school year and vacations within a school year; (iv) Learning time and student achievements in international and national assessments; (v) The average number of students in the class and the teacher-student ratio; and (vi) Working hours of teachers.

4.2.1. Compulsory learning time in primary and lower secondary education

Compulsory learning time refers to the amount and distribution of compulsory learning hours, the curriculum, which covers each grade and curriculum area/subject that must be provided by every public school and must be attended or attended in formal settings of the class, from all public school students. Usually this is done according to the year calendar for public schools in primary and lower secondary education, which is determined by the education systems of the respective countries.

Compulsory learning time in primary and lower secondary education is related to the years of schooling at the respective level of education and to the days of learning at these two levels of education. According to the OECD

Education Overview Report (OECD, 2021), primary education lasts an average of six years in OECD countries and economies, ranging from four (4) to seven (7) years. . While lower secondary education lasts an average of three (3) years in OECD countries, ranging from two (2) to five (5) years. In some OECD countries, at least one year of upper secondary education is part of compulsory full-time general education. In high-achieving countries in PISA, such as Estonia and Finland, students enrol in first grade at age 7, primary education lasts six years, and lower secondary education lasts three years.

Compared to the OECD average for years of schooling in primary and lower secondary education, primary education in Kosovo spans five years, including grades 1-5, while lower secondary education spans four years, grades 6-9. The preparatory/preschool class in Kosovo is still not mandatory by legislation, with the draft law on preschool education this class is expected to become mandatory in the school year 2023/2024.

On the other hand, beyond the years of schooling, there are significant differences in the number of compulsory lessons, both in primary education and in lower secondary education. According to the OECD report on education overview based on educational indicators (OECD, 2021), students from OECD countries have on average 7639 hours of compulsory education during primary education (4590 hours of education) and lower secondary education (3049 teaching hours). Poland has the minimum teaching hours of 5334 hours, while Australia has twice that, 11060 teaching hours (OECD, 2021).

In relation to the number of annual teaching hours, students of primary and lower secondary education in Kosovo, from grades 1-9, according to the current curriculum, are guaranteed a total of 8524 teaching hours, of them in primary education (grades 1 -5) there are 4181 lessons, while in lower secondary education (grades 6-9) there are a total of 4343 lessons.

Table 12. Years of schooling and teaching hours in primary and lower secondary education in some countries in the region and in the OECD

No.	*Countries*[11]	Elementary education		Lower secondary education		Total teaching hours in primary and lower secondary education
		Years of schooling	Teaching hours	Years of schooling	Teaching hours	
1	Estonia	*6*	3964	*3*	2468	6432
2	Slovenia	*6*	4091	*3*	2298	6389
3	Sweden	*6*	4283	*3*	2607	6890
4	Austria	*4*	2820	*4*	3600	6420
5	Finland	*6*	3962	*3*	2423	6385
6	Germany	*4*	2990	*5*	4502	7492
7	OECD	*6*	4590	*3*	3049	7639
8	Kosovo	*5*	4181	*4*	4343	8524
9	Albania	*5*	4025	*4*	4130	8155
10	North Macedonia [12]	*6*	5400	*3*	3348	8748

The marked differences between the lessons in primary education and lower secondary education come from the fact that some countries have 4 years of primary education, some 5 years (such as Kosovo and Albania) and some 6 years (such as .Finland, Estonia Sweden, Macedonia), versus lower secondary education, which some countries have 3 years (such as Finland, Estonia Sweden).

[11] The data source for European countries relies on the OECD report (2021) Education at a Glance 2021: OECD Indicators, OECD Publishing, Paris,https://doi.org/10.1787/b35a14e5-en

[12] Primary education in North Macedonia is divided into three 3-year cycles, within which there are 9 years of compulsory schooling.

On the other hand, according to the data from the table above, primary education students in Kosovo have an average of 836 hours of learning in a class within a school year, while students in a lower secondary education class have an average of 1086 hours of learning in a year school. In OECD countries, compulsory learning time for primary school students averages 807 hours per year per grade, while lower secondary students per grade receive an average of 923 hours of compulsory learning per school year.

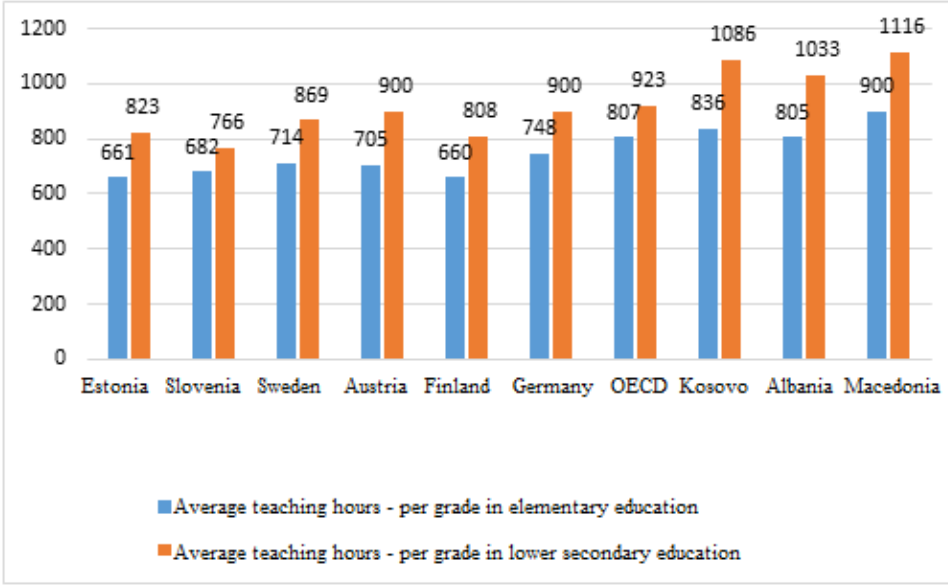

Figure 2. Average teaching hours per class, in primary and lower secondary education, in selected countries in the region and in the OECD.

In addition to the differences in the number of lessons, the OECD report (2021) also shows differences in the duration of lessons, from 30-40 minutes, 45-50 minutes, 55-60 minutes, etc., with an average of 45- 50 minutes of lessons. In some countries, such as Sweden, Finland, Italy, the lesson in lower secondary education lasts 60 minutes. In Estonia, the lesson lasts 45 minutes. In Kosovo, the duration of the lesson is the same, both in primary education and in lower secondary education, 45 minutes[13].

[13] For the case of Kosovo, we have not been able to secure any legal document, which determines the duration of the lesson in primary and secondary education in Kosovo. The

Compared to the same length of lessons in Estonia, basic education in Kosovo has over 2000 compulsory lessons, more than Estonia. However, in Estonia, in addition to compulsory teaching time, non-compulsory teaching hours and other forms of student support are also offered, in order to achieve learning outcomes.

On the other hand, in relation to the education in Sweden, where the lesson lasts 60 minutes, in the basic education in Kosovo, about 500 less lessons are held, or about 56 less lessons for a class in a school year. Even in Sweden, different forms of support are offered to students, in function of achieving learning outcomes and developing students' potentials.

So, if in Kosovo the duration of a lesson was 60 minutes, for primary education, it would be an average of the annual load of Kosovar students per class in a total of 627 lessons, while in lower secondary education it would be an average of per class about 815 teaching hours.

4.2.2. Distribution of teaching time for curricular areas/subjects

As for the distribution of teaching time for subjects and classes within a level of education, in Kosovo it is regulated by curriculum documents. In the document Curricular Framework for Pre-University Education (MESTI, 2016), the distribution of teaching time is made in percentage, for curricular areas for each curricular level.

The same approach is followed in the Core Curricula (MESTI, 2016) for education levels, but in addition to it, the specific table of the lesson plan for the subjects for each class is also reflected. This latter approach is reflected in all subject curricula/learning programs for each grade.

Almost the same practice is followed by many OECD countries. According to the OECD report (2021), in about a quarter of countries with available or reported data, the distribution of learning time across classrooms is flexible,

practice of schools in Kosovo shows that the lesson is planned for 45 minutes, but often in the winter season it is reduced from 45 minutes to 35-40 minutes, because schools, mainly urban ones, work in two shifts.

i.e. the teaching time for a certain subject is determined for a certain number of classes or even for the entire compulsory education, without specifying the time that will be allocated to each class, which is then done by the local authorities or by the schools. The following figure reflects the distribution of teaching time in education for curricular areas/subjects in primary education.

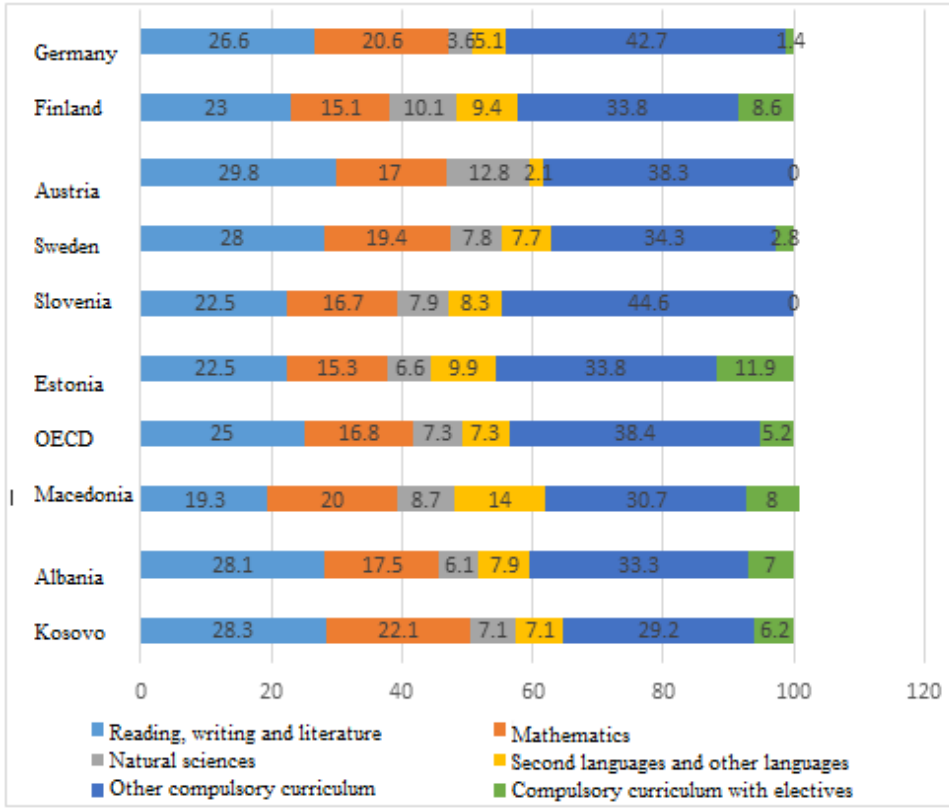

Figure 3. Distribution of teaching time for curricular areas/subjects in primary education in some countries in the region and in the OECD

The data from the figure above show that in the curricula of primary education in Kosovo, in the curricular areas Languages and communication (Mother tongue - reading, writing and literature and foreign languages) and in Mathematics, about 57.5% of the teaching time is determined against learning other subjects. Whereas, the average teaching time in OECD countries in these curricular areas is about 42%.

As for the optional curriculum, in primary education in Kosovo, it includes over 6% of the compulsory learning time, while in OECD countries, the learning time for the optional curriculum in primary education includes about 5% of the learning time mandatory at this level of education.

Even the comparison of teaching time for curricular fields in lower secondary education shows differences in teaching time at this level of education in Kosovo with European countries and the OECD average. These differences are reflected in the following figure.

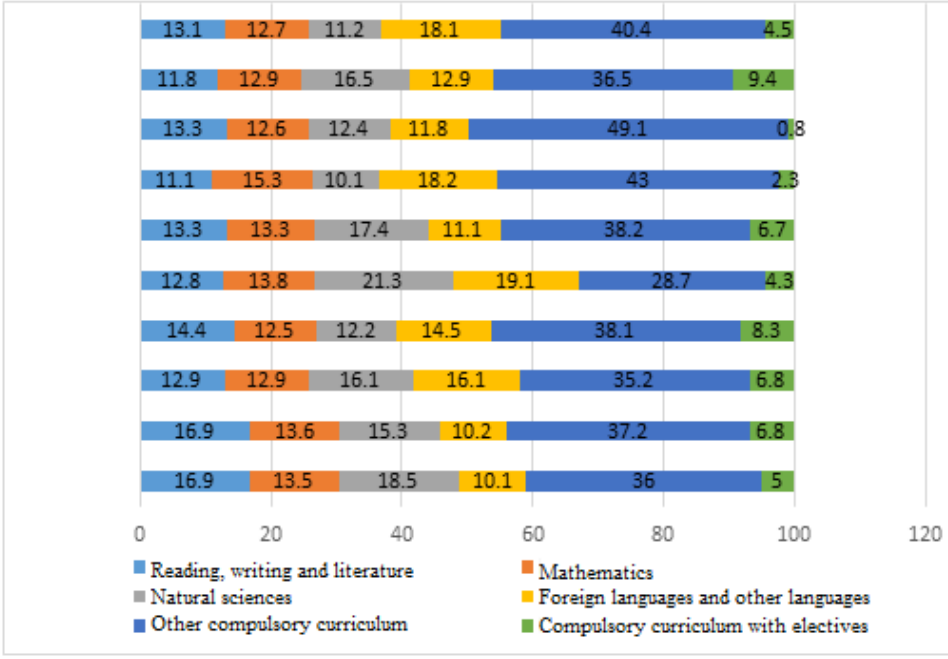

Figure 4. Distribution of teaching time by curriculum areas/subjects, in lower secondary education, in some countries in the region and in the OECD

The data from figure 4, for the distribution of teaching time in the curricular areas of lower secondary education, show that in Kosovo, at this level of education, in the curricular areas Languages and communication (Native language - reading, writing and literature and English language, Second Foreign Language and Community Languages) and in Mathematics, about 39.5% of the teaching time is determined against the teaching of other

subjects. Whereas, the average teaching time in lower secondary education in OECD countries, in these curricular areas, is about 27%.

As for the optional curriculum, in the lower secondary education in Kosovo, it includes about 5% of the compulsory learning time. Whereas, in OECD countries, the learning time for the optional curriculum in primary education includes over 8% of the compulsory learning time at this level of education.

Data compared between countries, different education systems, may also differ in school practices, within the education systems themselves, due to different curricular policies and the autonomy of local authorities and schools. However, data from the educational systems compared provide a rough indication of how much formal instructional time is considered necessary for students to achieve learning outcomes and educational goals.

This, in the context of Kosovo, is not reflected when comparing the ratio of teaching time per class with the number of teaching topics and learning outcomes per subject, within each class.

On the other hand, flexibility in the distribution of teaching hours per class and subject may allow for quicker interventions to minimize the impact of disruptions to learning, such as the period of the Covid 19 pandemic, disruptions to learning due to other factors related to with the contexts of educational systems, such as the climatic conditions in the winter or summer period, due to low - high temperatures, but also due to other factors, subjective and objective.

Regarding non-compulsory teaching time, in the curricula of primary and secondary education in Kosovo, there are very few instructions and orientations. With only one description, schools are oriented to planning the teaching time for the realization of extracurricular activities or extracurricular activities.

For the education system in Kosovo, there is no evidence reported on the number of schools that plan non-compulsory teaching time and offer it to students on a regular weekly basis. Schools that work in two or three shifts, in urban areas, find this almost impossible. However, this can be provided

in particular by schools that work in a shift and by schools that have small numbers of pupils in classes.

On the other hand, referring to the OECD report (2021), in two fifths of developed countries and economies, non-compulsory learning time is provided by almost every public school, but it is not compulsory for all students. Students in these countries enjoy a wide variety of courses in the non-compulsory curriculum, which can be taken physically and in other alternative forms. In these countries, non-compulsory learning time represents about 20% of compulsory learning time, however, according to the report, the percentages of this learning time should be interpreted with caution, as there are many differences between education systems.

European countries with high student scores in the PISA study, such as Estonia and Finland, have some minor differences in terms of school days, class length and subjects taught in compulsory education. According to the OECD report (2021), in Estonia, the school year consists of at least 175 school days, a school week usually lasts 5 days, while the average duration of a lesson is 45 minutes.

4.2.3. Duration of the school year and vacations within a school year

The school year calendar, the number of school days, the number of holidays within a school year and the duration of holidays, are an integral part of the school year and are closely related to the aspects of curriculum implementation in primary and lower secondary education. According to the school year calendar, in Kosovo, within a school year in basic education, 37 weeks of learning, or 185 days of learning are planned in grades 1-8, while 35 weeks of learning, or 175 days of learning in the 9th grade.

Also, according to the school year calendar in Kosovo, there are three vacations for students within a school year, with a total of 15 weeks of vacation. Two vacations are allowed during the school year, with a total of 3 weeks, while the other vacation includes the longest vacation time between two years, with a total of 12 weeks of vacation. 9th grade students finish

regular lessons two weeks earlier, but this time is dedicated to preparation for enrollment in upper secondary education, gymnasiums or vocational schools.

According to the OECD Education at a Glance report based on educational indicators (OECD, 2021), the average number of school days in OECD countries for primary education is 186 school days, while for lower secondary education it is 184 school days. According to the same report, education systems have differences in both school days and vacation weeks and days per student. In addition to the vacation weeks at the end of the school year, between the end of a grade and the start of a new grade, education systems have several vacation weeks during the school year.

Table 13. School days and vacation weeks during a school year in some countries in the region and in the OECD

Nr.	Shtetet	Ditët e mësimit[14]	Javët e pushimit në përfundim të vitit shkollor	Javët e pushimit gjatë vitit mësimor					Gjithsej javë pushimi
				Pushimi 1	*Pushimi 2*	*Pushimi 3*	*Pushimi 4*	*Pushimi 5*	
1	Estonia	175	11.4	1	2.6	1	1	/	17
2	Sllovenia	190/185[15]	9.4	1	1.2	1	1	/	13.6
3	Suedia	178	11	1	2.6	1	1	/	16.6
4	Austria	200	9	0.8	2	1	1.2	0.2	14.2
5	Finlanda	189	10	0.4	1	1	0.4	/	12.8
6	Gjermania	188	6.4	2	2.2	2	0.2	/	12.8
7	Kosova	185	10	2	1	/	/	/	13
8	Shqipëri	176	12.4	1	1	/	/	/	14.4
9	Maqedoni	180	11	2.5	0	/	/	/	13.5

From the data in the table, it can be seen that basic education in Kosovo has about as many vacation weeks for students as countries such as Germany, Finland, and Slovenia, but the number of vacations differs greatly. Sweden

and Estonia have the most vacation weeks among these countries. In Kosovo, according to the school year calendar, there are only two vacations during the school year, with a total of 3 weeks off and 10 weeks off at the end of the school year.

4.2.4. Learning time and student achievements in international and national assessments

The 2015 report of the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (OECD, 2016) points out that the time spent learning during a day, both in school and outside of school, i.e. learning at home, is not related to the academic performance of students. The following figure shows the relationship between PISA results (2015) and learning time, according to the OECD report *Curriculum Overload: A Way Forward* (OECD, 2020).

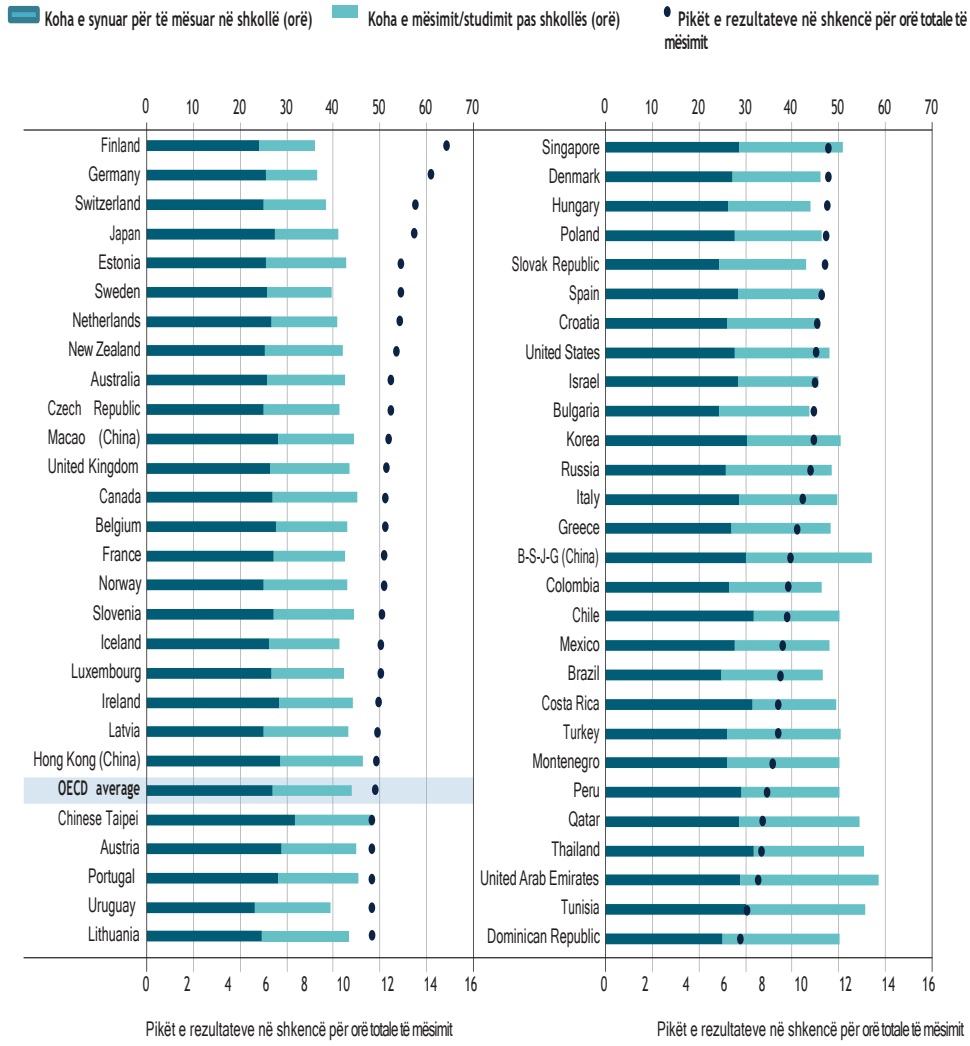

Figure 5. Relationship between PISA scores (2015) and learning time (Source: OECD, 2020)

As can be seen from Figure 5, many countries, such as Finland, Germany, Switzerland, etc. have less learning time at school and at home (reported by students) than many other countries, about 8 hours of learning per day, but, on the other hand, have much higher scores than students in many other

countries, that have 10-13 hours of learning per day, such as the United Arab Emirates, China, Korea, Russia, etc.

Even the time spent by Kosovar students in learning during a day, both at school and at home, is not related to their academic performance, compared to many educational systems, with which there is approximate learning time in relation to the annual number of instruction hours in primary and lower secondary education.

In 2015, Kosovo participated for the first time in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Kosovar students achieved a total of only 347 points in Reading, Mathematics and Science, or 150 points less than the average of OECD countries, which was 497 points.

Kosovo was a participant and has also accepted the results in PISA 2018. Based on the comparative analysis of PISA achievement results, Kosovo has marked a minimal progress in student achievement, compared to PISA 2015, with a total of 353 points in Reading, Mathematics and Science, or 134 points less than the average of OECD countries, which was 487 points.

Let us recall that PISA test evaluates the abilities of 15-year-old students to apply the knowledge they have gained in the field of Reading, Mathematics and Science, in everyday life situations. In line with this and in relation to the learning time that Kosovar students have, compared to other countries, Kosovar students have failed to reach the minimum level of skills to utilize their knowledge in life in the three areas that are evaluated under the PISA study: Reading, Mathematics and Science, regardless of the number of learning hours per subject.

Even in cases where Kosovar students have more than 5 instruction hours for a subject, they have scored minus points compared to students who have had less than 5 hours for a subject (Osdautaj, 2020). Significant differences are evident in overall scores and in the percentage of students who have failed to reach the minimum level of skills.

Table 14: *PISA 2018 - The percentage of students who have not reached the minimum level of skills*

	Science	Reading	Mathematics
Kosovo	76.6	78.7	76.6
Albania	46.9	52.2	42.4
North Macedonia	49	55.1	61
Montenegro	48.2	44.4	46.2
OECD (average)	21.9	22.7	23.9

The data from the table show significant differences with the countries of the region, Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, as well as with the average of the OECD countries.

Even in the Achievement Test, implemented by the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI) in June 2022, the time spent by Kosovar students in learning, according to the instruction time (lesson hours) for the subject curriculum, is not related to their academic performance, relative to the average achievement, which is 50.75%, or as a percentage at the minimum passing threshold converted to a rating scale, according to the evaluation system in Kosovo.

Differences have also been highlighted between subjects that have more or less tinstruction ime, e.g. the Albanian language in lower secondary education in Kosovo has about 16% of the instruction time and the average achievement of students in the ninth grade test is 54.4%. In contrast, the English language has about 7% of the instruction time, while the students' average in the test is 74.1%.

Another difference is also noted in relation to the instruction time in the subject of Mathematics, which has about 13.5% of instruction time in lower secondary education and the average of students in the Achievement Test reaches 46.8%, while the instruction time for the

subject of Physics is 6.7%, while the average in the Achievement Test is similar to the Mathematics subject, i.e. over 45%.

Of course, the differences in the Student Achievement Test (grade 9) in Kosovo are not only related to the instruction time as a percentage of the subjects, but rather it is related to the teaching process, the load of instruction content and learning outcomes, but also to the number of queries/ questions in the test, which is different for the subjects included in the Achievement Test.

However, in the results, the level of achievement of the students, the interest and commitment of the students for special subjects, such as the case of the interest and commitment of the students to learn the English language, for communication in the English language, but also for the use of various game and entertainment apps in English.

4.2.3. The average number of students in the class and the teacher-student ratio

The average number of students in the classroom and the teacher-student ratio has a correlation with the curriculum implementation capabilities, the quality management of the learning time and with the possibilities of providing individual support to each student. They differ in different educational systems. In some educational systems, the average number of students in the classroom and the teacher-student ratio has decreased year by year, due to the reduction in the number of students influenced by many economic, social and demographic factors. The decrease in the number of students has caused the average number of students in the classroom to drop in Kosovo as well as the teacher-student ratio.

A changing trend of the average number of students in the classroom, especially the teacher-student ratio, is also observed in different educational systems of the OECD countries. According to the OECD Education at a Glance report based on educational indicators (OECD, 2021), in primary education in OECD countries there are on average 21 students per classroom, while there are 23 students per classroom in lower secondary

education. Meanwhile, the teacher-student ratio in primary education in these countries is 14.5 students for one teacher, while in lower secondary education the ratio is 13.1 students for one teacher.

Table 15. Teacher-student ratio

	Countries	Primary Education	Lower Secondary Education
1	Estonia	12.9	10.0
2	Slovenia	10.6	8.9
3	Sweden	13.0	11.2
4	Austria	12.0	8.5
5	Finland	13.5	8.8
6	Germany	15.1	12.9
7	OECD	14.5	13.1
8	Kosovo	13.5	13.5
9	Albania	12.8	13

Source: OECD (2021); MESTI (2021); and MASR (2021)

The data on the teacher-student ratio in Kosovo refer to the MESTI report, Statistical Notes 2021/2022 (MESTI, 2021), according to which the teacher-student ratio for primary and lower secondary education is not disaggregated, i.e. it is reported jointly for both levels of education. Even in this study, the data are reported the same for both levels of education.

4.2.4. Teachers' working time

According to the OECD Education at a Glance report based on educational indicators (OECD, 2021), teachers in public schools, in the education systems of OECD countries and other countries, which are part of this report, have differences in engagement of teachers per teaching hours, direct work with students. Primary education teachers hold an average of 791 teaching hours per year, while secondary education teachers hold 723 teaching hours per year, out of a total of 1575 total working hours in a school year.

In Kosovo, referring to the lesson plans in primary education, class teachers in primary education have 20 to 22 hours of teaching per week of teaching. These teachers spend an average of 777 hours of teaching with students during a school year, out of a total of 1,600 hours of work in a school year. Whereas, subject teachers in lower secondary education, hold an average of about 740 hours of teaching with students during a school year, out of a total of about 1600 total hours of work within a school year. The rest of the working hours, which are not directly related to the learning process with students, are distributed to other activities related to teaching, work with students, parents, work with school documentation and other commitments at the school level. The latter are not normed into working time hours, i.e. how much should be spent, for example, for additional work with students, for meetings and consultations with parents, etc.

According to the OECD report (2021), the ways in which the total working time of teachers is divided between teaching hours - direct work with students, non-teaching activities and the distribution of working hours where the activities take place, in school or elsewhere, vary greatly between different educational systems. Some educational systems, such as Lithuania (1512 hours), Israel (1178 hours), Denmark (1643 hours), etc., all the total working hours of teachers must be completed inside the school. There are countries, such as Sweden, most of the working hours are done at school (1360 hours), but a small percentage is allowed to be done from home (407 hours).

In Kosovo, there is no evidence in which it is reported how much time apart from teaching teachers work at school, public school teachers, and how much they can do outside school, namely at home. However, a significant part of the hours are spent at school, meetings with the school's departments (professional actives), work hours that are necessarily related to class supervision and work with pedagogical documentation, meetings with parents, etc. This is largely related to the conditions of school institutions, since most urban schools do not have special environments for all the departments of teachers.

Even in relation to the duties and responsibilities of teachers, apart from teaching, there are differences between countries according to the OECD report (2021), from duties and responsibilities that are mandatory for all

teachers, to duties that are mandatory for a part of teachers, tasks and responsibilities that are requirements but not mandatory, voluntary tasks, as well as tasks that in some educational systems are not required, are missing as evidence or are not implemented. The following table reflects these differences of 39 education systems from OECD countries.

Table 16. *Tasks and responsibilities of teachers for 39 education systems, OECD countries*

Tasks and responsibilities of teachers (2020)[14]	Mandatory for all	Mandatory	Requirement for some teachers	Voluntary	Not required	No evidence	Not applicable
1. Teaching	39	0	0	0	0	0	0
2. Individual planning or preparation of lessons	38	1	0	0	0	0	0
3. Marking/Correcting of student work	36	3	0	0	0	0	0
4. Communication and co-operation with parents or guardians	34	4	0	0	0	1	0
5. Team work and cooperation with colleagues	33	3	0	1	0	2	0
6. General administrative work	30	4	0	3	1	1	0
7. Participation in professional development activities	24	8	0	7	0	0	0
8. Supervision of students during breaks	16	15	0	4	2	2	0
9. Student counselling	13	11	1	7	5	2	0
10. Class teacher/form teacher	5	19	1	8	3	3	0
11. Participation in school or other management in addition to teaching duties	4	18	1	13	1	1	1
12. Participation in mentoring and/or supporting new teachers in induction	3	16	0	18	1	1	0
13. Special tasks	2	17	0	17	1	2	0
14. Teaching more classes or hours than required by full-time contract	5	10	2	15	5	1	1
15. Engaging in extracurricular activities	3	9	1	19	5	1	1

The regulation of teachers' working time through the definition of tasks and responsibilities of teachers, based on the descriptions of tasks from the table above, is seen as an opportunity to maintain the focus on teaching, as the

[14] The data refers to the OECD report (2021) on 39 education systems, OECD countries.

main mandatory task for all teachers. But also as an opportunity to define mandatory tasks for teachers who have special roles, who are freed from some teaching hours to maintain the balance of teachers' overload, beyond the teaching hours.

4.3. Results from school community perceptions of curricular overload

This subchapter presents the results from the perspectives of students, teachers, parents, school heads, curriculum development coordinators and experts (persons cognizant of the curriculum). The results are reported separately, according to the groups of respondents participating in this study. The main findings and their narrative description, according to the thematic areas explored, are accompanied by quotations from the data collected through interviews and questionnaires.

The findings organized into thematic subcategories, in addition to the narrative description, are followed by a listing of specific themes for each subcategory, of specific themes, which have emerged from the content analysis for each subcategory and are ordered according to the frequency of information identified from the data of collected within this study.

4.3.1. Teachers' perception of curriculum overload

The views of the teachers on this issue of the study make up important information to confront in the discussion about the perceptions and attitudes of the other respondents included in this study, with other evidences of this study, as well as to draw conclusions about whether the curricular overload is a perception or reality.

The teachers involved in this study had different perceptions regarding curricular overload and its aspects addressed in this study, from those that are argued and based on experience, to those that are less based on their experience and experiencing. The main findings from teachers' attitudes

about the issue of curricular overload are organized into four thematic categories:

a) Changes, novelties in the new curricula and difficulties in implementing the curriculum;
b) Curriculum overload - its description and influencing factors;
c) The impact of curricular overload on students and teachers;
d) What can be done to deal with and mitigate curricular overload?

4.3.1.1. Changes, novelties in the new curricula and difficulties in implementing the curriculum

The successful implementation of the curriculum, in the first place, requires that the school community are fully informed about changes, novelties in the curriculum, and it also requires a change in approach to the organization of school work and teaching, as well as the commitment of all school staff and other supporting actors, who directly or indirectly have a role in the curriculum implementation process. Undoubtedly, teachers are the ones who bear the main responsibility in implementing the curriculum at the school level, giving meaning and content to it while working with students.

Changes, novelties in new curricula. With the teachers involved in this study, the changes and novelties in the subject curricula were first discussed. Teachers, to a large extent, when they talk about changes and novelties in curricula, they mainly touch on general elements that reflect developments in curricula, such as curricula are based on competences, reference to curriculum principles, school and teacher autonomy, for subject curricula developed after the pilot phase, lesson topics and learning outcomes, etc. While the change in approach to teaching is only indirectly tackled, they relate this more to the textbooks for the relevant subjects and the teaching conditions at the school level.

Changes, novelties in the new curricula, among teachers are discussed in different ways. Some of the curriculum trainers, not all of them, are more argumentative towards curriculum changes, emphasizing positive changes as well. Elements of changes in the new curricula are described by a trainer of the Natural Sciences curriculum field as follows:

A positive change is the teacher's autonomy in the selection of teaching resources, as well as in work methodologies. Then, the student's opportunity to express his/her learning in creative ways according to personal abilities, as well as explaining the contents critically according to the arguments claimed, defending through evidence, whether founded or not... (m/64 , urban school).

Meanwhile, a trainer of the curriculum for primary education, regarding the positive changes, the novelties promoted by the new curriculum, says:

The implementation of the competency-based curriculum enables the gradual development of the main learning competencies in students, which then prepare them for an easier access to the market, to face the challenges in social life more easily, etc. As well as the flexibility it offers to teachers during teaching, which then affects the development of creativity in them (m/65, urban school).

The teachers in primary education, when they talk about the changes in the curricula, say that the changes are greater in the subject curricula of each grade, listing that there are more changes in the subject Man and nature, then Society and the environment, Mathematics and the Albanian language. In certain cases, talking about the changes and novelties in the curriculum, the class teachers are quick to express themselves about the work with books, the textbooks that are not in accordance with the curriculum, about the curricular load that they have seen with lesson topics and learning outcomes in the subjects Albanian Language, Man and Nature, Mathematics, in the 5th grade, which are often considered not suitable for the age of the students.

There are teachers in primary education who describe the changes in the subject curricula and at the same time provide information about the curriculum overload, which they noticed as early as the analysis phase of the changes in the curricula with which they work.

The change we notice in the subject curricula is that through SLOs (Learning Outcomes of Subject) it contributes to the development of competences, but that in some cases (the subject) is overloaded, which then lose their role. Their large number sometimes prevents the carrying out of practical activities, which help to reinforce them.

So during planning we have more development hours. We notice this in the subject of Mathematics and in Man and Nature (m/65, class teacher, urban school).

Primary education teachers are often confused about the changes in the subject curricula, versus the textbooks for the relevant subjects and the challenges they face. This situation finds different descriptions, such as:

- there are difficulties and tasks not suitable for the age of the students;
- in the subject of Mathematics there are loads of tasks, where in some chapters a unit has many tasks (grade 3);
- Although the texts have changed, in grades 2 and 3, the lesson topics are almost the same, in the teaching units there are sometimes requirements that are not suitable for students;
- In the Mathematics subject (grade 3) the multiplication table has been added, which the students (most) have difficulty in acquiring.
- The large number of students in the class makes it impossible to implement the curriculum accurately, as well as the large number of subjects taught by the class teachers.

In lower secondary education, grades 6-9, teachers who are heads of departments in the curricular areas of Languages, Mathematics and Natural Sciences express themselves directly about the changes in the new subject curricula, compared to the previous curricula/programs. Other teachers, who do not have a leading role in the departments, refer more to the general aspects related to CC, which are a change in the approach to curriculum development.

English language teachers say that the changes have led to inappropriate topics for the age of the students, such as topics about work, love relationships, etc. (English language, grades 6-9) and, according to them, some of these topics, which are mainly found in books, are taught before the children can properly understand these aspects.

According to the teachers of the Albanian language, in grades 6-9, many educational topics have been removed and topics that do not fit the age of

the students have been introduced, they refer more to the topics in the textbooks.

There are cases when teachers from the department of Languages and Communication declare that they do not have complete information about which topics have been changed (they refer to the textbooks), there are few changes in the texts, we work with the same texts, despite the request for change. This is what a teacher of the Albanian language in one of the schools in the urban areas, who is also the Head of the department of Languages and Communication, says:

> *As a teacher with a year and a half of work experience, I do not have information about which topics have been changed, but from the first to the second year of my experience, there are no changes, because we work with the same texts, despite the request for change (m/ 52, Albanian language teacher, rural school).*

For the subject of Mathematics, there are teachers who emphasize that some lesson topics have been added, in grades 6-9, which are in a way reorganized from the previous programs. Some mathematics teachers, who teach in the sixth grade (6), state that there are a large number of SLO and there are topics that are not found in the textbooks that are being distributed to students in schools, this is also reflected in other grades. Some other Math teachers are very specific in describing the changes made. Regarding the changes in the mathematics curriculum, the head of the Mathematics department from a school in an urban area, says:

> *There are added competency outcomes, area outcomes, and lessons are removed. In the 6th grades, there is a large number of SLO and there are topics that are not found in the textbooks that are being distributed to students in schools (m/7, Mathematics teacher, urban school).*
>
> *In the subject of Mathematics, there are not many changes in terms of content and learning outcomes, except for assessment, so the opportunity to use a greater number of assessment tools has*

increased, which was used less earlier (m/63, Mathematics teacher, urban school).

The majority of mathematics teachers point out that there are changes in the curricula of this subject, more so in grades 8 and 9. Some teachers point out that the changes have influenced the program to be loaded for grades 8 and 9 since, according to them, the changes are not suitable, they create problems in learning the subject of Mathematics. This year, according to them, the trigonometry chapter for the 9th grade was added, which was very difficult for students of this age to understand, but also because the teachers also had to find additional materials for this chapter.

The changes, novelties in the curricula of science subjects and the elements of their implementation are also addressed by the teachers of science subjects, Biology, Physics, Chemistry. According to the teachers of the Biology subject, what has been added is for health-sexual education, which is necessary for each class (grades 6-9). Among biology teachers, curriculum changes are also described in open and general language.

Curricula in the subject of biology are more generalized, that is, they are not rigid, but they offer opportunities to target the same requirements for all students in Kosovo in different contexts (m/64, Biology teacher, urban school).

According to the teachers of the Chemistry subject, in this subject some of the changes made are appropriate and suitable for the age of the students. There are teachers who emphasize that in the 8th grade, the Chemistry subject is loaded in a large volume of teaching content, topics/units that do not have such a big role in learning chemistry are included. There are also teachers of the Chemistry subject, who have equated the changes in the curriculum with the changes in textbooks/school books, as they emphasize that the work with documents has increased, there are new approaches and methodologies, then others who consider that there are no changes and that it is continued mainly with the old approaches.

According to the teachers of Physics, even in this subject there are changes from grade to grade. Some teachers point out some changes made by

introducing some SLOs, which are not in accordance with the logical sequence of presentation, but also with the age of the students. Therefore, they propose that some outcomes, e.g. in the 6th grade, are moved to the 7th and 8th grades, because there are more topics and they are not of the appropriate level. A teacher of the Physics subject says that the lesson topics from the previous plans and programs have not been removed, they have been added, and therefore the curriculum in their subject has been overloaded. Some teachers of the Physics subject, when they talk about the elements of curriculum implementation, talk about the lack of teaching literature, which should be related to the lesson topics and SLOs.

Structure and coherence of subject curricula. Regarding the structure and coherence of the subject curricula, the teachers involved in the study express different attitudes, positive, the lack of understanding, some disagree with the changes made or with the attitude that no changes have been made in the new curricula, compared to the prior curricula of the subjects which they teach. The lack of understanding about the coherence of the curricula is more present in the views of the teachers.

On the other hand, teachers who have a positive attitude refer to the connection between the lesson topics of the subject within a grade, their extension to other grades, the suitability to the age of the students, as well as the practical aspect of the implementation of the curricula.

In cases where teachers express disagreement with the changes made, they describe it with the differences in the curricula of some subjects from grade to grade, where the learning outcomes of the relevant curricular area are not integrated, with a poor order of lesson topics, with difficulties in achieving the connection between the lesson topics of other subjects, with depth and breadth that do not fit the age of the students, in certain cases very superficial, but also with the difficulties they have in implementing the curricula.

In general, according to the teachers, there is an enhancement of the treatment or inclusion of lesson topics from grade to grade, even though, according to them, their breadth and depth differ according to the subjects,

because there are cases when there is a disconnect between the topics and an arrangement that is not according to a logical order of presentation. The logical order of presentation of lesson topics is mostly related by teachers to the delivery of topics of teaching units that are done in school textbooks.

When teachers talk about curriculum changes, they also talk about organizational changes in schools, which are related to curriculum changes. They describe that the level of communication at school, autonomy and flexibility in their work have increased.

Difficulties in implementing the curriculum. The implementation of curriculum elements in working with students, to a significant extent, depends on the approach of teachers in relation to teaching and student engagement. The teachers involved in the study, in different ways, try to show that, according to the curriculum, teaching is oriented towards the development of competencies. Almost everyone in their own way tries to describe their approach to how they do inter-subject integration, how they use other teaching and learning resources, which they say are few and have difficulties in obtaining them.

According to the teachers involved in the study, the curriculum stages are very loaded, with a structure of learning outcomes, and this makes it difficult to implement in practice. Even the lack of adaptation of the curriculum to the age of the students, in some cases, and problems with the textbooks are described as difficulties in their work during the implementation of the curriculum.

Some teachers, when they talk about the difficulties in implementing the curriculum, put emphasis on increasing activities with students, which lead to the achievement of competencies. On the other hand, as positive elements that facilitate the implementation of the curriculum, the increase in the use of ICT equipment in schools, the knowledge of the English language by students and its introduction from the first grade, the determination of learning outcomes for subjects are highlighted, which they qualify as facilitation and guidance for planning and evaluation.

The most emphasized aspects for the implementation of the curriculum turn out to be those related to the assessment of students, especially the assessment periods, and the implementation of the summative assessment (SA1 and SA2, an aspect which at the same time is described as having been quite challenging for a part of teachers. Emphasis is placed on the division of assessment into three periods of learning and within them also the content elements of assessment related to assessment challenges based on measuring and verifying the achievements of competencies. In this regard, there are teachers who describe the aspects of student assessment, also in the affirmative and mobilizing aspect for the work of teachers with students.

According to the teachers of the schools involved in this study, the implementation of the competency-based curriculum continues to be accompanied by great challenges and many concerns raised by the teachers themselves, which have not been addressed by MESTI for several years now. The teachers have stated some of the difficulties they encounter in practice for the implementation of the new curriculum, related to textbooks and the provision of supporting literature, poor working conditions in schools, teachers' engagements with a focus on meeting administrative requirements, the assessment of students into three periods of learning, the lack of ICT equipment and means of concretization, etc.

According to the teachers of primary education, grades 1-5, the main challenge for the implementation of the curriculum is considered the large number of subjects taught by the class teachers. Another challenge, more specifically specified by urban school teachers, is considered to be the large number of students in the classroom, which, according to the teachers, prevents the effective implementation of the curriculum.

Some teachers, heads of departments in lower secondary education, when they talk about the difficulties in implementing the curriculum they also refer to the incorrect understanding of the curriculum, the changes that the curriculum brings, the opportunities that the curriculum offers, etc. A teacher, head of the Languages and Communication area department, in a school from urban areas, raises concern about the way the process is carried out in some departments, which, according to him, happens to be carried out

by a teacher who may have more knowledge about the new curriculum, or has the position of the head of the department.

As for lesson planning, a process that many teachers call administrative work, it is considered a very challenging requirement for a large part of teachers. According to a significant number of teachers, the implementation of the curriculum is being challenged by "administrative" work in planning the implementation of the curriculum, where the emphasis is placed on daily plans. According to the teachers who have raised this concern, daily plans take a considerable amount of time and when they make them, in most cases they connect them to the textbooks they work with.

Students' lack of interest in learning is one of the concerns raised by many teachers, which they relate to the working conditions offered by schools in Kosovo, the lack of concretization tools, ICT equipment, the short schedule of lessons in some schools, but also with the large number of students in urban schools, in some cases with the approach of teachers, both in primary education and in lower secondary education.

The following table reports a summary of teachers' attitudes regarding some aspects of changes in the curriculum, divided into four items, coded in four subcategories: (i) Positive elements of the new curriculum; (ii) Changes, novelties in new subject curricula; (iii) Structure and coherence of subject curricula and (iv) Difficulties in implementing the curriculum. Each aspect of the treatment, item coded in subcategories, is accompanied with specific topics according to subcategories, which summary aspects organized in these subcategories are elements of the voice of teachers, ordered according to the frequency of information identified from the data collected with teachers.

Table 17: Changes, novelties in the new curricula, and difficulties in implementing the curriculum from the teachers' perspective

Subcategory	Specific topics from subcategories
Positive elements of the new curriculum	- Autonomy, flexibility and accountability at the school level;

	- Teaching oriented towards the development of competences; - Inter-subject integration, additional opportunities for other teaching and learning resources; - Opportunities for increasing the level of communication and the level of research by students and teachers; - Student in the center of attention, opportunity to be active continuously; - The learning outcomes defined in the curriculum are facilitation and orientation for planning and evaluation; - Assessment of students based on competencies, opportunities for multiple assessment instruments; - Increased cooperation within departments and teachers inside and outside the school; - Different teaching methodologies and pre-preparation requirements (annual, two-month, daily plan); - Ability to adapt to learning requirements.
Changes in new subject curricula	- Learning topics have been added and reorganized; - Inter-subject integration with additional elements; - Area outcomes have been added and lesson units have been removed; - Focusing on competency outcomes and not on learning content; - The way of dealing with topics and connection with life has changed; - Cross-curricular issues have been added; - Changes without adaptation to textbooks; - No changes; - Topics not well adapted to the age of the students;

	- The changes are not suitable, they create problems, the subjects Mathematics, Man and Nature are singled out.
Structure and coherence of subject curricula	- Sometimes superficial and sometimes deep structure; - Sorting of topics not appropriate; - There are disconnections between the topics and sometimes the topics are not arranged in a logical order; - There is depth of topics, sometimes the breadth and depth differ according to the subjects; - Curricular stages highly loaded, make it difficult to implement in practice; - Good and practical connection, but with difficulties in implementation (age of students); - Structure that is difficult to achieve, connection between the topics of other subjects; - The structure of subject programs is difficult to implement; - Good communication in the relevant field; - Well-connected topics, but books are a hindrance.
Difficulties in implementing the curriculum	- Curriculum trainers not well prepared; - Lack of monitoring of curriculum implementation; - Incorrect understanding of the curriculum, the changes that the curriculum brings, the opportunities that the curriculum offers; - The large number of subjects taught by class teachers; - Implementation of the curriculum in practice; - Practical implementation of lessons; - Lack of adequate texts and difficulties in obtaining supporting literature;

	- The engagement of teachers with "administrative" work regarding teaching planning; - Stagnation of teaching still with focus on teaching content; - Teachers' engagements regarding assessment with three periods of learning, with many assessment tools for summative assessment (SA1 and SA2); - Poor conditions in the school, such as the lack of ICT equipment and means of concretization; - The large number of students in urban schools and the short schedule of lessons; - Students' lack of interest in learning.

4.3.1.2. Teachers' reflection on curricular overload and its factors

From the teachers involved in this study, we have few concise descriptions of curricular overload, which include most of the elements that are considered to constitute curricular overload, namely the main elements that define curricular overload (recall the definition of curriculum overload). However, as far as the responses given by the teachers, we learn that according to the teachers, curriculum overload means: the repetition of lesson topics, the addition of both outcomes for curricular field and lesson topics, the lack of textbooks and their volume with teaching content, the number of subjects, homework, the inconsistency of the lesson plan with the learning contents to be developed, the administrative work of the teachers, the short time of the lessons to achieve the outcomes and the impossibility to cover all the planning is also considered to be overload.

Some teachers' descriptions of curriculum overload are presented as follows:

- *Curricular overload is when there are many lesson topics, many outcomes per field, for lesson topics, i.e. many writings, and in the end the outcomes are the same (m/38- Albanian language teacher, rural school).*

- *Overload is the excessive work with documents and papers, since each subject curriculum is expected to have annual and bimonthly plans, however, their preparation by the teacher is mandatory (m/13 - head of the 3rd grade department, urban school).*
- *Overload is when the volume of the text increases from 120 pages to 180 pages (m/31 - Chemistry teacher, urban school).*
- *Overload is when we constantly give homework to students (m/15 - Mathematics teacher, urban school).*

On the other hand, regarding the specification of the **factors of curricular overload**, the descriptive elements for curricular overload are again touched upon by the teachers and the most pronounced reference is to the missing textbooks, to the textbooks that are considered unsuitable for meeting the curriculum requirements. Loaded learning outcomes are also highlighted, the large number of subjects and learning topics and learning outcomes for learning topics, the load of students with numerous homework assignments, activities, competitions, projects, etc.

Among the teachers, there are those who do not see the curricular overload related to the content of the curriculum, learning topics, learning outcomes and methodological instructions, but most of them associate it with the teachers' approach to learning and to use of textbooks, which are described as overloaded with unnecessary lesson units.

> *Perhaps I am presenting myself as a subjective evaluator of subject programs, since I am a drafter of SLOs, and I am defending the position that the subject programs are not overloaded. The SLOs of the subject Biology are also relevant to the age of the student and the teaching norm of two (2) hours per week. The teacher causes the overload, not because it is a requirement of the SLO, but from the lack of understanding of the SLO requirement, since it was not explained to them during the training how to read and understand the SLO requirement (m/64, Biology teacher, urban school).*

Referring to the factors of curricular overload, a teacher, head of the third grade department, from an urban school, when she talks about the factors of curricular overload, she refers to the teaching contents, or, as she puts it:

The subject curricula are overloaded with learning topics, as a result students are also burdened in class with work/homework (m/12, urban school).

Another teacher, head of the 5th grade department, from another rural school, sees the instruction time/syllabus as one of the most influencing factors in curriculum overload. According to her:

The available instruction time (the number of teaching hours) is insufficient for the elaboration of the topics and the achievement of the outcomes set in the subject curricula of the third grade. We often take lessons from Physical Education and Arts subjects to elaborate on topics in other subjects! (m/22 - head of the 5th grade department, rural school).

Another teacher, when talking about curriculum overload, emphasizes the teaching units, which should be assigned by the teachers themselves, but in the approach of the teachers' work, based on the textbooks, the units are taken from the textbooks and for them then the learning outcomes are specified. This is how a math teacher describes this situation.

There is an overload with a large number of teaching units (some unnecessary), which then impose a lot on the learning outcomes that must be achieved while working with students (m/63, Mathematics teacher, urban school).

A teacher of primary education, in an urban school, relates curriculum overload mostly to the subjects Mathematics and Natural Sciences, specifying grades 1, 4 and 5. According to her:

There is overload in all grades, but perhaps more so in first grade with Mathematics and fourth and fifth grade with Man and Nature. This is quite challenging, because the large number of these outcomes prevents the sufficient development of practical activities, especially in the subject Man and Nature. All this is also reflected in the students (m/65, class teacher, urban school).

An approximate description of curriculum overload in primary education is also given by a first grade teacher from an urban school.

I consider that there is an overload of students in teaching in almost all subjects and that from the first to the fifth grade. The subject programs are overloaded with SLO. I would like to highlight: the first grade (6-year-old) is faced with 18-20 textbooks, in Mathematics in the first grade linear equations and inequations (inequalities) are taught. Textbooks together with workbooks often overload the student with various and sometimes difficult tasks (m/13, class teacher, urban school).

Regarding textbooks, a relatively large part of teachers mention the load of students' bags with textbooks as a factor of curricular overload.

It is worth noting that often the authors of the books, when they turn the outcomes into a lesso, make it even more difficult, giving detailed information about the unit, which is not required by the outcome, and sometimes the vocabulary is not very age-appropriate for students. We find this in most texts we work with (m/59, class teacher, urban school).

We have analyzed mathematics textbooks from the fifth grade (5) to the ninth grade (9). As a math department, we have come to the conclusion that math texts in grades 5, 7 and 9 are overloaded and these texts should be improved so that there is no overload for students, since most teachers work only with textbooks (m/63, Mathematics teacher, urban school).

A teacher from the field of natural sciences sees the curricular overload as influenced by the textbooks and by the approach of the teachers, but also of the students and parents to the acquisition of the learning contents from the textbooks.

Textbooks have unnecessary lessons and this causes overload. The work of the teacher is based on the book and not on the subject program. The teacher focuses on the book, since the external assessment (achievement test and Matura exam) is also carried out by testing by formulating requirements from the content of the book, and not by requirements from the outcomes of the stages, i.e. the evaluation of competencies. The teacher leans on the book because

the student and the parent are persistent in assessment according to the book, and the book is not in harmony with the subject program (SLOs)! (m/64, biology teacher, urban school).

Student assessment, and especially focus on the frequency of testing, is also highlighted to be a factor of curriculum overload. The engagement of teachers with administrative work, planning and preparations for implementation, is considered to be as an aspect of overload to teachers. Also, the inappropriate conditions and environments of the schools for the implementation of the curriculum are considered one of the key factors affecting the curriculum overload in relation to the fulfillment of the expectations arising from the curriculum for students and teachers.

Cross -curricular issues, included in the subject curricula, according to most teachers, are not considered overload because they are not broken down, are not mandatory to include in planning, which a relatively large part of teachers state that they only formally integrate into their planning for student work. There are also statements from other teachers that sometimes this integration causes overload to teachers, but also to students, especially in elementary education.

As a summary of this section, it can be said that teachers have different attitudes regarding the descriptive elements of what is considered curricular overload, specific factors affecting curricular overload, and the role and use of inter -curricular issues. However, almost all teachers have given elements of their experience, which indicate the presence of curriculum overload, which has even affected teachers in their work. A summary of the teachers' attitudes on this aspect is reflected in the following table, organized in subcategories and listed according to the frequency of the information identified.

Table18. Curriculum overload and its factors from teacher perspective

Subcategory	Specific topic from subcategories
Curriculum overload description	- Deems the overload to imply the many contents in textbooks; - Administrative work of teachers;

	- Curriculum overload is deemed the repetition of topics, as well as outcomes per area, topic, too much administrative work, which in the end the outcomes are the same as with the previous curriculum; - Overload is when we constantly assign homework to students; - Overload a limiting factor in the development of critical thinking; - Short time of class for achieving success criteria; - Number of subjects, topics, and student assessment; - Inability to cover the entire syllabus; - New approach, which is taking time until teachers get used to this curriculum approach.
Curriculum overload factors	- Textbooks; - Administrative work; - Student assessment, written tests, when there are other forms of assessment; - Large number of subjects and topics; - Outcomes loaded in number and content; - Approach to teaching and working with textbooks; - Excessive homework; - Conditions and working environment in school not suitable for curriculum implementation; - Loaded lessons, as a result, students are also loaded with homework; - Large number of students in classrooms; - Loaded backpacks, large numbers of books; - Insufficient time available for topic elaboration; - Non-adaptation of learning topics for students; - Many activities, tests, tasks, competitions, projects, large numbers of subjects etc.
Cross -curricular issues	- Yes, they are included in planning, we do not think they have caused overload; - are part of planning, but not to satisfactory extent;

	- There is overload to teachers and low cycle students; - Overload more in us teachers; - there are times when they cause overload, but we try to give guidance, depending on the level of students; - Yes, they have caused overload; - there is overload in students; - unnecessary and impossible to implement.

4.3.1.3. Teachers' views on curriculum overload

The findings from the teacher's perspective on the impact of the curriculum overload are reflected in relation to the impact on students 'achievements/outcomes, students' well -being and the work of teachers themselves.

Impact of curricular overload on student achievements/outcomes. It is described in different ways by elementary (grades 1-5) and lower secondary education teachers (grades 6-9). Most teachers, who consider that there is a curriculum overload, say that it affects the success of students who cannot achieve the learning outcomes in their grades or subjects.

Moreover, participants stated that the impacts of the curriculum overload on students' achievements or outcomes are numerous, they are reflected in the inability of many students to achieve learning outcomes, the difficulties that students have in their learning, poor achievements in basic subjects, superficial learning, mechanical learning, often just to get grades, subjective evaluation, etc.

It should be noted that teachers when talking about the impact of the curriculum overload on students' achievements/outcomes, a large number of teachers, mainly put emphasis on students with low achievements in learning, or students who do not engage in lessons.

Students, due to the curriculum overload, are not succeeding in having good achievements in learning, then they are having some kind of withdrawal, which is then causing problems in constant classroom activity, reflecting at the low level of achievement of competencies defined in the curriculum (M/63, Mathematics Teacher, Urban School).

There are teachers who associate the impact of the curriculum overload with the low results in the PISA study, but their number is small.

Working in schools based on content rather than competencies, is the main factor that puts us poorly in PISA. Still in our schools work is carried out, evaluations and certifications made only based on knowledge and proficiency, without switching to competencies, and our students do not have the courage, internal freedom and confidence of manifesting their personal capacity.... (M/64, Biology teacher, urban school).

There is interconnection of the basic curriculum results with the PISA test, but not too much. The difference is in the approach, it must be admitted that the approach of teachers and students differs in working with curriculum requirements, versus the approach to the PISA test and other international tests. Textbooks lack the material (questions, tasks, alternatives, description of events ...), which are required in the tasks/questions of the tests. Teachers have little information on PISA, TIMSS, Pirls test material and consequently do not develop and exercise such test formats. On the other hand, students lack the motivation to represent the state of Kosovo in a dignified matter, so forms of motivation of those students participating in that test must be found (M/63, mathematics teacher, urban school).

Overall, teachers see the impact of many factors related to the curriculum overload on student outcomes, such as the large number of subjects, the large number of content to be learned, the large number of students in the classroom, the frequency of assessment, engaging students with numerous

homework, etc. Among the teachers, there is an opinion that teachers' approach to student assessment has made students not engage in learning to achieve learning outcomes, to develop key competencies, but to engage only to obtain grades that provide a good final numerical success.

According to teachers, the impact of the curriculum overload on students' achievements is considered to be related to the level of teacher engagement. According to the descriptions of 4-5 teachers, the engagement of teachers with administrative work has consequently produced the shift of focus from student to lessons planning, which, according to them, is not reflecting on students' achievements.

In the views of some teachers, they do not see the curriculum overload as a negative factor in students' achievements, but they see it as an influential factor in their work, which leads to students being overburdened.

Impact of curriculum overload on student well -being.

Aspects of the curriculum overload mentioned above, according to teachers, have led to school becoming uncomfortable for many students, increase in the number of students' absences, decrease of interest in the performance of tasks, and the achievement of outcomes in general. According to the teachers involved in this study, among their students there is fatigue, demotivation for learning, concerns, stress, lack of will for learning, suspicion in their capacities and learning opportunities, disinterest in carrying out tasks, refusal to learn, disappointment, and consequently a loss of desire and ambitions for learning, doubts whether the new approach is feasible, bodily deformities from heavy backpacks, etc.

Some teachers describe the impact of the curriculum overload on the well - being of the students as follows:

- *The load is affecting the emotional aspect of the children. Children are often stressed in not managing to timely and appropriately perform assignments (M/65 - classroom teacher, urban school).*
- *The load is affecting the student to focus on justification/accountability for the results, before the parent, not on*

reliability according to evidence and pleasure for learning achievements; Increasing tendency of students' inclinations to justify non-work rather than ambition for work etc. (M/64 - Biology Teacher, Urban School).

- *Some students are surprised when they cannot achieve the right outcome, they seem in a way to accept that they are failing to succeed with lessons, but we try to re-establish their self-esteem and keep going (M/32- Albanian language teacher, Head of the Department in an Urban School).*
- *There is a lot of discussion of the heavy weight of the children's backpack, then the large loads, which are causing disappointment and consequently the loss of desire for learning, etc. (M/30 - Physics Teacher, Department Head at an Urban School).*

Impact of curriculum overload on teacher work.

According to teachers, overloads in their work, related to the curriculum, are numerous, such as: administrative work, descriptive documents, then preliminary preparations for subject, topic, unit, lack of texts, or inadequate texts. Consequently, the need for research, provision of additional materials, pressure from parents' requirements about student assessment, insufficient time for the realization of learning planning, behaviors and disinterest of students for achievement, working with students who are disinterested in learning and who waste time surfing the Internet etc. All of these, according to teachers, have led to teachers having fatigue, psychic load, emotional load, pressure, mental pressure, confusion, ambiguity, work demotivation, loss of creativity, often fail to accomplish what they plan, etc.

This is how some teachers describe the impact of the curriculum overload on their work:

- *Teachers are overloaded with daily planning, because such planning takes a lot of time, sometimes forgetting the main goals we have with*

students, and dealing with 'papers' instead! (m/26 - mathematics teacher, rural school);

- *Not only me, but 99% of teachers in my school are overburdened with vain issues, with documents they have to fill in vain, with daily plans they make just for the sake of appearances, things that do not yield any results. This makes our job boring and there is poor performance as a result of overload (M/40 - Biology teacher, rural school).*
- *The load is huge, we have to describe every word that relates to the lesson (filling in many papers), and I think we need to focus more on content (M/38 - Albanian language teacher, Urban school).*

However, according to a considerable part of the teachers, the success achieved in these processes has not been lacking, thanks to their commitment, but also the understanding they have reached with students and parents. There are those who say that as individuals they do not feel the curriculum overload.

> *Personally, I do not feel the curriculum overload. To me, what presents an overload and negative effects on my work is the out-of - teaching requirements. As a teacher, I do not feel comfortable to spend time with administrative work outside the direct impact on the teaching process, for example completing school documentation, matrix books, protocols, etc. (M/64 - Biology Teacher, Urban School).*

Referring to the reports above, about the impact of curricular overload on the achievements and well-being of students, as well as on the work of teachers, it can be said that teachers provide ample evidence for the effects of curricular overload that they have observed in their students, but also from its reflection in their work. A summary of teachers' attitudes regarding these aspects is presented in the following table, organized into subcategories and specific topics ordered according to the frequency of the information identified.

Table 19. Teachers' reflection on the impact of curricular overload on students and the impact on their work

Subcategory	Specific topic
Impact on student achievement	- Difficulty in learning; - Poor achievements; - Students quickly learn the content, but also quickly forget it; - Most of the outcomes are attempted to be achieved only as a theoretical lesson; - Focus on mechanical learning, rote learning; - Commitment of students only towards grades - final achievement; - The student focuses on passing and not on personal development; - Reduced productivity in achieving results; - Low results in PISA; - Achieving outcomes is impossible; - Students' disinterest in learning; - Unsystematic learning.
Impact on students' well -being	- Stress in students; - Student fatigue; - Disinterest in learning; - Overload with heavy backpacks, body deformities; - Non-attendance, lack of will to learn, refusal to learn; - Withdrawal from lessons; - Appearance of distrust in achieving learning outcomes; - Uncertainty about student's abilities, concerns; - Disappointment and consequently loss of desire for learning; - Lack of ambitions for engaging in lessons; - Has influenced drop in students' interest in learning, suspicion of achievement;

	- Problems in classroom engagement activities.
Impact on teacher work	**Forms of expression of teacher overload** - Administrative overload, much administrative work is required; - Preliminary preparation overload; - Overload with subjects in primary education; - Overload from the shortcomings of existing textbooks, providing additional resources; - Planning and implementation of the lesson within the pressure of time/lesson; - Overload with students' structure, parental requirements, etc.; - Insufficient time in proper treatment of outcomes. **Impact on teacher well -being** - Loss of emotional calm; - Psychological overload, which in some cases causes confusion and uncertainty; - Loss of creativity; - Mental pressure; - Pressure retention; - Fatigue, irritability, but also success.

4.3.1.4. What can be done to handle and mitigate the curriculum overload?

Teachers have mentioned some strategies, actions to be taken to handle and mitigate the curriculum overload, referring to leading planning and implementing curriculum actors. They consider that the MESTI should initially make an analysis of the curriculum documents and the manner of implementation so far. They propose to review the learning outcomes, the curricula/syllabi, for which concerns have been raised by teachers and

emphasis is on their adaptation to the age of the students. Teachers suggest that other curriculum implementation guidelines be drawn up to assist teachers in their actions. There are suggestions from teachers to reduce the number of subjects and see the implementation of learning through curriculum areas as another opportunity to mitigate curriculum overload.

Some actions, which must be taken from central to school level, which are more outlined by teachers, are as follows:

- Drafting new textbooks for grades that are currently missing, reviewing existing textbooks;
- Review of learning outcomes in curricula/syllabi, for which concerns have been raised and reducing the number of subjects (specifically in primary education);
- Drafting supportive and applicable policies for teachers and students by the MESTI, indispensable.
- MEDs to follow work in schools and create better working conditions;
- MEDs to provide appropriate infrastructure for the implementation of the new curriculum, such as; reducing the number of students in classrooms, creating and equipping cabinets with accessible tools for practical work, internet etc;
- School heads should be in support of students and teachers, especially in provision of didactic equipment, ICT equipment, etc.
- Parents to devote themselves more to their children, supervise them and support them in right use of the Internet.

In relation to teachers, on how to approach the treatment and reduction of the curriculum overload, teachers themselves suggest that they should be as clear and practical in teaching as possible to address this problem, to simplify lessons and adapt them to the level and age of students, avoid unnecessary assignment of homework, engage students with additional and supplementary lessons, depending on the needs of the students. Teachers also become self -critical to the way of teaching planning, they say that the syllabus should be prepared / designed by the teachers themselves, for their students, rather than borrowed from others, because it brings difficult.

Other actions, suggested for teachers by teachers, regarding the treatment and mitigation of curricular overload, affect other aspects regarding work based on curricula-learning results, and not on books, planning more attractive activities for students, avoiding the inappropriate learning contents for students and contents that are unfit for their age. Likewise, working with students to be based on students' needs and on students' preliminary knowledge, fewer students' homework, coordinated projects for students, practicing different forms of assessment, using technology in teaching, involvement of students in alternative forms of learning, supplementary-, additional learning, out-of-school and extracurricular activities.

Regarding the necessary support, the most pronounced teacher requirement is to improve the conditions for work and successful implementation of the curriculum, including the creation of the most appropriate work environments, the supply of didactic and concretization tools, the equipment of classrooms with technology, Internet and other. Reducing the number of students in classrooms, in urban schools, is also considered support.

Teachers see school -based professional development, peer mentoring, providing continued quality training and providing support even after completing training, enhancing the quality of training, as some of the ways and opportunities for more advanced teacher support in processes related to the implementation of the curriculum.

In addition to what was said above, teachers suggest that there are as many similar research as possible, which would include more teachers, students and parents. Findings and suggestions from these research to be taken into account by the competent institutions.

> *Teachers' remarks and suggestions should not fall on deaf ears, as was once the case with the removal of errors from texts, where "text corrections" indeed came out with many mistakes (m/40, Albanian language teacher, rural school).*
>
> *I say it is a befitting research, hoping it will affect the lightening of excessive overload, both for the student, the teacher and the parents (M/65, class teacher, urban school).*

Also, the teachers suggest that when the changes in the curriculum are initiated, more teachers should be invited to the meetings and their ideas and suggestions about the needs for changes, the possibilities of implementing the changes at the school level should be heard directly from them, so that the overview of the real situation is as clearer and that there are no hesitations in the implementation of the curriculum, as they have appeared in this curriculum reform. Campaigns for parents' awareness regarding their role in children's education are also suggested by teachers. The teachers call for everyone to perform their work and obligation with as much dedication and responsibility as possible. Only in this way will the implementation chain of the curriculum and children's education be able to function successfully.

Teachers involved see the study as of interest in three aspects:

- the need to address the issue of the curriculum overload, which they have observed and experienced;
- the opportunity and space offered to express their views, to obtain ideas of reflection on the overload that they themselves can handle in their work with students;
- guidance that is expected to emerge from research findings for educational institutions that have a role in avoiding and reducing curriculum overload.

4.3.2. Students' perceptions of their learning overload

The main findings on the students' learning overload, from the perspective of the students, are reported and presented into four thematic subcategories, with descriptive elements of specific topics from each subcategory, which together reflect the main findings on the issue of dealing with students' learning overload. The first part reports the main findings on students' responses regarding their engagement in learning and the time students spend to engage in lessons and homework assignments. The second part presents the students' responses regarding their learning overload and influencing factors. The third part reports the main findings from the students 'responses regarding the impact that students' overload has in

learning, how it is reflected in their achievements and well -being. Whereas, the fourth part offers some students 'ideas for the treatment and mitigation of students' learning overload.

4.3.2.1. Student engagement in learning and time of engagement

Students' engagement in the learning process depends on many factors. Their learning is not the same in all subjects, nor can we talk about the same time of student engagement, to achieve learning outcomes in the relevant subjects or grade.

Regarding the engagement of students in learning, the students involved in this study are asked about the subjects in which they are more engaged, learn more, the reasons or factors that encourage them to learn more, as well as their average time of engagement during a day in learning and homework. These elements are indirectly discussed with students to also derive aspects of their learning overload.

Students' engagement in learning and subjects in which students learn more.

Referring to the answers received by the students, we see that the engagement of students in the lessons differs from subject to subject. The learning of any subject is not excluded from the students of the 8th and 9th grades, who were part of this study.

The singling out of some subjects, which students say they learn more and are more engaged, is evident in the reflections of the students of this study. The subjects in which the students involved in the study are more engaged in learning are Albanian language, science subjects (biology, chemistry and physics), then mathematics, English, civic education, etc. For each subject that students have specified they are more engaged in learning it, there are reasons for their engagement in the respective subjects described above, and a large part of them relate to the teacher factor and the practice of teaching them.

On the other hand, the reasons or factors that encourage students to learn more in particular subjects, in which they engage more in lessons, according to students, are their interests in certain subjects, the prospect of some subjects in their further education, as well as other factors related to the methodological approaches of teaching practiced during work with students, communication with students, influences from family and peers, English language prospects, more attractive content, but also the involvement of the subjects in the Achievement test.

According to the students, they learn because they want to gain certain knowledge in the subjects of the respective grade, or because they are interested in a particular subject due to their interest, further education, and the incentives that teachers give them through their work.

The time of students' engagement in learning after regular school lessons.

Students' engagement in learning, after regular school hours, largely refers to their willingness to participate and succeed in their learning process and the tasks they receive from teachers, including homework.

The students' engagement time in learning at home, according to the students, is related to the learning contents they learn at school, which they say are very extensive and have many difficult things that must be repeated several times at home to better memorize and assimilate them.

Students' responses about the time they engage in learning and homework are described to be highly variable. More than half of the study sample students declare that they engage in learning and homework an average of 4-5 hours during a day, about 40% about 1-3 hours, the rest, about 10%, declare that they have more than 5 hours of engagement in learning at home and homework.

According to the students, their commitment to learning at home differs according to the daily schedule they have at school and the number of subjects. In the subjects where there is a lack of textbooks or when the lesson units are not in the books they learn from, they state that they spend more

time engaged in obtaining materials from different sources, mainly referring to Internet sources.

A period of student engagement for home learning is linked to assessment with marks. According to the students, their engagement in learning at home varies from period to period of the school year, during the time of oral or test assessment of students, where this time is described to be even longer.

Student engagement time only for homework.

Homework remains among the activities least liked by many students, which, according to the students, take up the most time of their engagement in learning at home. From interviews with students, it turns out that more than half of them spend 2-3 hours on homework on average during the day, about 1/3 of them spend 1 hour, while others spend more than 3 hours only on homework.

The views of the students about their engagement in learning and the time of engagement are presented in the following table, in which the views of the students are organized into the three subcategories described above, then for each subcategory specific topics are listed, according to the frequency of the information identified from the data collected with students.

Table 20. Student engagement in learning - engagement time

Subcategory	Specific topic
The main reasons for the greater engagement of students in learning in particular subjects	- *Ways of explanation by teachers;* - *The communication approach of teachers about lessons;* - *Students' interest in subjects;* - *The perspective of some subjects, specifically the English language due to its use throughout the world and for communication opportunities;* - *Practical side;* - *Encouragement from family and peers;*

	- *The inclusion of subjects in the achievement test;* - *Orientation of students for further education;* - *Attractive content in some subjects.*
Engagement time of students in learning at home	- *Engaged at home around lessons and homework, every day up to 5 hours;* - *On the days near the end of the school period, the learning time goes from 4 to 6 hours;* - *More hours of engagement in learning and homework, with differences in time- is related to the lack of teaching units in textbooks, the load of learning content that needs to be learned;* - *Engagement in learning at home with differences in time - depending on the number of subjects with assigned homework and the lesson schedule for the next day;* - *During the period of tests or oral assessment, students state that they dedicate 6-8 hours.*
Student engagement time only in homework	- *Engagement time in homework, up to 3 hours;* - *Engagement time in homework, up to 4 hours;* - *Engagement time in homework, every day at least 2 hours;* - *The load of doing homework is too great;* - *There is a lot of homework and little instruction;* - *Unlimited engagement time in homework is also related to maintaining achievement in subjects that also assign homework.*

All that was described above and presented in the table above shows that the subjects in which students learn or engage more and the duration of their learning at home, for lessons and homework, is different, to a large extent large is individual and depends on the obligations they receive from teachers and their way of learning.

4.3.2.2. **Students' reflection on the factors of their learning overload**

From the answers given by the students, we find that their overload with lessons is present both in the 8th grade students and in the 9th grade students. Student learning overload, according to the students' own descriptions, differs from student to student, because most students relate their overload more to the time of engagement in learning and homework, as well as in learning topics that require greater engagement. There are students who also talk about the overload with the number of subjects. When referring to the large number of subjects, students specify subjects which, from the name they offer, imply that the reference is made to elective curriculum subjects, such as Career Orientation, Advanced Chemistry, etc. According to the students, within some subjects (the subjects are not specified) there are topics that require greater engagement and for them this represents a higher load than it would be considered appropriate. This is what a 9th grade student from an urban school says:

> *I think that for our age the engagement we make represents a higher load than it should. The lesson topics are in more detail than usual and there are also lessons that years ago were taught in upper secondary schools, now carried over to the 9th grade.*

The main factors affecting the overload of students in learning are many, such as: the number of subjects; the number of topics/lesson units loaded with historical facts - dates, numbers, theories, trivial information, formal data, etc.; overload with textbooks and learning materials (books, workbooks, manuals); overload with curricular and extracurricular

activities; homework overload; the frequency of assessments with tests; teaching and learning etc.

All these factors are presented directly or indirectly by the students of this study, some from a larger number of students and some from a smaller number of students. Some students have indicated 2-3 main factors that influence their learning overload. From the quantification of students' answers regarding the main factors that influence their learning overload, we managed to derive a ranking of the most influential factors, which is presented as follows:

- the frequency of assessments with tests (stated by about 44% of students);
- learning topics/units within some subjects (stated by about 43% of students);
- textbooks (stated by about 40% of students);
- homework (stated by about 39% of students);
- teachers and teaching (stated by about 34% of students);
- other factors (stated by about 20% of students).

Overload from the frequency of assessments with tests. Students, when they talk about their overload with the frequency of assessments with tests that are carried out in different subjects, they relate it to the assessment tests for the three teaching periods within the Summative Assessment SA2, but also to the tests and other assessment tools, which are used by teachers within the Summative Assessment SA1. The students, when they talk about the assessment tools, also talk about the unnecessary use of some of the assessment tools, specifically for example the file tool and the scientific subjects research tool, for which they state that they the assessment criteria are unclear. This, too, implies a lot, because students are not informed with the purposes of using more than one assessment tools during a teaching period.

In their descriptions, the students state that there are cases when they have up to 2-3 tests within one day of school, or cases when in certain subjects they are assessed orally three times within a teaching period. Another

element that the students touch on in their descriptions, which is related to the assessment of learning achievements, the students state that instead of frequent assessments with tests, they would prefer more repetitions and reinforcements, which, according to them, are rarely done by teachers.

Overload with topics/lesson units. Some of the subjects, which contain redundant topics/units, according to the students' statements, are: Biology, Physics, Mathematics, Geography and the Albanian language. The topics, according to them, are too long and vague. Students, when they talk about the learning topics foreseen with the subject curricula or lesson units that are explained during the classes, mainly refer to the learning topics or lesson units in the textbooks they work with. This leaves us to understand that the students are not informed with the learning topics and the learning outcomes that are expected to be achieved in the teaching periods.

According to the students, in some subjects, due to the load of teaching units that have to be explained by the teachers, they are often not explained by the teachers, who then give the students the task of learning the lessons even without being explained in class. In this regard, the challenge according to the students increases, when there is a lack of practical examples from teachers, examples in textbooks, as well as opportunities to get other information from reliable sources. In such cases of overloading with topics/lesson units, students suggest that teachers during the class divide the topics into smaller parts, explain slowly, clearly and only the basic things.

Textbook overload. In the context of the organization of learning in Kosovo schools, the textbook is seen as the main tool for learning, which is prepared for students and is also used by teachers to deliver and organize teaching in working with students. Textbooks represent another factor of student learning overload, also highlighted by the students included in this study. The elements of textbook overload, which are most often referred to by students, are the number of lesson units in the textbooks, long contents, contents not adequate to the age of the students, or even unnecessary contents, the language of understanding the texts, etc.

According to the students, the textbooks that most influence their learning overload are the textbooks of Geography, Albanian Language, Mathematics, Physics and Biology, in different grades. Some contents of these texts, according to the students, are long and unnecessary. The students state that there are often inconsistencies between the basic book and the workbook, as well as inconsistencies between the program and the texts they work with.

Referring to the grades attended by students this year, the 9th grade textbooks appear to have more loads in terms of the contents that the students say they cannot learn.

Another problem stated by the students of this study is the lack of adequate texts in some subjects and, as a result, they are forced to learn from notes given by some teachers and from other sources.

Overload with homework. Students at school cannot acquire all the knowledge and all the skills they need to acquire during the lesson, so homework for them is inevitable, for the acquisition of these knowledge and skills. In the context of schools in Kosovo, where most work in double shifts and often in the winter season with reduced hours, homework continues to be assigned by most teachers.

From about 39% of students, who have stated that homework is one of the main factors of their learning overload, more than half of them state that they are very burdened with homework, while the rest state that they are to a certain extent burdened with homework.

A relatively small number of students think that they are not burdened with homework, on the contrary, according to them, there should be more homework so that students are more engaged in learning.

The subject in which students are mostly burdened with homework is that of Mathematics. Apart from mathematics, according to the students, they are also burdened with a lot of homework in the Albanian language, without specifying any aspect of this overload. Other subjects loaded with homework, according to the students, are Biology and Physics.

When students talk about their homework load, they talk more about the number of homework and less about the level of difficulty. They express more concern about the time they spend doing their homework, since more than half of the students spend at least 2 hours just doing their homework. Students also indirectly talk about the lack of homework instructions and the learning benefits they get from homework. The latter, the benefits of homework, students mainly associate with the assessments at the end of the teaching periods, not with the continuous progress and the extra support they can get from their teachers.

Overload from teachers and teaching. According to the students, in their schools they face a number of teachers who explain a lot of learning content, without taking care of how much the students have mastered the learned content. Students also draw differences in the way the teachers work with them, the work methodology, and the emphasis is placed on the way the lessons are explained, whether they are explained with meaning or without meaning, the connection of learning with practical examples and with life, the engagement of students during lesson, group work instructions, homework instructions, use of ICT in teaching, use of additional resources, etc. All these aspects, which affect the elements of the role of teachers and teaching, are described by students as having an impact and playing a role in students being active or passive in learning, being burdened during learning or when performed well, being relaxed and to learn with motivation, will and to love the subjects more.

Overload of students in learning and free time for extracurricular activities. For the all-round development of the student, along with education, free time and extracurricular activities play a special role. They are an integral part of students' lives and development, not just theirs. Regarding these aspects, it was discussed with the students involved in the study, with special emphasis on the time available after school and homework, time for rest, leisure, play, socializing with peers, sleep, etc.

Despite the loads that the students have presented in the time for learning at home, for doing homework, over 66% of the students included in the study stated that they have enough time for rest, leisure, play and socializing with

peers, although from time to time it is said that in certain periods they lack this time, while about 33% of students have expressed that they do not have enough time for these activities, due to the burdens they have related to lessons and homework.

During the time of tests and assessments, according to the students, there is little free time and little time for extracurricular activities. In order to achieve good results and maintain success, students say that they have to be constantly engaged, so they don't have much free time left.

According to the students, they mainly spend their free time hanging out with their friends outside the house, listening to music, and on social networks. The way students describe the use of free time for rest, leisure, play, socializing with peers, etc., shows that it varies a lot between students, there are no elements of planning for creative use of this time and it depends on the assignments they receive from the school/teachers, namely lessons and homework.

In conclusion, it can be said that students have many arguments about the factors that influence their learning overload. Students have provided specific topics for each of the factors that they feel are loaded in learning. The details of the specific themes for the overload factors, or according to the coding of the subcategories of the overload factors, which have been reviewed above, are shown in the following table.

Table21. Factors of student learning overload - descriptions of the elements of overload from the students' perspective

Subcategory	Specific topic and student descriptions
Overload from the frequency of assessments with tests	- *Loaded with many assessment tools;* - *Constantly loaded with tests, 2-3 tests in a day;* - *Different assessment tools from subject to subject;* - *Very frequent test assessments;* - *Repetitions and reinforcements are done very rarely;*

	- *We are burdened with tests, we do not learn from them;* - *Loaded with oral assessments in science subjects within a teaching period.*
Overload with lesson topics/units	- *There is a load of topics / lesson units, because there are many subjects that are taught within one school year;* - *The key things are not taken out in summarized form to explain;* - *The topics in the geography textbook contain a lot of extended text, a lot of data;* - *In the subject of Geography, the lesson is often very unclear.* - *The lessons are unnecessarily long, while in the subject of Biology (grade 9) throughout the year the units are taken from the Internet and we often came across incorrect sources;* - *Scientific subjects are the most loaded compared to other subjects, especially Chemistry;* - *Some topics are not incomprehensible to students, teachers do not use additional material (resources);* - *In Biology, the lesson topics are loaded, sometimes even unnecessary. Teachers must find a way to simplify the lessons;* - *The subject of History has many topics and lessons, the teachers should remove a part of them.*
Textbook overload	- *In Geography textbooks, grades 8 and 9, there are extended topics that students cannot learn for the classes per week, teachers should simplify the lessons;* - *The data in the geography text, grade 9, are outdated;* - *In the Physics textbook, grade 9, there are examples and information that are not necessary;*

	- *In the biology and physics textbooks, grade 9, the topics that the teachers realize are not in the textbooks with which we work;* - *In the Biology and Physics, grade 9, there are no adequate textbooks, students mainly learn from notes and information they can obtain from the Internet;* - *Grade 9 textbooks, in Albanian Language and Mathematics are more loaded.* - *Mathematics textbooks, in grades 8 and 9, are very loaded with tasks, which the students do not understand.*
Homework overload	- *Very engaged in tasks, activities, tests;* - *There should be less homework;* - *The subject of mathematics is itself a loaded subject, but the tasks are also a load;* - *Due to the load of math tasks, it often happens that they are not completed by the students;* - *In Albanian Language and Technology we are loaded with a lot of homework;* - *In Biology, due to the lack of a textbook, the unit of each lesson must be researched by the students themselves in the preparation of papers, projects, etc.* ***There are some students who do not see homework as an overload:*** - *We are not overloaded;* - *Teachers give us tasks to the extent they are necessary;* - *Homework is not excessive, but on the contrary in some subjects it is lacking.*
Overload from teachers and teaching	- *Few teachers summarize the lesson in short and concrete points;* - *The teachers of Albanian Language, Mathematics, Chemistry and Physics explain the lessons with a*

	large content, they should divide them into two or three parts; - *Technology teachers should explain the lessons in a practical way, slowly and more clearly;* - *The explanation by Civic Education teachers should be more related to examples from life, so that they can be understood by students;* - *Students are burdened when they have to write the whole lesson in the notebook;* - *Students need another way of explanation from teachers, in order to understand the lessons;* - *In the absence of the biology textbook, in the 9th grade, teachers should simplify the lessons for students, with practical examples;*
Student learning overload and free time for extracurricular activities	- *We spend most of our time at home around lessons and homework;* - *We don't have time for family or other activities;* - *We should study at least 7-8 hours during the time of tests;* - *In our free time we go for walks and watch movies;* - *I don't have much free time after school. What remains we spend in sports and music;* - *During our free time, we play sports, attend the English course, socialize, communicate through social networks, etc.*

4.3.2.3. **Students' perspectives on the impact of their learning overload**

The impact of students' learning overload is reflected in the achievements of students, but also on their well -being. Students participating in this study reported various elements related to their learning overload, which is reflected in their learning outcomes, but also on their well -being, where fatigue appears to be a much discussed concern by students.

Regarding the outcomes or students' achievements in learning, students confirmed that they need constant engagement in learning, to achieve the intended outcomes, to increase their learning opportunities and prepare for the future. Almost all students who were part of this study have excellent or very good success. To achieve this success, according to the students, a great deal of engagement was needed on their part, which students say they have done continuously, despite the fact that at certain times they have been burdened with numerous lessons and tasks.

To achieve the desired success in learning and generally in school, many aspects are inevitably discussed and one of them is fatigue due to the energy lost as a result of many engagements. Students also confirm that their fatigue often occurs as a result of excessive engagement or overload with instruction time, lessons and tasks related to lessons. Signs of fatigue, as students describe, are different, but the basic ones are distraction, reduced ability to normally pay attention to the lesson, emotional distress, stress, lack of good mood etc.

The impact of students' learning overload comes as a result of school lessons, but also as a result of the lessons and assignments that take place at home. Elements of the impact of students' overload on these two aspects are also displayed by the students involved in this study, who present these impacts from their perspective on the changes and distress they have observed in themselves, the changes and distress they have noticed in their peers, who have low achievements in learning, but also the distress they have noticed in their parents about their children.

***Changes and distress that students have when returning home and interrelation to school lessons*.** The impact of students' learning overload is observed during daily work and classroom engagement, but students themselves can observe or experience it after returning home, as well as when doing homework. Most students say that after returning home from school, they feel they have fatigue, stress, distress, mainly related to school lessons and their obligations toward additional lessons and homework. From the way they are described by students, it is seen that these aspects that

reflect the well -being of students are manifested in different ways, depending on the willingness and experience of dealing with them.

There are students who say that most of their changes and distress from the learning load are related to the school, especially during the testing period, when they have to get grades that have an impact on their success in teaching periods, when the grades are finalized.

However, there are also students who say that these concerns are not always related to school lessons. According to these students, their distress can also be influenced by some other factors and society and family are two of the other factors mentioned by students.

Changes and distress of students at home, during lessons and when performing homework. Students estimate that they have distress while learning at home while performing homework because they consider that they are loaded with them. This is also reflected in physical time of 2-3 hours, which students spend only for homework.

According to students, they encounter many difficulties in doing homework, which also come as a result of the failure of teachers to provide proper explanations and guidance. According to students, from the difficulties they have in the lessons and homework, many perturbations come to be manifested in various forms. These perturbations, according to students, manifest as stress, deconcentration, fatigue and fear of inaccurate performance of homework.

For a number of students, learning at home and doing homework do not cause any change in their behavior or any distress because they consider that there is no overload, so there is no reason for distress. A number of students associate this with the support provided by parents or family members with lessons and homework.

Parents' concerns about the lessons and results of their children. The large engagement of students in lessons and homework requires family support, primarily from parents, in creating the suitable conditions and environment for learning, but also with the necessary guidance and advice in relation to relevant lessons and homework.

The students involved in this study, to a relatively good extent, confirm that their parents are those who care about the lessons and results of students at school. Also, most students confirm that they notice concerns in their parents when they have failed to achieve good results in the lessons, when they inform them of the lessons and homework that they cannot complete on their own, when they complain that they are burdened with the number of the texts but also the lessons emerging out of a single school day.

According to students' statements, almost all parents have concerns about their progress in learning, doing homework, the time they spend around lessons, fatigue and stress related to lessons and generally to school, etc. According to students, the load with too much homework, as well as achievements and success in the tests that take place at school, are the greatest preoccupation and concern of their parents.

Another concern for some of the parents, according to students, is the long stay in front of computers and other technological devices for communication and games.

Among the students involved in the study, there are those who state that their parents do not worry about them at all, because they (students) are doing well with lessons, have excellent grades, are well-behaved and have good relations with peers, etc. Some students state that they do not want to burden their parents with any concern, so they engage as much as possible in lessons.

Changes and distress of students who have low results in learning, observed by their peers. Despite the progress, the low performance of students in general is likely to have a negative impact on opportunities for their well -being. The concerns that students notice in their classmates with low success/results in learning when they fail to learn or complete homework are different. About half of the students involved in this study state that their friends with poor results are distressed when they fail to learn or complete homework.

The concerns of their peers, according to students, relate to lessons and results in learning and manifest with stress, loss of control, sometimes even conflicts with teachers and conflicts between students.

Changes and distress observed in peers with average or low success/scores in learning, as students say, depend on students' formation and interest in learning. Among the students with low results, there are those who do not worry at all about learning or their success.

Students' views on the subcategories described above, regarding the impact of students' learning overload, are shown in the following table. For each subcategory, specific topics are listed, according to the frequency of information identified from the data collected from the students included in this study.

Table 22. Students' changes and concerns from the impact of learning overload

Subcategory	***Specific topics and descriptions of students***
Changes and concerns of students from lessons and school engagements	- *fatigued and exhausted from the weight of backpacks and stressed by the lessons;* - *feel fatigue;* - *feel tired, not in a mood and stressed out of excessive assessments;* - *have concerns;* - *feel stressed and nervous at times;* - *also have concerns from the situation in my family;* - *concerns with the improper behavior of students at school.* ***There are some students who have no changes and concerns from school lessons and engagements:*** - *feel good about school lessons;* - *have no problems with school lessons.*
Students' changes and concerns due to lessons and homework	- *Concerns from the many lessons and homework to complete at home;* - *Concerns when we cannot give right answers in homework;* - *Concern is related to whether or not homework is well completed;* - *Sometimes there is stress and panic from homework.*

	There are some students who do not have concerns about home lessons and homework: - *feel good about lessons and homework;* - *understand school lessons well, have no problems with homework;* - *We use homework to learn more.*
Parents' concerns about the lessons and results of their children	- *concerned about the success of students because they push their children to do their homework, learn, etc.* - *concerned about the fatigue, lack of sleep and anxiety of children from work and engaging in lessons;* - *Parents' concerns relate more to the final grades and success;* - *concerned when we spend too much time with technology and social networks;* - *concerned when we have stress and spend long time learning and doing homework.* ***There are some students who say they do not see concerns in their parents about their lessons and results:*** - *are not concerned because they feel very pleased with success and behavior in school;* - *are not concerned about the engagements, lessons and homework;* - *We try not to transmit our concerns to our parents so as not to burden them too;* - *do not show enough interest about our lessons.*
Changes and concerns of students who have low results in learning, observed by their peers	- *They experience this situation very badly, because they too want to achieve high results in learning;* - *Students when they do not achieve good results, get worried, lose control, do things that should not be done, including conflicts with teachers;* - *They get emotional, stressed and afraid they will not be successful;* - *It depends on the students. Some feel bad and have a hard time coping, while others are already accustomed to this;*

- *Some of these students do not worry about their results at the end of the school year;*
- *We have students in our class who show no interest in learning and don't worry about anything.*

4.3.2.4. Students' ideas for dealing with and mitigating their learning overload

Students had the opportunity to provide comments or suggestions on their part, for concrete actions that could be taken by teachers and schools regarding the treatment and mitigation of their learning overload. Their suggestions for concrete actions almost tackle all the factors that influence their learning overload, which are presented by them as more influential factors in their overload, such as: student assessment, topics/lessons, textbooks, homework, teachers and teaching etc.

Some actions to be taken to treat and mitigate students' school learning overload, outlined the most by students, are as follows:

- During a school year, students' assessment should be done in two teaching periods;
- Have as many activities as possible with students during class and have it be as interactive as possible;
- Have fewer homework for students;
- Textbooks to be more appropriate (more comprehensible) for students. Texts to contain more practical activities and of interest to students;
- Increase the number of classes that have many lesson topics (specified 9th grade Geography, due to many learning contents);
- Have less load with subjects, lesson topics, lesson units

Some of the students' suggestions for actions in dealing with and mitigating their learning overload in school go to the students themselves, their peers. When summarized it emerges as an articulated request for students to learn more and constantly engage and be active during classes so that the lessons taking place in school are better acquired.

Students also see the Achievement Test as a load, which they require to undergo changes, instead of 200 requirements and test taking place in two days, they request to reinstate the previous form, with 100 requirements and a single day of testing. The way students approach this request implies that students of grades 8 and 9 are not well informed of the purpose of the Achievement Test, the use of results from this assessment, and are not supported by the school with the right preparations to undergo this test at the end of compulsory education.

4.3.3. Parents Perspective on Student Learning Overload

The following results, according to the fields examined, from the parents' perspective on the students' learning overload, vary depending on the role parents had at school, their education level, but also on the level of education where the parents involved in the study had their children attending school. Most of them reflected their individual experience in relation to school, teachers and their children's lessons.

Despite the differences in their descriptions about the aspects dealt with regarding the students' learning overload, their references, their opinions on this topic, provided valuable findings of interest to this study, which are summarized in four separate subtopics, as presented in the section below:

- Informing parents with changes in curricula/syllabi, challenges and difficulties of teachers and students in the implementation of the curriculum;
- Student learning overload and influencing factors;
- Impact of overload on changing students' behavior;
- Parents' abilities in supporting children in reducing overload and their requirements for support from school/educational institutions.

4.3.3.1. Informing parents with changes in curricula/syllabi, challenges and difficulties of teachers and students in the implementation of the curriculum

Informing the entire school community about changes in curricula or syllabi, in particular informing parents, is one of the prerequisites for enhancing school collaboration with parents and to raise parents' responsibility for paying closer attention to working with their children, monitoring their progress and providing support in the learning process. From this starting point, for the parents involved in this study we have asked questions about their being informed about the curriculum/ syllabi changes, novelties and opportunities they bring.

From the thematic analysis of the answers given by the parents involved in the research, some important aspects related to the information of parents about curricula/ syllabi, including information they have received from school/ teachers about the work done in school regarding the education process, as well as the parents' information on the challenges in implementing the curriculum, the complaints, problems and concerns that parents have heard and discussed in certain cases with teachers and their children.

Regarding the substantive aspect of information of parents from school/teachers related to curriculum changes, referring to parents' descriptions, there appears to be no internal school system related to informing parents about changes in curricula, about novelties and opportunities offered by the competency -based curriculum. It is found that the information that parents have on this topic is very general, they mainly relate to the changes in textbooks or textbooks used by students.

Parents, in relation to their information about the organization of the learning process, reported that they know the number of subjects in their children's grades, about the textbooks their children have or do not have, without specifying elements related to learning content and learning outcomes in certain subjects and grades. So, from the way their informing practice related to curricula and textbooks is described, it is seen that parents are mainly informed about the number of subjects per grade, provision of textbooks, missing textbooks, etc..

Regardless of the level of information, some parents also provide assertions regarding changes in the curricula. In some cases, changes are described as

good, which make learning more attractive and that it takes time to see the results. But there are also cases that point out that the changes are unforeseen by professionals and that there is plenty of uncertainty on how to work with this curriculum, with these textbooks.

There are parents who are more reserved in their assertions regarding curricula changes. One of the parents states: *I have followed from the onset the changes that have been brought about with the new curriculum. There are novelties as well as good opportunities, but it takes time until their real evaluation* (P/35- Chairperson of the SSC (KDSH), school in urban area). However, there are parents who do not hesitate to do so, regardless of their level of information. This is what one parent states: *We are not very informed of the curricula, and the curriculum changes that take place, we are seeing them as being done without any analysis by professionals (P/14- school in rural area).*

Referring to the elements described by parents related to their information about the curricula, it turns out that parents who have a role in the School Steering Council or are parents' representatives for a particular classroom are more informed about general changes in the curricula versus other parents, who have no special roles in school. Parents of students from rural areas and parents of students with special needs give the least elements of their information on the aspects of the curriculum their children are taught with. These differences appear in the following descriptions:

> *I, as a representative of the class, am personally well informed about any educational changes and we have a constant communication about educational novelties with the teachers and the principal (p/13 - school in a rural area);*
>
> *We are not well informed, because there is a lot of ambiguity in the subjects that are taught (p/36 - head of the Parents' Council, school in an urban area);*
>
> *We are not informed (p/11 - school in rural area).*

The level of parents' information also differs in relation to the grades their children attend. Based on the elements described by the parents regarding

their information about the curricula and the way they are informed, it appears that parents who have their children in primary education, grades 1-5, are more informed compared to parents whose children are in lower secondary education, grades 6-9. The information of the latter is mainly provided by the form teachers, who provide general information about the beginning of the school year, the subjects according to the grades and the teachers who lecture/teach them, the equipment with the textbooks and information about the success and discipline of the students in meetings held with parents. Meanwhile, parents who have their children in primary education have greater opportunities for communication with the parents of their students about the aspects related to all the subjects they are taught. This is what a parent whose child is in the third grade says:

> *I am informed about the changes in the teaching programs from communications with the teacher, during meetings or in various cases when we encounter various problems in the students' understanding of the lessons (p/20 - head of the Parents' Council, school in an urban area).*

As for the information that the parents receive from the teachers, about their difficulties, challenges and concerns regarding the implementation of the curriculum, in many cases they are described or presented as the parents' own perceptions, not as information that has an argumentative basis in the parents' discussions carried out with teachers or vice versa, with some exception when a parent happened to be a teacher in another school.

According to parents, teachers' concerns about the difficulties and challenges they have in their work are related to textbooks, errors in the content and tasks of textbooks; the large number of children in the class (referring to urban schools); the short time to properly elaborate the learning contents; homework; loaded literature; deficiencies in the reading quality of a number of students; lack of concrete tools and internet in classes; weight of backpacks; too much is required of students; the need for students to learn more and in a logical way; same subjects for which two textbooks from different editions are used, etc. Some of these concerns are outlined in the following descriptions:

We have discussed many times with the teacher. In the event that we complained verbally as parents about the heavy load the children have with lessons, the answer was that the curriculum requires it (p/3 - head of the parents' council, school in an urban area);

When we have discussed with the teachers, they complain about the limited opportunities to carry out the lesson as the curriculum provides. Therefore, it is not possible to implement the full curriculum (p/4 - school in an urban area);

Teachers complain about the heavy load of content in textbooks, the very large difference between theory and practice, the large number of students in the classroom (p/7 - head of parents for the grade, school in an urban area).

During the communication with the teacher, it was observed the speed of the treatment of the lesson by the teachers, regardless of how much the students have learned (p/19 - member of SSC, school in an urban area).

On the other hand, regarding the difficulties and concerns of children/students regarding their lessons, most of the parents, who have expressed that they often talk with their children about lessons at school, textbooks, homework, the difficulties they face in certain subjects, successes in learning, etc., in their descriptions they have provided sufficient elements which show that their children face different challenges and have concerns in different aspects related to the learning process.

Summary of students' concerns related to their lessons, the implementation of the curriculum, according to parents, are the lack of new textbooks according to the applicable curriculum, the large number of textbooks that students work with in some grades, issues related to the homework, both their number and the frequency of homework assignments, but also the teachers' approach to classroom explanations and homework instructions.

One of the concerns raised by my child is related to the subject of Biology, 6th grade, where the teacher explained more than half of the textbook within 2 months, on the grounds that this is how it is in the syllabus (p/8 - head of Parents' Council, school in rural area);

Our children's concerns are related to the number of textbooks and homework in the lower grades (p/13- school in a rural area);

Now there are more engagements for students at school, there are more homework, but with the help of the teacher and the parents, my child is managing to overcome the difficulties he has during learning and tasks (p/15 - school in an urban area).

A summary of the concerns raised by teachers and students, always according to parents, is presented in the following table. They are organized into subcategories and specific topics, sorted according to the frequency of the information identified.

Table 23. Problems and concerns of teachers and students in the implementation of the curriculum, from the parents' perspective

Subcategory	Specific topics from subcategories
Problems and concerns heard/discussed by teachers	- The large number of subjects at the primary level; - Lack of concretization tools and internet in classrooms; - Limited opportunities to implement the lesson as the curriculum provides. - Too many topics, insufficient time (Albanian language, Mathematics - 5th grade); - Large number of students in classrooms; - There are difficult learning contents in relation to the age of the students; - The syllabi is loaded and they cannot work with students who do not keep up with the lessons; - Loaded learning topics, while insufficient time to elaborate them properly;

	- The syllabi do not correspond to the textbooks that have been distributed to students, errors in the textbooks; - Difficulty in assessment, numerous assessment criteria; - The impossibility of giving the student a failing grade until the fifth grade, if he is not successful.
Problems and concerns heard/discussed by their children	- There are many students in a classroom; - Lots of homework, difficult and without instructions; - Difficulty in solving tasks; - Teachers explain a lot and quickly; - Students work with textbooks that have many lessons and tasks; - Some textbooks have errors; - Inadequate textbooks for many subjects; - Backpack loaded with school books; - There are lessons that the teacher gives without explaining them at all at school; - Many requests to research on the Internet, to prepare presentations, projects; - Fatigued students at school, no time for leisure and friends.

4.3.3.2. **Student learning overload and influencing factors from the parents' perspective**

The findings that are reported below refer to the attitudes of parents about the students learning overload and the influencing factors, is there or not

student learning overload according to parents, is there a positive or negative side to the student learning overload, what are the factors that influence the student learning overload and their specific elements?

Student learning overload. As for the parents' answer to a direct question, i.e. whether there is a student learning overload, most parents, about 60% of them, answered that there is an overload to some extent, about 30% of parents answered that there is a lot or too much student load, while about 10% of parents answered that there is no student learning load or that they are not aware of this.

In the subsequent request to argue the answer given regarding the students' learning overload, there are almost all the elements that have been presented by the parents as difficulties or concerns of the teachers and students for the implementation of the curriculum, with minor changes in the language of the description. In their arguments, parents have emphasized that there is loaded and often unnecessary content, then loaded texts and their lacking for some subjects and grades, homework, short schedule to elaborate the content well, overloaded content for the age of students, ineffective classes, obligations and homework without being elaborated in classroom, overload with tests, the heavy weight of books, one subject up to three textbooks, etc..

Positive or negative effects of student learning overload.

Most parents have stated that overload has a negative effect, because children cannot absorb all the contents. According to them, the overload is affecting the mental health of children and their development. They state that children can learn well even without overloading them with learning content. There are also parents who think that the results of PISA show the overload, because the practical and logical addressing of the contents learned by the students is not being done during school lessons.

Parents who stated that the effect of student learning overload is negative, argued it with various elements related to children's well-being, with the feeling of insecurity to learn, loss of self-confidence of students for learning, loss of will for school, loss of interest in learning, fatigue and stress, the inability to participate in extracurricular activities, sports activities, etc. This

is how two parents, respondents of this study, describe in a more extensive way the negative impact that, according to them, the overload of students has on learning:

> *I consider overload as negative. With this burden that our children have, they are gradually damaging their mental health. They often cry because of the heavy tasks they are assigned for homework and during the learning process. They are often receiving lessons that do not correspond to their age (p/3 - head of the Parents' Council, school in urban area);*

> *I consider the students' learning overload as negative, because I think it affects the loss of self-confidence in children and going to school enthusiastically, often children consider that they do not know many things in lessons (p/20 - head of the Parents' Council, school in urban area).*

A smaller number of parents involved in this study think that student learning overload has positive effects. They justify this with the fact that the more engaged students are, the more successful they are. This group of parents considers the load with lessons as more positive, emphasizing that it is better to learn than to spend time with technological tools, in social networks, friends on the street and wasting time. Among the parents, there are parents who have stated that the students must be burdened, so that they are successful in their studies, but they must be helped by the parents to overcome this burden.

Also, among the parents, there are parents who have stated that they see a positive side, but also a negative one, from the student learning overload.

> *I think there is something positive here, something negative. When I say positive I mean it strengthens the child to be better prepared for life. On the negative side, I think they have little time to engage in activities or hobbies (p/18 - school in an urban area).*

The summary aspects in the subcategories and specific topics from the subcategories, sorted according to the frequency of the identified

information, addressed by the parents, about the negative and positive effects of student learning overload, are shown in the following table.

Table 24. The impact of student learning overload– negative and positive effects

Subcategory	Specific topic from subcategories
The negative effects of student learning overload	- Overload is affecting children's mental health; - Children have a lot of stress and many obligations, very little satisfaction and that there should be parallels between children's obligations for learning and activities that make children feel satisfied and relaxed; - Children are tired of being overloaded with some content, which is unnecessary for life and reality, they are tired of being overloaded with textbooks; - PISA results show the overload and not the practical and logical addressing in lessons; - There is a loss of self-confidence in children, they often do not want to go to school; - Negative, because many things are learned that are not practiced in life and are not easily remembered; - The negative load is taking place with lessons where the use of technology is required, on the other hand it is evident that there is a lack of technology in schools; - Children are fatigued and stressed, especially in cases where teachers cannot break down the lesson/material enough and engage the children/students to do it, etc. - Children have little time to engage in extracurricular activities or hobbies they are interested in.

The positive effects of student learning overload	- Children engage more in lessons; - Are encouraged more to learn; - They don't spend a lot of time online, on social networks; - Children do not stay long on the street; - It strengthens the child to be better prepared for life.

Factors affecting the student learning overload. Regarding the aspects or factors of student learning overload, the largest number of parents declare that textbooks are one of the main factors that influence student learning overload. Also, a large number of parents declare that one of the main factors of the overload is the number of subjects and the contents that are taught within the subjects. A relatively high number of parents state that other factors that affect their children's learning overload are homework and the time that should be allocated for homework, then teachers and teaching, as well as the frequency of test assessment.

A ranking of factors influencing the student learning overload, according to parents, it is presented as follows:

- Textbooks;
- Number of subjects;
- Teaching contents;
- Homework;
- Teachers and forms of teaching;
- Frequency of test assessments.

Parents who have stated that one of the main factors of student learning overload is textbook overload mainly refer to the number of textbooks in a grade, only in certain cases they touch on the elements of textbook load and their inconsistency with the curriculum.

The majority of parents who stated that there is an overload of texts refer to the grades in which they have their children. The textbooks that are

considered the most loaded with content and tasks are Mathematics at the primary level, then Man and Nature textbook also at the primary level, Albanian Language 3B, etc. While, in grades 6-9, the German language textbooks are specified (grades are not specified), History grade VII, Biology grade IX, Mathematics grade VII and Geography (grades are not specified), etc. This is how two parents describe the overload of textbooks:

> *I consider having two books for one subject and plus the tasks that have to be written in the notebook to be an overload (p/21 - parent with a child with special needs, school in urban area);*
>
> *In grade VII Mathematics there are tasks that are of grade IX or grade X of high school (p/11 - school in urban area).*

In addition to the learning overload from the contents of the textbooks, other contents are presented by parents, such as essays that the students are obliged to do, portfolios, homework from the textbooks and outside of them, additional research on the Internet, many school novels, the heavy weight of backpacks, etc.

Parents in certain cases refer to their concern about the lack of textbooks and other teaching materials for children with special needs. At the same time, they request textbooks and learning materials for this category of children as well.

> *I request that textbooks and teaching materials also be compiled for children with Down Syndrome or in general for children with special needs (p/1 - parent of a child with special needs, school in urban area).*

Both parents who have their children in primary education, grades 1-5, and parents whose children are in lower secondary education, grades 6-9, state that there is a large number of subjects, but the number of parents referring to the number of subjects in primary education is much larger, relating it to the age of the children.

Parents who have stated that one of the main factors of overload is the overload with learning content/topics and lesson units, have given different

arguments, which tackle subjects, grades, but also some aspects of learning content related to their understanding by students.

Regarding the subjects loaded with learning content, parents for lower secondary education (grades 6-9) have mostly emphasized that there is an overload in the following subjects: Biology, Mathematics (Geometry section), History, ICT, Chemistry, German language and Physics. While for the elementary school level, it has been emphasized that the subjects of Albanian Language, English Language, Mathematics, Man and Nature are overloaded. Parents have stated that, in their opinion, some of the content in these subjects does not fit the age of the students.

In addition to the finding that there is an overload with content/topics and lesson units in the above subjects, parents also give some suggestions on what should be done, how to avoid or reduce the student learning overload. Parents suggest the following:

- reduce some learning outcomes in Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics, Biology;
- the contents that are explained should be simplified by teachers so that they are more understandable for students;
- the teaching of the English language at the primary level should be done more carefully;
- learning contents are refreshed, to match the reality that children live in;
- tasks for students should be as simple and understandable as possible;
- a better coordination in the use of textbooks, in subjects with 2-3 textbooks;

Some parents thus describe their suggestions on what to do, how to avoid or reduce student learning overload:

- *In order to avoid this load, changes should be made in the curriculum, because difficult lessons are explained, taking into account the age of the students (p/3 - head of parents, grade 3, school in urban area);*

- *Content reformation is needed, updating the content to match reality and time (p/14 - head of parents, grade 7, school in an urban area);*
- *The student is a student, he/she must learn the lessons, but he/she must also deal more with educational activities (p/24 – school in urban area);*
- *The school should facilitate learning for the children a a little more and simplify it because of the overloads that the children carry (p/36 - head of parents, grade 3, school in urban area).*

A very small number of parents stated that homework is not an overload for the students and that the teachers give as many assignments as the students can complete without being too overloaded. This group of parents sees this as the convenience created by the use of technological tools for communication and homework check.

On the other hand, the majority of parents have stated that students are overloaded with homework. They justify this in different ways, starting from the fact that they are often given assignments without being well explained in classroom, then there are cases when a child works on the tasks and others copy them from him, the lack of time to explain the assignments properly in classroom. The biggest concern regarding homework is the lack of instructions and explanations that students receive. This is what a parent says:

> *I think that homework should be motivating and more practical for the student, there should be instructions that are more understandable for children (p/26 - member of SSC, school in urban area).*

There are also various requests from parents regarding homework, that there is no homework on the weekend, that they are not asked to memorize poetry verses, that they are given practical tasks, that the classes are extended or that extra classes are held, as needed, the homework to be motivating for the student, to make the schools full-day stay, so that the children complete the tasks at school, as well as to reduce the assessment criteria for the students.

This is how two parents present their requests regarding the approach to homework:

- *Class assignments must be completed in class. The topics/lessons should be explained by the teachers before giving assignments to the students, it seems that in the absence of time for teaching in the classroom, the teachers give a lot of homework assignments (p/8 - head of parents, grade 8, school in rural area);*
- *During the weekends, students should not have assignments, in order for the weekend to pass without being burdened with assignments and to start school refreshed and to spend the weekend with the family without any burden (p/14 - head of parents, grade 7, school in rural area).*

Also, the parents participating in the study reported as factors of overload the teachers and the teaching methods applied by a number of teachers. They refer to the load that teachers cause for some children during work or tasks in groups, presentations and projects, since one student does almost all the work alone, on the other hand, all students receive the same grade. Then they refer to some teachers, who are not attractive in teaching, do not explain the lessons well or do not explain them at all and as a result, according to them, the children do not understand the lessons, are stressed about the lessons, etc. In line with these aspects, parents request that:

> *Teachers should not demand more from the children, more than they provide for the children (p/4 - head of parents, grade 8, school in urban area);*
>
> *The child should not be forced to learn topics not explained by the teacher (p/7 - head of parents, grade 5, school in an urban area);*
>
> *Teachers should be more attractive in teaching, inform students about mistakes in the texts and avoid them while working with students (p/18- head of parents, grade 8, school in urban area).*

There are parents, individuals, who still require a traditional approach to the education of children, which requires that class teachers and subject teachers be stricter with children, but also a little aggressive, so that the child feels a dose of fear!

Strictness on the part of educators, teachers, to be a little more aggressive, so that the child feels a healthy dose of fear...(p/24 - school in urban area).

On the other hand, parents, when they talk about the frequency of test assessments, as factors influencing the overload of students, refer to the periods of test assessments, which, according to them, cause successive loads.

In conclusion, it can be said that, although parents do not describe all the elements of factors influencing the student learning overload, they talk a lot about the overload they see in their children.

4.3.3.3. **The impact of learning overload on student behavior change**

Parents participating in the study reported elements of the impact of student learning overload, which, according to them, is reflected in different forms and behaviors in their children, depending on the load they have, with elements that are more related to the children's well-being .

Parents base their statements about the impact of overload in the different behaviors of their children, which parents have observed at different times of the school year, when the children return home from school.

Most of the parents have declared that their children when they come home are tired from lessons and engagements at school. According to them, they (their children) are often moody, tense because they did not understand the lessons well at school, they show many worries about learning topics, which they do not find interesting for them. Also, according to the parents, their children often show concerns about the work of some teachers, who demand a lot from their students and do little, give a lot of homework, lack creativity in learning, etc.

Also, parents say that their children are also worried about the tests, the frequent assessments that are given to them for giving grades in different

subjects. According to parents, children are very stressed at the time of the tests, before the tests and until receiving their results. But there are also parents who think that their children's worries come not only from lessons, engagements, assessments, but also due to their teenage years and from friends, as well as from the influence the mobile phones and social media have nowadays.

> *As soon as the child returns home, their first words are, "Oh, mom, I have a lot of homework." "We have a test tomorrow," "I'm worried." Maybe not always, but we're just seeing that kids today are more concerned about grades than about something they've learned (9/25 – School Taskforce member, school in urban area).*

Not all parents have expressed that their children have shown changes in behavior or concerns due to the workload at school, therefore, a small number of parents have emphasized that they have not observed concerns, fatigue or changes in their children's behavior from student learning overload.

Learning load and homework. Almost the majority of parents share the opinion that children are burdened with lessons and homework. They also state that the majority of teachers who give homework to students do not give the necessary instructions for the tasks, especially for those tasks that they have not exercised or practiced during class.

According to parents, there are changes in behavior or the emerging of concerns in their children when they have a lot of lessons and homework, as well as when they do not comprehend and do not manage to complete their homework. Parents state that in these cases they notice hesitation in their children to continue with their tasks, displays of doubt and lack of faith in their abilities, lack of concentration, often even nervousness, up to cases where in various forms they express reluctance to go to school.

There is a significant number of parents, who declare that their children show no concerns about lessons and homework, as they complete the tasks willingly, and for this reason, parents often motivate their children. Among them, some parents declare that they should help their children in doing their homework, since they know in advance that they (their children) cannot do

it by themselves. Some parents say that their children start homework lazily, insisting on parental support, which parents are forced to provide for their children.

Not all parents respond to their children's requests for help with schoolwork that they have to do at home, according to their reasons, because of time, as well as because they do not know the contents of the tasks, they simply consider that the school and teachers should give more instructions about the tasks, so that the children are taught to work on them independently.

Family concerns about child assessment. Preoccupation and concern for the parents and the family of the students appear to be the assessment and grades obtained by their children in school. Parents relate each concern to the child's achieved results, grades, but in some cases also to the children's well-being. Some parents declare that their children do not care about the grade, while some present precisely the assessment with grades as a concern, thus showing that a significant part of the children learn for the sake of grades and not for gaining knowledge. This then, according to the parents, turns into family concerns and should also be a concern of the school and society.

There are parents who do not hesitate to say that, when their children get low grades, they are discouraged and traumatized, and this also causes concern for them as parents and for the whole family. A significant part of the parents present themselves as participants in the children's engagement in each step, therefore, they declare that they try extremely hard for their children to comprehend them correctly and offer them help when they can.

Parents worry when they can't solve the tasks themselves to help their children, worry when they know that children can achieve more, but do not do so due to other influences, including those of age, friends , social networks, etc. The latter is used by some parents as an orientation to encourage discussions in the family, on various social, religious and national topics, in order to help their children understand the reality in which they live and the need to face life's challenges.

A significant part of parents state that they assist and support children a lot in their homework, in simplifying the content, in arousing interest in

learning, in offering different alternatives to make learning more graspable, more logical, in filling the gaps, sending them to courses, creating material conditions for learning, motivating them, etc. This is what a parent says:

> *Our concerns are mostly related to the low results in learning, we try to help our children, we are forced to engage them in various courses and activities (p/7 - head of parents, grade 5, school in urban area).*

The changes/concerns of children, parents and family, related to the overload of lessons and tasks during learning at school and at home, from the parents' perspective, are summarized in the following table, in three subcategories and some in specific topics from the subcategories - according to frequency of identified information.

Table 25. The impact of overload on emotional and behavioral changes in children, changes and distress that occur in the family

Subcategory	Specific topic from subcategories
Emotional and behavioral changes in children due to being overloaded with lessons and tasks during school - observed by parents.	- *Children are often moody, they are tired;* - *We observe nervousness, worry, fatigue, due to burdens during the school day;* - *Stress from tests;* - *Often changes expressed as panic, trauma, mental fatigue, insomnia from the load of successive tests;* - *Concerns about the learning topics that they could not comprehend at school;* - *do not have a good opinion of the teachers who don't help them in lessons they don't understand, and who ask too much of the students and give little to them.*

Emotional and behavioral changes in children due to overload with lessons and homework - observed by parents.	- *Changes are observed almost every day, different feelings, not good, upset;* - *Lack of motivation;* - *Hesitation, nervousness, loss of patience;* - *Children are nervous, tired and often have bad reactions;* - *Too much fatigue and stress;* - *Lack of interest in tasks;* - *Complaining about tasks, often asking for help to solve the tasks.*
Changes and concerns that occur in the family related to children's studies and results.	- *Worry when children bring negative results at home* - *Upset when the result achieved by the children is low;* - *Concern for children who can achieve more, but they do not engage in lessons;* - *Worrying about children fighting more for grades and not for knowledge;* - *Concerns when children cannot be helped in lessons and tasks;* - *The main concern is the over-assessment that is sometimes given to children in the lower grades;* - *The result of the child is also the result of the parents and the family, therefore this is the concern.*

Use of free time by children/students. Learning overload also affects the possibilities of using free time by children/students. Regarding free time for children/students and the possibilities of using it, the parents involved in this study are divided into two groups.

The first group of parents, slightly more than half of the parents involved in the study, are of the opinion that their children have enough free time, which can be used for numerous activities. They justify this with the care they show regarding the organization of the school schedule at home for their children and the possibilities they have for other activities. This is how a parent describes the possibilities children have for using their free time:

> *Yes, they do have enough time for play, for lessons, for homework, all of it. Every parent should know how to organize time for their child (p/15 - school in urban area).*

While, the second group, the rest of the parents, declare that their children do not have enough free time, because they have many tasks and engagements in lessons, especially the children of the lower cycle. Some argue this with the time that children have to learn at home, children have to work 4-5 hours at home to achieve good results in the assessment.

Some other parents argue this with the fatigue from school lessons, the heavy weight of the backpack with many books, but also with the fatigue children get from homework. This is how a parent describes the children's lack of free time:

> *I can say from my experience that primary education children do not have time for other activities, except for learning. We are caught up until 22:00 hrs doing homework and exercises. This comes from the load with assignments and due to the ability/speed of doing tasks displayed by children at this age (p/35 - head of the SSC, school in urban area).*

4.3.3.4. Parents' abilities to support their children in reducing learning overload and their demands for student support by educational institutions

Parents' answers/opinions about their abilities to support their children to reduce learning overload are varied, different, depending on the areas they come from (rural or urban), their education levels, their experience with

supporting children with lessons, as well as with the encounters they have with children, or the needs of their children.

Parents with low levels of education, with primary or secondary education, are very skeptical in their ability to support their children in learning, on the grounds that they are not familiar with the contents which children learn today and that they feel bad or worried when they cannot support their children, as one parent puts it:

> *I worry when I don't know how to solve the tasks to help my child with homework (p/30 - FNV, school in rural area).*

On the other hand, parents with high levels of their university education describe more experiences and abilities that they practice to support their children in lessons and tasks, where through the support provided they express that they contribute to reducing their children's learning overload. So says a parent:

> *I encourage my child, showing him that only learning (knowledge) is a responsibility and a key to open doors everywhere, so we engage together to achieve more (p/14 - head of parents, grade 7, school in urban area).*

There are parents, regardless of their level of education, that within the abilities they have find different forms of support for their children, without specifying them as a work approach or technical support, as expressed by the parents:

> *Within our abilities, we as parents try as much as we can to support them in their studies. We try that they lack not a single thing during the school year (p/9 - head of parents, grade 3, school in rural area);*
>
> *As parents, we support our children in every way to facilitate our work all the time, to achieve the required results (p/19 - member of SSC, school in urban area);*
>
> *I support my child and motivate him to learn (p/33 – member of the Parents' Council, school in rural area).*

Parents of children with special needs are in the most unfavorable situation to help their children. They state that they are very limited in the opportunities they have and in their experience to support children in lessons, even though they state that they are invited by the school to try to help children in this direction. This group of parents, when they discuss their possibilities in supporting children, address them more in the form of requirements for educational institutions, how to work with children with special needs. This is what a parent who has a child with Down syndrome says:

> *As a parent of a child with Down syndrome, I ask the Ministry of Education to do something about the textbooks for our children. In every school, the cases should be identified and based on their knowledge, they should be taught with adequate texts, not with the same texts as other children. I request that an individual plan be drafted based on the child's achievements and not only in Albanian Language and Mathematics, because my daughter is capable of learning in other subjects as well. I strongly request that these requests be considered. Also, I ask that they have and bring textbooks for children with vision impairment (p/1 - FNV, school in urban area).*

There are parents who see their supporting role for children as something that should not be done all the time and immediately when requested by the child, in order to help the children in their independence in learning and the performance of school tasks and obligations that they have . So says a parent:

> *I think that children should understand that the tasks and obligations belong to them, and we parents should stay informed and support them when they need it (p/4 - head of parents, grade 8, school in urban area).*

On the other hand, regarding the discussion on parents' requests to schools/educational institutions related to the actions that must be taken to deal with and mitigate curricular overload, they mainly refer to the strengthening of teacher-parent-student cooperation, as well as other actions leading to direct support for their children.

Most parents find it necessary that there should be closer teacher-parent-student cooperation, to support more children who do not have good results, to organize more frequent meetings to inform about the problems and seek solutions, to extend the hours of stay of students at school, for teachers to clarify the teaching units up to the level that is understandable for students, to have activities and courses organized at school to free students from the burdens, to have pedagogical and psychological support, to create good conditions for learning, cabinets, technological tools, libraries, new books, etc. Also, the school is required to have more frequent reports on the achievements and setbacks of the students.

There is a small number of parents who have presented ideas that parents should not be involved too much in the school on curriculum issues, because they are not professionals and can be subjective.

Another group of parents suggest that good group work practices be adopted because, according to their children, the way they currently learn in groups, not all children in a group learn and in most cases one individual in group does all the work and others are assessed and take credit. There should be less theory, more logical learning, and teachers should not spend class time just talking to students, but provide adequate explanations, with practical examples.

There are several requests from parents to extend the hours of stay at school, to implement the physical education class in primary education, because, according to them, these classes are not regularly implemented during the school year, while it happens that in the winter period they are skipped altogether.

As for technological tools, they refer more to their use in social networks, they are seen as a burden for children, which are increasingly influencing children to become dependent on them and, as a result, lose interest in learning. In line with this, parents are required to find methods to motivate children to love learning and move away from the use of technology that is not related to learning in school.

The Ministry of Education is requested to make facilities related to learning and teaching in schools, to unload students' backpack of many books, to

provide assistants for children with special needs, to reduce the number of subjects and textbooks, teachers to be monitored for the quality they provide, instruction through fifth grade to be more focused on literacy and the four basic math operations.

4.3.4. Curricular overload from the perspective of school principals and school quality coordinators

The outcomes in this part reflect the main findings from the perspectives of school principals and school quality coordinators, participants in the study, on the researched aspects related to curricular overload in primary and lower secondary education. The main findings are used to make the narrative description of the researched areas, and are accompanied by quotes from the data collected through the conducted interviews. The outcomes are categorized and presented in four topics named according to the researched areas, where each of them is also accompanied by separate thematic subcategories and specific topics from each subcategory, which are ordered according to the frequency of information identified from the data collected through conducted interviews.

4.3.4.1. Implementation of the curriculum at the school level

School principals and quality coordinators at the school level, in their discussions regarding the implementation of the curriculum at the school level, touched on various elements related to the coordination of activities for the implementation of the curriculum at the school level, the provision of evidence for the implementation of the new curriculum, the readiness and confidence of teachers for the implementation of the curriculum, as well as for the difficulties, challenges and concerns raised by teachers, students and parents regarding the implementation of the curriculum.

Coordination of activities for the implementation of the curriculum at the school level. The most emphasized aspects by school directors and QC regarding the coordination of activities for the implementation of the curriculum at the school level mainly refer to the support of the trainings for the implementation of the curriculum, organized by MESTI in cooperation

with the MEDs, then the work done with the school departments in the planning related to the implementation of the curriculum, the preparation of assessment tools.

School principals largely refer to the coordination of activities related to the creation of conditions, technical support, as well as the provision of ICT equipment. The involvement of the school principal in the coordination of activities for the implementation of the curriculum is thus described by a school principal: *I can highlight the provision of cabinets and concretization tools, SMART TV in some classrooms, the provision of lockers for teachers to place their work files and other tools they need for the teaching process (d/5- urban school*).

Checking the files of the teachers involved in the training for the implementation of the curriculum occupies a significant space within the activities of the principals and QCs the school level, related to the coordination of the school's preparations for the implementation of the curriculum. However, from the descriptions made, it can be seen that this was done more for teacher certification issues than to ensure an effective preparation for the implementation of the curriculum at the school level.

In the descriptions provided by the school principals and QC involved in the research, the aspects of continuous informing and sensitization of the school community about the opportunities and new requirements of the curriculum, do not seem to be included as main activities and organized for the purposes of information, with a notable exception of three principals and three quality assurance coordinators from the same schools.

Also, in the descriptions made by the principals of the schools and QC included in the research, in no case is it mentioned that the schools have extracted from the SDP (PZhSh) a special action plan for the implementation of the curriculum, they mainly refer to an annual school work plan, in which all the technical aspects of the organization of the school's annual work are included.

As coordination activities for the implementation of the curriculum at the school level, which are referred to the school principals and QC, are also the work with the school departments, the organization of discussions about the

curriculum at the school level, the support in the definition of the assessment tools, the conducting of the performance assessment of the school, treatment of extracurricular activities, etc.

Providing evidence for the implementation of the new curriculum. As for the provision of evidence for the implementation of the new curriculum, the principals and QC of the schools included in the study mainly put emphasis on the teachers' files from curriculum training, files of annual plans and for teaching periods that are prepared at the level of departments, teachers' personal grade books for student assessment and in some cases also the reports that have been prepared for MEDs or for MESTI, which are mainly informational reports required.

Only in three cases is it specified that, within the SIA (VBSh), they have more detailed reports related to the implementation of the curriculum, the challenges and difficulties faced by the schools in the implementation of the new curriculum.

According to the school principals and QC involved in the study, the schools prepare work reports according to the teaching periods and at the end of the school year, which are sent by the school principals to MED and then forwarded to MESTI. The templates of the 3-4 reports analyzed describe the general aspects that characterize a teaching period, mainly with positive language, without a special focus on the implementation of the curriculum and without analysis and description of the progress achieved, challenges and difficulties, with which have been faced, and the next steps. According to the report from School No. 1, we have a formulation in line with what was described above:

> *All the classes planned for this school period have been completed, we have no missed classes at all, the implementation of the curriculum is carried out according to the plans*.

There are schools that have made efforts to report in detail the issues by departments on the issue of curriculum, such as report from School No. 3:

> *Some of the learning outcomes of the Biology grade 6 and Physics grade 7 do not correspond to the lesson topics; school III books in*

the field of natural sciences are not in full compliance with the curriculum, there are deficiencies in the mathematics syllabi, in grades 8 and 9.

According to the principals of the schools and QC involved in the study, every year they have received from MESTI the tool for data about the subject curricula, which they have completed and sent through the MEDs, with remarks and suggestions, for which they have not received feedback information on their addressing. Regarding this, one of the QC, from a rural school, states:

In most cases, we have not seen that the suggestions of departments in the new programs/curricula have been addressed, such as the teachers' proposals related to the removal or addition of some lesson topics (KC/3 - rural school).

The readiness and confidence of teachers for the implementation of the curriculum. Regarding the readiness and confidence of the teachers for the implementation of the curriculum, the principals and QC involved in this study say that the beginning of the implementation of the curriculum was accompanied with a lot of skepticism, but over time the curriculum as such is being accepted. They describe that the pilot phase was too much of a burden for teachers and school principals. This is what one of the principals of rural schools says:

From a detailed curriculum, the request for teachers and schools related to the design of syllabi, based on the Core Curricula and the teachers' own experience, was too ambitious, it was a request, which even today cannot be implemented at the school level! (d/ 1- rural school).

The readiness and confidence of teachers to implement the curriculum is described as increasing, but with many challenges. According to school principals and QC, there are still hesitations from some teachers. In their descriptions, emphasis is placed on older teachers, mainly those about to retire, on teachers who lack digital competence, as well as on teachers who are not interested or motivated to change their approach to work.

A school principal, from an urban area, during the discussion about the readiness and confidence of teachers for the implementation of the curriculum, says: How can the curriculum be implemented when it is rejected by a school principal or director of the MED?, therefore she suggests to work in this level in order to influence the increase in readiness and confidence of teachers for the implementation of the curriculum. Because, according to her, the curriculum and the teachers are not to blame, but, it seems, there has been a lack of harmonized leadership between the links of the system, from MESTI to the school level.

Some of the difficulties, challenges and concerns raised by teachers, which are presented by school principals and QC. According to the principals of the schools and QC involved in the study, the greatest difficulties, challenges and concerns, shown by the teachers regarding the implementation of the curriculum, are as follows: the mismatch between the syllabi and the textbooks, loaded administration, additional administrative work for planning and for assessment, assessment in three school periods, assessment for curricular stage, poor working conditions, lack of concretization tools and ICT equipment.

There are principals and QC involved in this study, who also specify other concerns raised by teachers, such as the large number of SLOs, in some grades the SLOs are too high for the level and age of the students, some textbooks are with unclear terminology, lack of information and not aligned with the syllabi, the large number of students in classrooms makes it impossible to achieve SLOs (urban schools), insufficient instruction time for achieving SLOs, for reinforcement or repetition - the subject of Geography is specified in particular, in grades 8 and 9.

Three QCs and one school principal, included in the study, state that some of the teachers of their schools have shown concern about the difficulties they have in understanding the curriculum, its implementation and in achieving learning outcomes by a number of students, emphasizing science subjects and mathematics. Only one school principal refers to teachers' difficulties in understanding and integrating cross-curricular issues in the learning contents that are elaborated with students.

Some of the difficulties, challenges and concerns raised by students and parents. Both students and parents, according to the principals of the schools and QCs involved in the study, show their complaints and concerns mainly about the lack of texts according to the curriculum for some subjects in some grades (grades are singled out for which it has not been managed until this school year to develop new textbooks, grades 4, 5 and 9), on the large number of textbooks of a subject in the same grade (more at the primary level), as well as for the assessment system with three periods, with SA1 and SA2[15].

According to school principals, parents also show their concerns about the provision of resources for some lesson topics that are not included in the textbooks, the heavy backpacks packed with many books, the difficulties their children have in working with old textbooks of the different grades, e.g. 8th grade textbooks are used in 6th grade for some lesson topics.

About 50% of school principals and QC involved in the study indicate that parents largely show their concerns about the approach to teaching and assessment by some teachers. Also, on the lack of information about grades, since they are marked in the teacher's personal grade book; on homework, which in most cases are assigned to students without specific goals and without follow-up instructions, which, according to them, causes difficulties for the students, but also for the parents themselves, who declare that they cannot help their children with homework.

As a summary of this part, it can be said that the school principals and QC included in the study offer different views regarding the investigated aspects of curriculum implementation, they differ depending on the specifics of the schools and their confrontations in the implementation of the curriculum,

[15] The new Administrative Instruction on Student Assessment (No. 06/2022), has several novelties related to the switching from assessment in three teaching periods to two semesters, the creation of some facilities, the flexibility and autonomy of teachers in relation to the use of tools that relate to summative assessment. Some of the challenges and concerns raised by students and parents about SA1 and SA2 have already been addressed with the new instruction on student assessment. For more, see: https://masht.rks-gov.net/udhezimi-administrativ-mashti-06-2022-per-vleresimin-e-nxenesve-ne-arsimin-paraunivesitar-te-republikes-se-kosoves/

but also from the work approaches of the principals themselves and QCs involved in this study.

The views of school principals and QCs on the five subcategories related to curriculum implementation, described above, are presented in the following table, and for each subcategory, specific topics are listed, according to the frequency of information identified from the data collected through conducted interviews.

Table 26. The views of school principals and QCs on aspects related to curriculum implementation and their role

Subcategory	Specific topic from subcategories
Coordination of activities for the implementation of the curriculum at the school level	- Support of curriculum trainings, organized by MESTI in cooperation with MEDs; - Checking teachers' files; - Technical support; - Provision of ICT equipment; - Working with school departments; - Discussions and workshops at school level; - Support in determining assessment tools; - Evaluation of school performance; - Treatment of extracurricular activities.
Providing evidence for the implementation of the new curriculum	- Teachers' files from trainings; - Planning files for curriculum implementation; - Reports and evidence from meetings with the school's professional bodies; - Personal assessment grade books; - SIA report; - Reports to MED.

The readiness and confidence of teachers in the implementation of the curriculum	- The beginning was accompanied with a lot of skepticism, over time it is being accepted; - The piloting phase is a heavy load for teachers; - The request for the drafting by the teachers themselves - too ambitious; - There was a flight to and fro; - There is positive development from piloting; - There is increasing readiness, with many challenges, still with some hesitations; - Confidence is present thanks to the support from schools; - There is a lack of readiness in some teachers, but also school heads.
Complaints, difficulties, challenges and concerns of teachers	- Inconsistency of syllabi with textbooks; - Loaded administration, additional administrative work for planning and assessment; - Assessment in three teaching periods, frequent tests, assessment for curricular stage; - Complaints are related to the load of lesson topics, lesson units, non-implementation of the curriculum. - The large number of SLOs, in some grades SLOs are too high for the abilities and age of the students;

	- Some textbooks with unclear terminology, lack of information and not aligned with the syllabi; - The large number of students makes it impossible to implement SLOs (urban schools); - Insufficient instruction time for achieving SLOs in some subjects; - Poor working conditions, lack of concretization tools and ICT equipment; - Understanding the curriculum, preparation for implementation, etc. - Non-qualitative trainings for capacity building for the implementation of the curriculum - Lack of feedback information on the requests and concerns raised by teachers regarding curriculum issues.
Complaints, difficulties, challenges and concerns of students and parents	- Lack of textbooks according to the curriculum for some subjects in some grades; - Approach to teaching and assessment; - Homework, without specific goals and without follow-up instructions; - Inappropriate textbooks and the large number of them; - SA2 assessment, tests a burden for students; - Lack of information about grades since they are marked in the teacher's personal grade book;

	- Large number of students (urban schools); - Non-use of ICT for learning; - Children's difficulties in achieving SLOs in the first grade; - Provision of materials when lessons are not included in textbooks; - Backpacks to heavy for students, too many books and students loaded with excessive information; - They cannot help students with homework; - Work with old textbooks of different grades.

4.3.4.2. School principals' and QC's perception of curricular overload and influencing factors

The essential understanding of what is considered curricular overload and the recognition of the influencing factors of curricular overload is the first step to raise the professional debate about this issue at the school level and to take concrete actions to deal with and mitigate curricular overload. These aspects were a guide to address with school principals and QCs the curricular overload and influencing factors.

Description of curriculum overload. Regarding the description of how school principals and QC see curriculum overload, the results show that there are differences in their descriptions. Most of the school principals and QCs involved in the study relate the curricular overload to the non-alignment or inconsistency of the textbooks with the subject curricula and to the lack of conditions and learning materials for teachers and students.

Among school principals' descriptions of curriculum overload, we also have descriptions that combine elements of working conditions, content, and curriculum requirements related to what students should learn and what they

should achieve, as well as elements that refer to the administrative load, as they call part of the teachers' work.

> *Curricular overload should be seen in two directions: a) excessive overload in subject curricula regarding the lesson topics outcomes; and b) orientation to two or more sources of information on certain topics, which is time consuming for teachers (d/9 - school principal in urban area and curriculum trainer);*
>
> *Curriculum overload is related to content for students and administrative load for teachers (d/4-school director, school in rural area);*
>
> *The lack of conditions for teachers and students, the large number of lesson topics, the lack of prioritization of specific topics, which should be in the autonomy of teachers, as well as other aspects of the content that are challenging for students and teachers, is curriculum overload (d /2-deputy school principal and curriculum trainer, school in urban area).*

Quality coordinators, unlike school principals, when talking about curricular overload, emphasize other aspects as well, such as: the large number of subjects, the large number of lesson topics in some subjects, the large number of SLOs that can't be achieved, the approach of teachers that does not facilitate the work for students. A QC from a rural school describes curricular overload as too much information for the age of students in textbooks, while a QC from an urban school describes curricular overload as the large number of learning outcomes that can't be achieved by students.

Curricular overload factors. It is already known that various factors influence curriculum overload. In the question addressed to the principals and QCs involved in this study: *Do you consider that there is curricular overload, student learning overload, and if so can you specify some of the factors that you consider are most influencing the overload*?, over 50 % of them state that there is curricular overload. Those who consider that there is curricular overload refer mostly to the number of subjects per grade, the number of classes for subjects that they consider to have many lesson topics, textbooks, practical teaching approaches , assessment of students,

homework and other aspects related to school conditions and teachers' work, as the main or among the main factors of overload.

This is how some of the principals and QCs involved in the study sum up the factors of curricular overload:

> *Inappropriate and inadequate textbooks, large number of subjects and lesson topics (KC/2 – urban school);*
> *Lesson contents, homework, textbooks, teachers' administrative work (d/5 – rural school);*
> *The content of the texts and the terminology used, the SLOs in some subjects are not in line with the students' capabilities, approaches to teaching, unequal teaching periods (KC/4 – urban school);*
> *Textbooks – they do not enable the teaching approach to develop students' competencies to respond to the demands of the PISA study. The language of textbooks in primary education is often inappropriate for students. I consider that the failure to prepare the texts in time - parallel to the implementation of the subject curricula has been among the most influential factors in the emergence of curriculum overload (d/10 - urban school).*

Focusing of teachers in working with students. Competency-based curriculum requires changed approaches to teaching, from a focus on content – knowledge to a focus on the learning process and the development of competencies. About how much the approach to teaching has changed in this regard, we asked the principals of the schools and QC involved in this study. The dominant finding is that most teachers continue to have a greater focus on the development of teaching content, on the explanation of lessons according to the textbooks of the relevant subjects.

Regarding the focus of teachers in working with students, school principals and QCs, referring to their observations in class, discussions with teachers and students, express their conviction that teachers' focus on content and knowledge dominates. There are also principals and QCs who, based on their evidence for some teachers, state that the approach some teachers follow in their work has made them focus on tasks and projects with students, which are often accompanied with little instructions and with little information

about the learning goals. This, according to them, has caused students to be often overloaded with assignments and projects, which do not ensure effective learning and inclusiveness in learning, since some students complete the assignments and projects for the whole group and some students continue not to be active in the learning process.

Referring to the principals' and QC's descriptions of teachers' focus on student work, one gets the impression that often teachers' focus on student work, namely on content and knowledge, is guided by how teachers view school-level assessments.

> *The teachers' focus in working with students is on the learning contents - knowledge, those related to the textbooks that are used, this is because no assessment is made to measure the competencies outcomes (KC/1, urban school*).

There are school principals and QCs who point out that some teachers in their schools are paying more attention when working with students to the learning process and the development of competences and this has made their students more active and cooperative in lesson.

The views of school principals and QCs on curricular overload, factors of overload, and on the focus of teachers in working with students, are presented in the following table, where specific topics are listed for each subcategory, according to the frequency of information identified by the data collected with this group of respondents.

Table 27. The views of school principals and QCs on curricular overload and factors of overload

Subcategory	Specific topic from subcategories
Description of curriculum overload	- Lack of conditions and teaching materials for teachers and students; - The large number of lesson topics and the lack of prioritization of lesson topics; - Non-harmonization of textbooks with subject curricula/syllabi; - More related to technical than professional aspects;

	- The level of implementation or non-implementation of the curriculum; - All those not aligned with the curriculum; - Failure to plan, realize and implement all aspects of the curriculum; - Excessive information relative to the age of students; - Large number of SLOs that are not realized; - The approach of the teacher that does not facilitate the work for students.
Curricular overload factors	- Number of subjects per grade (emphasis is placed on primary education); - Textbooks, the content of the textbooks and the terminology used; - Number of lesson topics and learning outcomes; - Instruction time in relation to content and SLO; - Approach to teaching; - Assessment of students; - Homework; - Aspects of the organization of lesson contents in curricula; - Administrative work of teachers; - Unequal teaching periods; - Infrastructure for learning.
Focus of teachers in working with students	- Teachers focus on the contents of the subject/textbook; - On knowledge, those related to the textbooks that are used; - Focus on providing new information; - More on knowledge in providing new information; - On knowledge, those related to the textbooks used; - Focus on what they write in their plans; - On knowledge with efforts to develop competencies; - On knowledge, those related to the textbooks that are used, this is because no assessment is made to measure the competencies outcomes.

4.3.4.3. School principals' and QCs perception of the impact of curriculum overload

Regarding the impact of curricular overload on student achievements/outcomes, student well-being and teachers' work, school principals and QCs, in the first place, state that under the circumstances of how the new curriculum is being implemented, it is inevitable it is affecting the students and teachers the most. In general, their views are the same regarding the impact of curricular overload, except for the number and order of elements that reflect the impact on students and the work of teachers.

The impact of curricular overload on student achievement/outcomes. It is described in different ways, both by the school principals and the QCs involved in this study. The majority of those who consider that there is curricular overload state that it is reflected in the level of students' learning, emphasizing the success of average and sub-average students, in the success of students in the subject of Mathematics and in the subjects of Natural Sciences.

When we talk about the impact of overload on student results, what is most important is the lack of reliance in evidence for results, in comparisons of results, etc. In this regard, QC and school principals refer more to their attitudes or student statements and there is less reference to evidence from school reports on the work and achievements of students or comparisons made with other data and indicators.

So, one approach to reflect the impact of curricular overload is to refer to the arguments of school principals and QCs that only good students manage to master the programs properly. Students do not achieve learning outcomes because many lessons in the textbooks do not match the program, students' interest and motivation for learning has decreased. Then, the reference to the students' statements, where according to the principals and QCs, the students with whom they hold meetings very often *say that due to the many lesson topics, we cannot keep up with the lessons in all the subjects and thus we do not have good results.*

According to a group of school principals and QCs, the impact of curricular overload is greater than is actually reflected in classroom grade books and achievement reports. According to them, the impact is reflected in the number of students who do not really achieve the learning outcomes, in the Achievement Test scores, where the majority of students barely get scores comparable to grade 2, but also in the comparison with the results of the Kosovars students in the 2015 and 2018 PISA study.

The impact of curricular overload on student well-being. The concepts that refer to the well-being of students at school, which are mostly used by school principals and QCs involved in this study, when they talk about the impact of curricular overload on the well-being of students, are as follows: psychological load, physical load, fatigue, passivity, loss of interest in learning, stress, harassment, even bullying in certain cases, students dropping out of school - for which they refer to family conditions, but also low learning outcomes.

The school principal (d/8-rural school) says that due to the load of learning content, in some students is observed a decrease and loss of interest in learning. While, according to the principal of the school (d/5-urban school), the load with learning content, but also with the number of students in a classroom, is causing student fatigue, learning difficulties, stress, harassment. On the other hand, a QC (KC/2-urban school) says that due to the stress created by the many lessons and assignments, we often noticed elements of bullying among students.

Another school principal (d/8 – urban school) points out that they have observed that when students move to the second level (grade 6) they are lost due to their failure to master many learning contents, the increase in the number of subjects, teachers and different approaches of teachers in working with students.

The impact of curricular overload on teachers' work. Regarding the impact of curricular overload on the work of teachers, school principals and QCs involved in the study mention numerous issues, which are based more on the factors that influence teacher overload than the direct impact that

curricular overload has on efficiency and the effectiveness of teachers in their work.

According to school principals and QCs, the workload of teachers is largely related to the workload teachers have in relation to the time they have to spend on preparing lesson plans and preparing assessment tools, in elaborating the lesson content with little class time available according to the official lesson plan, in achieving many outcomes that are determined by the curriculum: stage-competence learning outcomes (RNSh), curricular area learning outcomes (RNF), subject learning outcomes (SLO).

Other aspects related to the overload of teachers are highlighted to be the work with textbooks, the engagement to find teaching sources and materials that are not included in the textbooks in use, the administrative and reporting aspects that must be carried out for each teaching period and at the end of the school year, both for parents and for reporting needs from schools.

Both school principals and QCs have reported that they notice fatigue in some teachers from the excessive workload, especially from the excessive administration and formal matters that are often required of teachers. According to them, the fatigue of teachers is being reflected in their work and communication with students, in the time they allocate for instructions and clarifications for students outside of class. Also, according to them, the workload of teachers is reflected in ineffectiveness in teaching, which indicates a greater focus on formal and procedural aspects than on substantive aspects related to the quality implementation of the curriculum and effective work with students.

The views of school principals and QCs on the three subcategories described above regarding the impact of curricular overload on student achievements/results, student well-being and teachers' work are presented in the following table, where specific topics are listed for each subcategory, according to the frequency of information identified from the data collected from the interviews conducted.

Table 28. The views of school principals and QCs on the impact of curriculum overload

Subcategory	Specific topic from subcategories
The impact of curricular overload on student achievements/results	- There is a lack of progress in learning, this is reflected in the achievement test scores and in the PISA scores; - Moving to the 6th grade without mastering the primary level outcomes, lost students; - The load is reflected in the success of average and sub-average students; - Only good students manage to master the programs and lessons properly; - Lower success in natural science and mathematics subjects, higher success in skills subjects; - Homework is done only for the sake of it, the instructions for it are insufficient, not very effective in results; - Due to the many topics, students cannot keep up with the lessons in all subjects; - The unsatisfactory success of a large number of students is an indication of their overload; - Many lessons in the textbooks do not match the program and this is affecting the students' results; - Some students have completely lost their desire to learn, since the lockdown during the pandemic until now.
The impact of curricular overload on student well-being	- Students are somewhat lost, unfocused in learning; - Tiredness from homework; - Passivity of some students; - Student stress and as a result "bullying";

	- Fatigue, stress, harassment due to the large number of students in classrooms; - Students with disabilities are very challenged; - Passive and uninterested in learning; - Physical load due to the weight of the backpack; - The load in some students has affected the loss of interest in learning; - Fatigue from working with many textbooks.
The impact of curricular overload on teachers' work	- Load in the preparation of plans, especially weekly plans; - There is a fatigue of the teachers from the excessive administration, which is often reflected in the students; - Teachers are overloaded with frequent reports; - Focusing more on administration; - Frequent changes in syllabi are causing problems, teacher overload; - Loaded with extended topics and less instruction time available; - Not effective; - Primary teachers loaded with preparing many plans, many assessment tools; - Burdened by the lack of some textbooks and textbooks that are not suitable for the curriculum; - Also burdened by the lack of digital competence; - Fatigue in their work.

4.3.4.4. The perspective of school principals and QCs on strategies to be undertaken to address and mitigate curricular overload

Some of the suggested strategies. Regarding the action strategies for dealing with and mitigating the curricular overload from the central level to the schools, the school principals and QCs involved in the study share different opinions and ideas and some of them are as follows:

- intervention in subject curricula, where there is an overload with lesson topics, learning outcomes, or other aspects that have been raised as concerns argued by teachers;
- harmonization and adaptation of textbooks with relevant subject curricula, their adaptation to the age of students;
- creating the conditions and providing concretization and ICT tools for the effective implementation of the curriculum;
- ongoing supervision of schools and teachers and their support;
- strengthening institutional cooperation, increasing responsibility and accountability, etc.

About half of the school principals and QCs included in the study, as an action strategy for dealing with and mitigating curricular overload, also suggest reducing the number of subjects, placing more emphasis on primary education, with the argument that this level of education has many subjects.

This is how a school principal (d/1- urban school) describes the action strategies for dealing with and mitigating curricular overload:

> *MESTI should work more with schools, discharge the curricula from excessive content, work on the full adaptation of the textbooks to the subject curricula. MEDs should work on ensuring the conditions for schools and for effective learning. The school should engage in strengthening the school's professional mechanisms, teachers should change their approach to teaching, adapting to the curriculum, while parents should be more cooperative with the school and teachers.*

Another school principal (d/7 – rural school), in order to alleviate the curricular overload, he suggests digitizing all school materials, such as

matrix books, grade books, planning and evaluation; simplification of SLO, reduction of a number of lesson topics, in a significant number of subjects. The other director (d/4 – urban school) suggests that school autonomy should be reinstated and school institutions should be vested with more powers and responsibilities and be continuously supervised. And their other colleague (d/10 – urban school) suggests increased supervision of teachers and schools, in order to avoid the formal side, where teachers do something else in the classroom and write something else in the class book.

On the other hand, QC (KC/2 – urban school) thus describes some of the actions that should be taken to deal with and mitigate curricular overload:

> *The time has come for a partial revision of the curriculum, taking into consideration the concerns of teachers, parents and students - reduction of the number of subjects and learning topics, the design of textbooks in accordance with the requirements of the curriculum and the needs and the age of the students*.

While QC (KC/4 – rural school) suggests that the infrastructure should be improved, books for teachers issued by MESTI, not by publishing houses, textbooks in alignment with the curriculum, textbooks for curricular areas, in order to reduce the students' backpack.

The suggestions for teachers from school principals and QCs involved in the study touch on some content aspects related to the implementation of the curriculum, the possibilities of mitigating the curricular overload, such as: referring to the principles and requirements of the curriculum, focusing on the analysis of SLO and on the selection of contents/lesson units and learning materials, changes to the approach to teaching, communication with students and staying close to them, the organization of supplementary and additional learning.

This is how a school principal (d/4 – urban school) describes the action strategies for dealing with and mitigating curricular overload on the part of teachers: *It is necessary to adapt, change the teaching and assessment approach, avoid what is redundant and simplify lessons for students*, so that they are well understood by students. Whereas, KC/2 from an urban school suggests that teachers during their work with students should constantly

refer to the principles of the curriculum, teaching should be more oriented towards the development of soft skills, critical thinking and situation-based problem solving from life and future.

Teachers' support needs. Regarding the needs for professional support of teachers, for the development of teaching competence for handling and mitigating curricular overload, the school principals and QC involved in the study suggest some of the following actions:

- quality training by competent trainers who have substantial knowledge of the philosophy of the curriculum and the practical side of its implementation;
- specific trainings in subjects/curricular areas, on more specific learning topics, for which teachers are being challenged in their practice;
- a clear and permanent address where teachers can receive feedback on their requests and concerns related to the curriculum;
- additional instructions and guides for teachers;
- monitoring, inspections and more counseling for teachers;

This is how a school director (d/5- urban school) describes the action strategies for professional support of teachers for the development of teaching competence to deal with and mitigate curricular overload: *Continuous training by competent trainers, professional networks for teachers, digitization of textbooks, support with the teacher's book for the textbooks used*. While the other school director (d/7- rural school) suggests more professional support for teachers, development of teachers' professional networks, address at MESTI where teachers should receive additional instructions from the officials responsible for the respective curricula. The same actions are suggested by the QC involved in the study.
There are also additional ideas and comments that go beyond direct suggestions for strategies and actions to address and mitigate curricular overload, emphasizing teacher pay increases, merit-based pay, retirement of teachers with health problems, etc.

4.3.5. Curriculum overload from the perspective of curriculum development coordinators and experts (persons well-informed about the curricula)

Looking at the idea of the role of experts, drafters and coordinators in the development of core curricula and subject curricula, their opinion, their point of view on curriculum overload in primary and lower secondary education is indispensable. Therefore, this section focuses on the main findings, which are organized into four sub-topics, which were part of the structure of the discussion with this group of respondents:

- Curricular reform – some elements related to curricular overload;
- Curricular overload - influencing factors;
- The impact of curricular overload on students' results, students' and teachers' well-being;
- Strategies for dealing with and mitigating curricular overload.

4.3.5.1. Curricular reform – some elements related to curricular overload

Curriculum experts, coordinators and curriculum developers included in this study had different opinions about the approach developed to curriculum reform, after the development of the concept document, the curriculum framework, up to the design of subject curricula. The positive thoughts were that the best possible thing has been done after the piloting in the period 2013/14 - 2015/16, in relation to the context and the possibilities of implementing the curriculum. While the negative attitudes expressed the belief that there was a departure from the concept of curriculum reform, as a result of the lack of adequate preparation by the system to correctly and properly break down this concept of curriculum and as a result of a distributed leadership for the implementation of curriculum reform, from the central level to the school level.

Unexploited opportunities. Experts in the curriculum reform point out that the departure from the concept of the curriculum has caused some opportunities not to be used during the further development of the curricula,

which would in the first place ensure the transition in practice from the content-based approach to the approach targeting the competences and learning outcomes approach, would enable to minimize the focus of teachers' on work with textbooks, enable the integrated approach and strengthen the autonomy of the school in the development of the curriculum contextualized to the real needs of the children.

When it comes to the opportunities offered by the spirit and philosophy of the competency-based curriculum, which have not been used as well as they should in the development of the CC and subject curricula, as well as in their implementation, the coordinators of the curriculum areas say that many opportunities have been missed to properly communicate, interpret and present the concept of the curriculum, to reorganize the work of the school, to use various resources, and especially the use of information technology, and to take initiatives in various activities of interest to the curriculum reform.

Also, it is estimated that at this stage, after piloting, the opportunity to develop subject curricula based on a proper analysis, which ensures a content connection of each curriculum with the main competencies and concepts within each curricular area, has not been used.

Due to the non-utilization of all the elements of the curricular reform, the expectations that the school itself design the subject curricula for each grade, based on the requirements and orientations of the CC according to the levels, there has been increased pressure and the need for the subject curricula to be developed by the working groups established by MESTI, under the leadership of the Division for Curricula at MESTI.

On the other hand, after the development of the subject curricula for all grades, by the working groups coordinated by MESTI, according to the curriculum coordinators, it does not seem certain that teachers will work only with the Core Curriculum for the relevant levels of education, because there is no such decision, just as there is no decision hindering it, since with the orientations of the core curriculum, teachers have flexibility in the

selection of learning contents that ensure the achievement of the outcomes of the relevant curricular area.

Another missed opportunity appears to be the move away from the approach to knowledge, learning content, focus on textbooks - to an approach based on competences and learning outcomes, or to an approach which ensures that we have practical and applicable subject curricula. According to the respondents, despite all the efforts in the pilot phase and later, it has not yet been achieved to change the work culture of the schools in the development and planning of the implementation of the school-based curriculum, in changing the approach to the implementation of the curriculum.

Changes in subject curricula. In terms of what the subject curricula have changed more compared to the previous subject curricula/syllabi, what has been added and what has been removed, the area coordinators express the opinion that the new subject curricula have been developed based on the core concepts and RNF, emerging from the core curricula, which then became part of the subject curricula, were broken down into lesson topics, for which some learning outcomes were developed, as well as methodological instructions were given, which led to a different structure of the subject curricula.

The approach to the development of subject curricula turns out to be the content change, the use of concepts in the form of concentric circles for the definition of lesson topics, has made it possible to derive topics per subject - grade and the possibilities of reducing the learning contents. However, it is not ensured that this has happened for all subject curricula and that the repetition of some lesson topics in different subjects has been eliminated. There are cases when, for a subject curriculum of a grade, the addition and reorganization of learning contents from previous curricula, the movement of learning topics from grade to grade, or from the level of lower secondary education to the level of upper secondary education and vice versa are also prescribed. This is justified by the new developments that have taken place in certain areas.

The vertical connection between the learning topics of a subject, the breadth and depth of learning at grade level and curricular levels, is described as a challenge in the development of subject curricula. As described, this has been the central problem of working in working groups, for which there are opinions that it did not work out well in all subjects. In some areas/subjects it is concluded that it worked better.

Referring to the coordinators of the curricular areas included in this study, during the design of the subject curricula, for the needs of the working groups, maps of the extent of the lesson topics for the subject were developed, having as reference the concepts of the area and the area outcomes at the curricular stage. However, such a map of lesson topics has not been established in any of the subject curricula within a curricular stage or within a level of education. In its absence, in order for the teachers to see the scope of the lesson topics of their subject within a curricular stage or level of education, they should have all the subject curricula of the relevant level of education nearby, or refer to the concepts of the curricular area in the core curricula.

The readiness of teachers for the implementation of the curriculum. An important element of examining the developments of the curriculum reform is its implementation in the school, a process which is influenced by many factors, including the readiness of the teachers for the implementation of the curriculum.

Persons well informed about the curriculum (curriculum experts), coordinators and developers of current curricula, included in this study, had common opinions and views, that in principle, teachers have expressed readiness for the implementation of the new curriculum. However, they unanimously state that the system has not made adequate organizational preparations and the establishing of support mechanisms for the implementation of the curriculum, the teachers have not been sufficiently supported and instructed to change the approach to their work. This is also emphasized in recent studies that deal with the implementation of the curriculum in Kosovo (Potera & Shala (2018), Boshtrakaj, et al. (2018). Mehmeti, et al. (2019), etc).

Consequently, according to the respondents from this group, the initial readiness of the teachers has not been translated into a successful implementation of the curriculum at the school level, the implementation of which is described to be with small differences from the level to the level of pre-university education. According to them, it can be said that the initial readiness of a large number of teachers has turned into formality, not creativity, more to the completion of administrative aspects related to the curriculum.

Also, it is emphasized that the readiness of the teachers has been expressed to some extent by increasing the cooperation of teachers and schools, but more for formal issues, in numerous discussions, which have been held among the teachers, for which it is emphasized that they have not been well reported and documented, to be used during the design of subject curricula, after the pilot phase, but also now in providing feedback information on many requests and questions posed by teachers and school heads.

In conclusion, for this part it can be said that this group of respondents has many arguments for the unexploited opportunities in the developments around the curriculum reform, the basic changes in the subject curricula and the readiness of the teachers for the implementation of the curriculum. The details of the specific topics on these aspects, which have been looked at above, summarized according to the coding and frequency of the information identified from the collected data, are presented in the following table.

Table 29. Unexploited opportunities in developments around curriculum reform

Subcategory	Specific topic
Unexploited opportunities	- Clearly presenting the curriculum concept; - Organization of the educational process in grades 6-9, teaching according to curricular areas; - Commencing the university preparation of teachers for curricular areas, for lower secondary education; - Reducing the number of subjects;

	- Transition from the approach based on content and textbooks, to the approach based on competencies and learning outcomes; - Setting learning outcomes at a minimum level, which can be achieved by all students of a certain grade or curricular stage; - Determination of evaluation criteria for the assessment of competencies and outcomes at the level of curricular areas; - Consolidation of mechanisms to support curriculum implementation, - Setting up organizational structures in the school to support teachers in the implementation of the curriculum; - Changing the approach to teaching, teachers are continuing with the old ways...
Basic changes in subject curricula	- Approach to the administration of subject curricula; - The use of concepts in the form of concentric circles for the analysis of lesson topics; - Determination of the map of lesson topics for subject curricula according to grades, only for the working groups for the design of subject curricula; - The field of natural sciences is now taught to the pre-primary grade with an integrated approach at the first level; - Adding and reorganizing some learning content from the previous curricula - moving from grade to grade, or from level to level; - The structure of the organization of subject curricula.
The readiness of teachers for the implementation of the curriculum	- Teachers in the first phase have expressed more readiness to implement the new curriculum, but they have not been sufficiently supported and guided in this process;

	- Readiness is expressed more in the formal aspects of planning for the implementation of the curriculum; - There are many questions concerning the creativity and quality of curriculum implementation; - Numerous discussions among teachers, but not well organized and documented, - Increase of the cooperation of teachers, more for formal issues; - Teachers still have a lack/gaps of appropriate information for the implementation of the new curriculum.

4.3.5.2. Perceptions on curricular overload and influencing factors

On curricular overload, aspects of its description and influencing factors, persons well informed about the curriculum, coordinators and curriculum developers involved in this study, see them from a similar perspective, but with some small differences, which are more emphasized in the style of description and ranking of elements considered curricular overload. There are still elements of difference depending on the role where reservations about their work done in the curriculum development process are observed.

Description of curriculum overload. Among this group of respondents, there are different approaches in describing what they consider curricular overload and how much this issue is taken as a basis during the curricula administration in primary and lower secondary education. The dominant description is that the content aspects of the curriculum and the depth of their requirements, without taking as a basis the age of the students, constitutes the essence of the curricular overload in a grade or a curricular level. This is how some elements of curricular overload are described:

> *Overload is considered what is too much (should not be) in the curriculum documents, which determine what students should know and*

what they should be able to do properly, and which does not take as a basis the abilities and age of the students (Nj/K/1);

It can be called a curricular load when the whole process is based on theoretical learning, this learning is often unbearable for the students (Nj/K/3);

Everything that is defined as indispensable, be it the number of classes, of learning contents to achieve the minimum competencies, the minimum learning outcomes, should not be considered as overload. Anything that extends beyond this context is considered to be overload. In the case of the current curricula, the problem is that the minimum expectations have not been properly defined and this has led to an overload of students with the subject curricula, to deviation from the curricular spirit (Nj/K/2).

The respondents from this study group see the organization of the curriculum in seven curricular areas and the reference to the main competencies as a starting point for avoiding curricular overload, but which has not been exploited properly. Their descriptions also touch on elements of curricular overload related to the learning process that does not suit students, including the environment for implementing the curriculum, learning resources and materials, teachers' approach, working with textbooks, homework. All this shows that this group of study respondents sees curricular overload beyond the learning content and learning outcomes, as well as many other aspects related to the educational process in the classroom and in general at school.

As for the specification of the **factors of curricular overload**, this group of respondents, in practical terms, relates curricular overload mostly to the teacher and teaching factor, namely the approach to teaching, the elements of teaching practice while working with students, the elements of work of teachers based mainly on textbooks. In general terms, the number of subjects, learning content and learning outcomes are seen as the main factors of curriculum overload.

Curriculum experts believe that the large number of learning outcomes, high expectations in core curricula and the large number of subjects are the main

factors of curriculum overload, which are then transmitted to other levels of curriculum development.

> *I see the overload in the number of learning outcomes and high expectations in the core curricula, there should be a standard of generalization level, in the depth of the learning outcomes. I consider that what has led to this is that the descriptions of the features and characteristics of the relevant curricular stage were not taken into account during the presentation of learning outcomes for competencies and curricular areas. Then the load has also descended to subject curricula. Add to this the large number of subjects in primary and lower secondary education (Nj/K/1).*

From the coordinators of the curricular areas, the number of learning outcomes in the subject curricula is not seen as a factor of curricular overload. However, in relation to the learning outcomes in the subject curricula, the number of high requirements within a learning outcome is seen as a load, when there are no orientation instructions, when the weekly classes are minimum 1-2 and when from the requirements of the learning outcomes are expected many lesson units.

Textbooks and teachers' work mainly with textbooks, without relying in curriculum documents, is seen as a factor of curriculum overload. Textbooks are described to be overloaded at both levels of education (primary and lower secondary), because memorization of facts, numbers, names, formulas, processes, etc. is sought. It is emphasized that there are unnecessary theoretical contents in the textbooks, they should be simplified and concretized with practical examples, which would be in function of the easier acquisition of the learning contents and their more accurate application, to have illustrations, more attractive and meaningful figures, tables, graphics, or even different examples illustrated with life situations.

Other factors of overload are the approach to teaching, where only content-oriented learning prevails, the memorization of content, the amount of learning content that is explained in some subjects, in relation to the number of weekly and annual classes, the approach to homework and their number in several subjects in one day, the load of students with different

presentations that do not have goals related to the learning outcomes, etc. Even the school infrastructure, including the large number of students in the classroom/school is seen as a factor of curricular overload.

Regarding the discussion of where teachers are focused when working with students, there is a consensus from this group of respondents that teachers are focused more on knowledge (more on memorization) than on the development of competences, because this is "traditional" practice, which has been employed for a long time in our schools, even though there are also teachers who develop the competencies now defined with the new curriculum.

Regarding the grades where there is more curricular overload, there is a consensus that in primary education there is a greater load with the number of subjects, but also with high demands for student expectations. At the level of lower secondary education, the departure from teaching integrated in curricular areas is seen as overload, which is reflected in all grades of this level.

Cross-curricular issues. Another aspect of curricular overload, discussed with this group of respondents. This is due to the fact that cross-curricular issues, included in subject curricula, are seen as an element of curriculum overload, not only in our curricula, but also in countries that have a more pronounced orientation to their inclusion in curricula.

Among the respondents of this group, there are opinions that, in addition to influencing the overload of subject curricula, they are also wrongly conceived, since the main competencies are considered, among others, as cross-curricular issues that ensure interaction between curricular areas and subjects.

> *The way in which cross-curricular issues have been integrated into subject curricula is wrong, they are contradictory to the spirit of the curriculum based on competences, because the main competences have been considered as cross-curricular issues, which ensure as much interaction between subjects as possible, not only for some cross-curricular issues (Nj/K/1);*

Also, cross-curricular issues, topics, burden the syllabi (the way they are practiced in our schools), because they are often presented as separate topics, not integrated in the learning process within the relevant subject areas, here I think that the basic principle of the curriculum based on competencies has been degraded (Nj/K/3).

There is also a different opinion about cross-curricular issues, topics, where they are seen as a greater opportunity for integration of curricular areas, although this should have been done through the concepts of the curricular area and the learning outcomes for curricular areas.

I do not see them as a burden, because the treatment of cross-curricular issues aims at the acquisition of some specific knowledge, the cultivation of some skills, values and certain attitudes in students. Cross-curricular topics integrate curricular areas, help students interpret the world and connect education with life and its interests. Only care should be taken in the realization of these topics and their connection with the relevant area (Nj/K/2).

Focus of teachers in working with students. Competency-based curriculum requires a change in approaches to teaching, from a focus on content - knowledge, to a focus on the learning process and the development of competencies. This expected change continues to be one of the main challenges in implementing the curriculum in Kosovo.

Regarding the information that this group of respondents of this study has, regarding where teachers are more focused during the teaching process, when working with students - on knowledge or on learning processes and the development of competences, referring to the information that they have through different forms of contact with students, teachers, parents, formal and informal forms, express a common conclusion that the majority of teachers continue to have a greater focus on the development of learning content, the explanation of lesson units, mainly according to textbooks. There are opinions that the approach to the preparation of teachers has contributed to this, but also the approach our education system has supported toward the implementation of the curriculum.

Curriculum experts and developers see the approach to teaching as the main problem, which affects the curriculum overload, and thus the students' learning overload. They express the conviction that this can change if there is an interaction in supporting teachers from all links of the education system. In the first place, according to them, teachers need pre-service preparation and detailed in-service training, focused on advanced teaching approaches, based on curriculum principles, where the main focus should be on the competency-based approach and in the integrated teaching approach.

> *My perception (during informal conversations with teachers) is that teachers during the teaching process have two phases, which are disconnected from each other, one in the design of the lesson plans that are required according to the official planning forms, and the other phase, namely the process of its implementation in the classroom with students, where this process is generally based only on textbooks (Nj/K/1).*

The above considerations on these aspects addressed are summarized in the following table, which is organized according to the subcategories addressed above and in specific topics for each subcategory, which are ordered according to the frequency of information identified from the data collected with this group of respondents.

Table 30. Description of curriculum overload and influencing factors from the perspective of experts and coordinators for curriculum development

Subcategory	Specific topic
Description of curriculum overload	*Curricular overload is:* - Everything extending beyond the minimum expectations for students is considered to be overload; - The content aspect of the curriculum and the depth of its requirements, without considering the age of the students; - What is redundant and should not be in the curriculum documents;

	- Theoretical learning only; - The learning process based on theoretical learning, not on the motivation and progress of students for the development of competencies; - Anything related to the learning process that does not suit the students, beyond just the learning content and learning outcomes.
Curricular overload factors	- Approach to curricular reform; - Number of subjects; - High expectations in core curricula; - The number of SLO is large, to realize these outcomes in depth, more space, learning time and preparation are needed; - The number of high demands within a learning outcome in subject curricula; - Learning contents not in relation to instruction time for their development; - Textbooks - work only with textbooks without reliance on curriculum documents; - Teaching - approach to teaching where content-oriented learning prevails; - Homework - approach to homework and their number; - School infrastructure, including the large number of students in the classroom/school.
Cross-curricular issues	- A greater opportunity for integration of curricular areas - Cross-curricular topics integrate curricular areas, help students interpret the world and connect education with life and its interests; - They are contradictory to the spirit of the competency-based curriculum; - They load the syllabi;

	- They are often presented as separate topics and not integrated in the learning process within the relevant subject areas.
Focus of teachers in working with students	- Teachers continue to have a greater focus on the development of learning contents, on the explanation of lesson units; - The learning process in the classroom is generally based only on textbooks; - We have not progressed at all, the focus on content dominates, because indirectly the focus of the Ministry of Education continues to be on content; - More on memorization - "traditional" practice that has been employed for a long time in our schools; - The focus on content, learning knowledge continues, it is school practice in the entire education system of Kosovo, including higher education; - Teachers are not committed enough to reform.

4.3.5.3. The impact of curriculum overload from the perspective of experts and coordinators for curriculum development

Curriculum experts, coordinators and curriculum developers included in this study have different perceptions regarding the impact of curriculum overload, both on student outcomes and on student and teacher well-being. The commonalities and differences for these aspects from this group of respondents are reflected in the following section.

When it comes to the impact of curricular overload on student achievement, some of the respondents of this group have difficulty clearly emphasizing that it has a significant impact on outcomes, due to the fact that, based on the statistical reports of schools on student success, they are reported to be the same or similar from previous years. On the other hand, students' achievements in external assessments are not satisfactory, especially in the PISA study.

There is discussion that the new curricula are not expected to have a negative impact on student achievement, since the learning outcomes have a good hierarchical relationship of distribution from grade to grade, against the outcomes expected in the previous curricula. According to this discussion, negative impact can only come from the approach to teaching.

In another discussion, it is clearly stated that curricular overload has a negative impact on student achievement. The argument relies on the degree of achievement of students in the 9th grade test, the results of this school year (2021/2022) are specified. In particular, the achievements of Kosovar students in the PISA 2015 and 2018 studies are specified, despite the fact that the students involved in these two studies did not work with the new curricula. It is known that the PISA study does not evaluate the curricula of the educational systems, but rather evaluates the students' abilities, that is, evaluates the students' capacity to apply knowledge and skills, to analyze, judge and communicate effectively while identifying, interpreting and solving problems in different situations, which aspects are promoted and supported by curricula.

> *Simply, the PISA scores have revealed the reality that exists, and this approach to education reform, to curriculum reform, is contributing to this reality. We have produced this situation, the whole set up of curriculum documents and the work we have done is reflected in the PISA study scores, therefore this shows that they are not suitable for students and students are not supported in the right way to show good results in PISA. The PISA scores are a clear reflection of our work (Nj/K/1);*
>
> *I see a connection between the results of Kosovar students in the PISA study and the curricula in basic education. This relationship is more related to the teaching/learning methodology approach, from how teachers deliver teaching and how students learn (Nj/K/4).*

The impact of curricular overload on student achievement is also seen in relation to avoiding curriculum requirements without reason, or when they are misinterpreted and as a result do not provide satisfactory results and opportunities to meet expectations.

On the other hand, when it comes to the impact of curricular overload on the well-being of students, curriculum experts, coordinators and curriculum developers, included in this study, have stated that under the circumstances of how learning and teaching are organized in our schools, it is impossible for them not to have an impact on the well-being of students. Some of them relate this to the stress caused to students, the load of theoretical learning, but also to the ignorance a group of students display towards learning, then to the loss of students' interest in learning, which according to them, in a way, was also reflected in the students' protest " don't feel like going to school", it is reflected in a large number of student absences, etc.

> *I consider that the student learning overload, with the approach to the implementation of the curriculum, is being manifested in two extremes: stress, high load, and on the other hand total ignorance, when the teacher himself does not manage to explain to the students why a certain content is important to be learned, and thus the child sees it as something only to be done for the sake of it, as a number, as a topic, etc. Now we have two groups of students, those who are concerned, stressed and try to find ways to learn as much as possible and the other group of students who do not really care, do not stress and do not find it reasonable to cooperate around lessons, because they do not they see interest in learning (Nj/K/1).*

> *I do not consider this approach to the curriculum to be successful in the expected well-being of students, on the contrary, it will affect the mental and emotional overload in terms of time and will also affect their demotivation, because they will be more inclined to learn for the sake of a "grade" than to acquire "knowledge" and the purpose of education will be lost against the changes and needs in society (Nj/K/4).*

Others describe the fatigue of students, especially in primary education, from lessons in a large number of subjects, the load and stress with homework, the free time they take away, etc. From this group of respondents, homework, namely the way we work with homework in our

schools, the burden placed on students, is seen as influential and significantly damaging to the well-being of students.

> *Homework is an aspect of students' workload, which greatly affects students' fatigue and stress, especially when they encounter difficulties in completing them. It must be said that homework, in addition to affecting the well-being of students, is just a formality.*

Despite the differences, there was no participant from this group of respondents who did not mention at least 2-3 elements of the impact of curricular overload on the achievements and well-being of students.

Another aspect discussed is the impact of curricular overload on teachers' work. Regarding this aspect, curriculum experts, coordinators and curriculum developers, included in this study, have stated that there are elements of teacher overload in their work.

According to them, the overload is related to the circumstances of how teachers have been challenged at the beginning of the implementation of the curriculum, by the lack of proper support from institutional mechanisms, not knowing some elements related to the practical implementation of the competency-based curriculum, not following-up with new textbooks for the new curricula set for implementation, but also by not changing the organization of work in schools, etc.

The latter, according to them, has caused that is continued with a traditional approach to working in schools, an approach which has prevented the effective implementation of the curriculum and burdened the teachers, some of whom have remained vacillating between the old and the new approach.

The impact of curricular overload on the work of teachers, in some cases, is more related to the administrative process in schools than to the teaching process.

> *Yes, teachers are overloaded according to the requirements of the curriculum, or rather according to the interpretation of its requirements, which has more to do with the administrative process than with reflection on the teaching process (Nj/K/3);*

The way the work is currently taking place in schools is turning out to be an element of overload for teachers (Nj/K/2).

The overload of teachers in relation to the demands of the new curriculum, according to this group of respondents, is reflected in uncertainty and distrust in their work, loss of motivation for work, fatigue and fear of frequent changes, placing the focus of their work in the administrative elements around the curriculum, required by the school, in numerous debates related to the implementation of the curriculum, but also in resistance in certain cases to the implementation of the curriculum.

Despite the impacts on the work of teachers, among the respondents of the study from this group, there are opinions that for a significant number of teachers the new curriculum has started to have a positive impact, in mobilizing them to be more creative in teaching, that while working with students to apply teaching approaches that enable the development of students' competencies, as defined with the new curriculum.

The aspects that have had the greatest impact on the overload of students and teachers, mentioned by the curriculum experts, coordinators and curriculum developers, are summarized in the following table, in subcategories and specific topics.

Table 31. Impacts of curriculum overload from the perspective of curriculum development coordinators and experts

Subcategory	Specific topic
Impact on student achievement	- In general, students' achievements are not so satisfactory; - PISA does not evaluate curricula, but evaluates students' abilities, which in our case are reflected as very low; PISA results are a clear reflection of our work; - If we take the PISA study as a basis, we should not evaluate the curricula as an end in themselves, but the results that emerge from the curricula; - The results of the Achievement Test in the 9th grade are far from the reports of the schools on the

	success of the students from the internal assessments; - The way of learning in our schools has an impact on student results, this is also reflected in PISA results and other international assessments; - When the requirements of the curricula for any reason are avoided, or misinterpreted, they necessarily do not give satisfactory results.
Impact on student well-being	- Fatigue from lessons in many subjects; - Worries, stress and load; - Total ignorance; - Loss of interest in learning; - Fatigue with homework; - Uncertainty in homework; - Psychic and emotional overload; - Lack of time for extracurricular activities.
Aspects with the greatest impact on teachers' overload	- Inadequate preparation for the implementation of the curricular reform; - Lack of systematic support for teachers; - Failure to follow up the development of subject curricula with new textbooks and learning materials; - Not changing the organization of work in schools; - Numerous administrative requests for teachers, without support staff in schools; - Load with a large number of students in urban schools.
Impact on teachers' work	- Uncertainty and distrust in their work; - Work only with textbooks; - Numerous debates related to the implementation of the curriculum; - Loss of motivation for work; - Fatigue and fear of frequent changes;

	- Resistance in certain cases to the implementation of the curriculum; - Work focus on the administrative elements required by the school regarding the curriculum; - There are teachers who have changed their approach, who develop the competencies now defined with the new curriculum.

4.3.5.4. Strategies for dealing with and mitigating curricular overload

In response to the request, regarding action strategies for dealing with and mitigating curricular overload from the central to the school level, curriculum experts, coordinators and curriculum developers have given different ideas, which are primarily related to reflections needed by all the mechanisms related to the curriculum reform, on what has started to be done, what has been done in relation to the implementation of the curriculum, what is the common understanding, and for institutional decision on what to undertake in the continuation of the curricular reform, which should also address the problem of curricular overload.

The process of implementing the curricular reform, according to this group of study respondents, has been accompanied by a series of challenges and problems. According to them, a large part is related to the approach followed by MESTI in relation to the curriculum reform, therefore a considerable number of suggestions are dedicated to MESTI, which, according to them, should lead with concrete actions on the path to be followed in handling and mitigating curricular overload. It is suggested to start with the basics, the understanding of the curriculum reform, the monitoring of the implementation of the curriculum, the coordination of actions by the mechanisms of MESTI that have a role in the process of supporting and implementing the curriculum reform.

Then, there is ideas for substantial changes regarding the leadership of the implementation of the curriculum from the central level to the school level,

the organization of work in schools, the school schedule, avoiding bureaucracy in the curriculum reform process, etc.

The next part of the ideas for dealing with and mitigating the curricular overload is related to finding a pragmatic approach in the revision of the core curricula, but also of the subject curricula, for which there is grounds that they are overloaded for students and do not facilitate the work of teachers in the implementation of core curricula.

> *First, the revision of the core curricula, because that is where the main problem lies. I don't see subject curricula as a big issue, because they should not be mandatory for teachers, they should have autonomy and flexibility in removing or adding topics and learning outcomes, depending on the specifics and context where they work. They are indicative, helping teachers in the selection of some topics, but not necessarily all. It is important that on the basis of what the teachers select, they must ensure the achievement of the outcomes of the competencies and areas for the curricular stage. The integrated approach must not be abandoned. This should be done by redefining the number of subjects in the CC, continuing the integrated approach with curricular areas, until the new framework 2-3 teachers can work, but the children must have one subject (Nj/K/1).*

Curriculum coordinators do not think that changes to curriculum documents should be started without a comprehensive assessment of what has been implemented and what has not been implemented, where the main problems are and what can be changed. An important part of their ideas is related to the need to review programs for the pre-service teacher preparation, as well as programs for the professional development of in-service teachers.

> *The review of pre-service teacher preparation programs, including in-service programs, should be in the spirit of the revised core curricula. It is necessary to work with teachers in such a way that they themselves understand the competencies of the curriculum, how to reflect them in their work, because otherwise they cannot work and support students in the development of competencies. The six competencies must first of all be maximally mastered by the teachers,*

since only in this way, through their own example, the teachers can transmit them more easily to the students (Nj/K/3).

The ideas for MDEs, at the municipal level, are about changing the approach of the municipal authorities to work with the schools of the municipality, supporting schools in the organization of work, including professional support for teachers, reorganizing the professional activities of teachers at the municipal level, reorganizing of the work of pedagogical - psychological services in schools, etc.

In order to achieve these actions, a restructuring of the MEDs is suggested and their completion with human capacities that ensure the systematic support of schools, through which they would directly help to avoid some aspects of curricular overload, which are influenced by the organization of school work and the level of preparation of teachers to work in the spirit of the curriculum.

When it comes to the actions that should be taken by schools to deal with and mitigate curricular overload, this group of respondents often refers to the leading role of the school in carrying out the appropriate preparations for each year for the effective implementation of the curriculum, technical, organizational, professional preparations, so that the school manages to provide students with an enabling environment for the development of competencies, individual support for each student. According to them, each school should be prepared to establish a clear agenda for continuous development of its practices, in favor of supporting students towards meeting expectations, achieving learning outcomes defined by the curriculum.

Each teacher should have an additional role in the school, beyond teaching the subject they teach. The commitment should be made in that area or subject in which the teachers have better development, are better prepared in a specific of supporting students, parents, school lidership. Someone should be a peer mentor. In this way, their work is maximized, the overloading of some teachers with many tasks and commitments, lack of motivation, etc. is eliminated (Nj/K/1).

The school must change, there should be a concrete approach to the development of the learning process, to be more demanding in front of those in charge of the education system. To accurately report on the advantages and difficulties in the learning process and take responsibility for many problems related to this topic of study, which directly depend on the school (Nj/K/3).

Also, it is suggested for schools to report objectively on the advantages and difficulties in the learning process, to be transparent and to testify correctly about the achievements and obstacles of the implementation during the learning process and teachers to maximize the work with students, in order to ensure the support of all students in the learning process.

In conclusion, it can be said that even this group of respondents have given different and creative ideas, which can serve as a starting point and orientation in the work of educational institutions from the central to the school level, to undertake immediate and long-term actions for dealing with and mitigating curricular overload. Details of the suggested actions described above are presented in the following table.

Table 32. Necessary actions for dealing with and mitigating curriculum overload from the perspective of curriculum experts and coordinators for curriculum development

Subcategory	Specific topic from subcategories
Actions to be taken by MESTI	- Review of core curricula; - Redefining the number of subjects in the CC; - Continuation of the curricular areas integrated approach; - Review of pre-service teacher preparation programs; - Coordination of MESTI with Faculties of Education for the preparation of teachers; - Review and development of programs in-service teacher training, in the spirit of the curriculum; - Review and description of teachers' duties, in accordance with the teachers' development framework;

	- Norms/standards and guidelines for internal organization are needed; - Follow-up and distributing information in an accurate and timely manner to all involved parties; - Avoiding bureaucracy in the curriculum reform process; - Continuous monitoring of curriculum implementation; - Clear address for responding to the requests and needs of schools on issues related to the curriculum.
Actions to be taken by MEDs	- Restructuring of MEDs and work in MEDs; - Responsible implementation of the tasks under the MEDs competence; - To work more with the content that affects the entire educational process, and not focus only on the form; - Support in the organization of school work, in the training of teachers; - Supervision of the work of schools, to continuously supervise the performance of educational personnel; - Demand accountability from schools/teachers; - Coordinating work with school principals for the implementation of the curriculum; - To support schools with didactic and other auxiliary tools and equipment; - To ensure the necessary cooperation between teachers and joint planning of learning experiences.
Actions to be taken by the school	- Management of school processes based on curriculum principles; - A much more creative role in school management, with opportunities for different organization of the school

	schedule, classroom organization, always in the interest of the students and avoiding their overload; - Providing an enabling environment for the development of competencies, individual support for students; - Additional work and engagement with parents, for their work with children; - To objectively report on the advantages and difficulties in the learning process; - To be transparent and testify correctly about the achievements and obstacles of implementation during the learning process; - To identify the needs for engagement of competent external people in the school. - Each teacher should have an additional role in the school, beyond teaching the subject they teach; - Maximizing the teacher's work for the school; - The school must function as a learning organization.

CHAPTER V

Discussion of outcomes

The discussion of the outcomes, the main findings of the study, is related to the purpose and research questions of the study, as well as to the review of the literature on the issue of curricular overload. The main purpose of this study was to explore and address the problem of curricular overload in compulsory education in Kosovo, to investigate if the contents of the curricula in relation to expectations and instruction time - the lesson plan, present any aspect of overload for students and for teachers and to determine an approximate scope of the aspects of curricular overload in relation to the official requirements related to the implementation of the curriculum.

Also, the purpose of the study was to outline the aspects of curriculum overload, reported from the views of subjects from the school community (students, parents, teachers and school heads) and other subjects related to the development of the curriculum (drafters and coordinators for the development of curricula), in an attempt to answer the much-discussed question in the educational community: *Is overload "real" or "perceived"?*

5.1. Curricular overload in the set of curricular documents under implementation in primary education and lower secondary education in Kosovo

In response to the research question: *How evident are the aspects of curricular overload in the set of curricular documents in the implementation, in primary education and lower secondary education in Kosovo*?, the detailed data are presented in Chapter 4, in which the findings are highlighted mainly from the analysis of curriculum documents that regulate issues related to the curriculum in primary and lower secondary education and their implementation in Kosovo schools.

Research data shows that there is a marked difference between curriculum enhancement, learning content and learning outcomes with compulsory instruction time in primary and lower secondary education. The difference is more pronounced in the curricula of primary education versus lower

secondary education, in subject curricula, in subjects that have a compulsory instruction time of 1-2 classes.

The enhancement of the curriculum, the addition of learning content and learning outcomes in relation to the compulsory instruction time, have a disproportionate ratio and therefore have an impact on the student learning overload, but also teacher overload in their work.

However, the approach to the administration of subject curricula through the use of concepts in the form of concentric circles for the definition of lesson topics, reference to the outcomes of the curriculum areas per stage, as well as the implementation of the competency-based approach, allows that during the implementation of the curriculum there is possibility to reduce the learning content and coverage of some subject outcomes at the same time.

To find the relationship between curriculum enhancement, learning content and learning outcomes with compulsory teaching and learning (lesson) time, in response to the sub-question of the first research question: *Is there overload from the enhanced curricula, the addition of learning contents, expectations for students and what is the relationship of the overload with the compulsory instruction time?,* we used the thematic analysis of curriculum documents, according to the hierarchy of curriculum documents: Curriculum Framework Document (CFPE), Core Curricula, Syllabi and Subject Curricula for grades 1, 3, 5, 6, 8 and 9.

The CFPE document is a conceptual document of the curriculum and generally of the organization of the pre-university education system. As such, the document does not constitute a basis for curriculum overload with learning content or topics. However, the document directed that the teaching of all curriculum areas, a total of seven (7) curriculum areas, should be done from the preparatory class (grade 0) to the twelfth grade (12). This has caused that in the further breakdown of the curriculum, from the first grade of primary education, to start with a minimum of 10 subjects. This constitutes an enhancement of the curriculum, especially for primary education, which is reflected as a dimension of curriculum overload at this level of education.

The Core Curricula are the second hierarchy of curriculum documents, which break down the concept of the curriculum framework and define the expectations and curriculum orientations for the curriculum stage and for the organization of the learning process that focuses on the implementation of the curriculum. Even the documents of the core curricula, with the function they have, in principle should not constitute a basis for curricular overload with the enhancement of the curriculum and the addition of learning contents that must be developed with students, since the curriculum is based on competencies and it is organized in curricular areas, which offer opportunities for flexibility in relation to aspects of the curriculum content.

However, in the core curriculum documents there are some elements of curriculum enhancement, starting from the orientations for the syllabi in CC/1, which, like the CFPE, for primary education determines that at least 10 subjects should be taught, starting from the first grade of primary school, while for lower secondary education according to CC/2, it defines up to 15 subjects. Thus, the list of subjects is simply made longer and nothing is removed to accommodate the new subjects (Alexandre and Flutter, 2009).

Other aspects, which are considered curricular overload in the core curricula, related to the expansion of the curriculum and the addition of learning contents, are the number of several SLOs and high expectations in the core curricula, the number of requirements within a learning outcome for curricular areas and their depth, without a generalization level standard, regardless of the teaching/learning time determined for a curricular area.

In relation to the number of learning outcomes for curricular areas, the findings of the analysis show that differences are evident in some curricular areas, such as the curricular area Languages and Communication has over 38% of the instruction time for curricular stage 1, the learning outcomes for this curricular area are set at 24, while another curricular area, such as for example the curricular area Natural Sciences, has 14 learning outcomes, with about 5% of the instruction time at the same curricular stage.

The findings of the analysis show that there are elements of the enhancement of the curriculum and the addition of learning contents from the way the concepts for: (i) Attitudes, values and beliefs; (ii) Skills and abilities; and

(iii) Specific concepts and knowledge related to the curricular area, are placed in the core curriculum. In most curricular areas they are common, which means that all these basic elements of the curriculum are developed at both curricular stages of a level of education, primary education or lower secondary education.

This approach refers to the tendency to include new content items in the curriculum, in response to new societal demands, without considering, as appropriate, what content should be removed (OECD, 2020) within a curricular stage or within a grade.

The findings from the analysis of the subject curricula, within the framework of this study, the curricula for grades 1, 3, 5, 6, 8 and 9, show a tendency of expansion of the learning content, from the number of lesson topics, the number of learning outcomes and in many cases from the number of requirements within a subject learning outcome (SLO) and the depth of content that must be broken down into lesson units by teachers, but also by textbook designers.

The elements of increased learning content, through lesson topics and especially SLOs, are noted in cases where for a subject the number of SLOs set in the subject curriculum is equal to the number of outcomes of the corresponding curricular area, which are set in curriculum of the same grade, as for example the case of the subject curriculum Life Skills - 5th grade.

Or in cases where the number of SLOs varies significantly from grade to grade, within a level of education and from the same subject, such as for example the number of SLOs in the Physical Education, Sports and Health, 5th grade , where the number of SLOs is 50% smaller than in the 1st grade. Such cases are reflected in both levels of education.

Elements of content overload, which comes from the number of lesson topics and the number of learning outcomes (SLOs) in primary education, set in all subject curricula per grade, in relation to instruction time per grade (instruction hours per one week of instruction), are presented in the following figure.

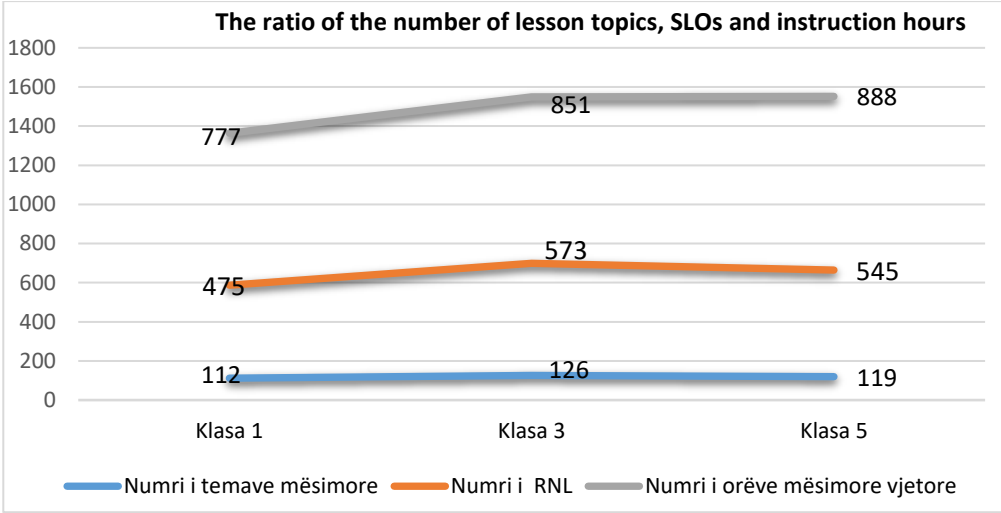

Figure 6. Differences in the number of annual topics and the number of SLOs in grades 1, 3 and 5

As can be seen, the difference exists between the 3rd and 5th grades, even though the 5th grade students are older, they have 37 instruction hours more than the 3rd grade. For this grade, 7 less lesson topics and 28 less SLOs have been defined for all the subjects of these grades. Subject-specific differences are presented in chapter 4 of this study.

Findings from the analysis of the Core Curriculum and subject curricula in primary education show that the contents, the number of requirements and the depth of SLOs in the subject Man and Nature are overloaded with content, both in relation to the instruction time of 1-2 instruction hours per week, and in relation to the age of the children, with concepts and content of learning outcomes that go beyond the characteristics of children's development within the relevant curricular stage or level of education.

Thus, for example, in the framework of knowledge, understanding and skills, it is determined that by the students by the end of the fifth grade (5) to develop: *The structuring of scientific thought on concepts, models, theories and laws for the construction of the matter, processes and phenomena in nature (physical, chemical, biological, geographical processes and phenomena on Earth and the Universe*) (MESTI (CC/1), 2016).

The same outcome is also outlined in the Core Curriculum for lower secondary education (grades 6-9), with an addition of the *development of scientific research skills on the construction of matter, processes and phenomena* (MESTI (CC/2), 2016).

The lack of clarity about subject goals and expectations, in addition to the burden it may cause for students, may in the first place cause confusion for teachers about the relationship between traditional and changed components in the new curriculum (Voogt, Nieveen and Klopping, 2017).

Even in lower secondary education (grades 6-9), the elements of overload emerge from the number of lesson topics and the number of learning outcomes (SLO), set in all subject curricula for each grade, in grades 6, 8 and 9, in relation to the instruction time per grade (instruction hours per instruction week). They are summarized in the following figure.

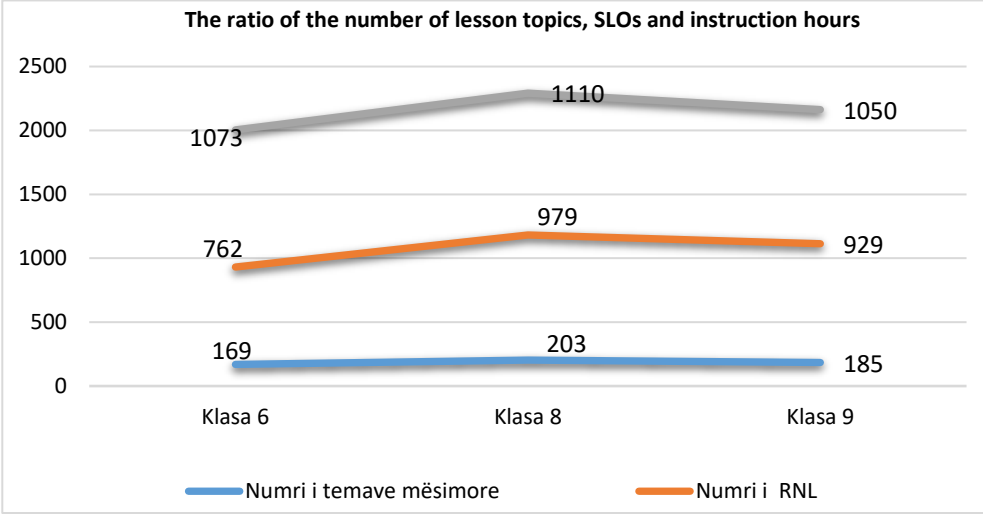

Figure 7. Differences in the number of annual topics and the number of SLOs in grades 6, 8 and 9

The difference is more evident between 6th grade and 8th grade. According to the data, 8th grade has only 37 more instruction hours than 6th grade, but it has 34 more lesson topics and 220 more SLOs. Despite the fact that the content depth element of the SLO best reflects content addition, as opposed

to quantitative indicators, this distribution of topics and SLO also shows that the building of learning progress is not coherent across grades.

The findings from the analysis on curricular overload, in relation to the compulsory instruction time, show that the students of primary and lower secondary education in Kosovo, from grades 1-9, according to the current curriculum, are guaranteed a total of 8524 instruction hours. This number of instruction hours represents a load with instruction hours of about 900 more than the OECD country average of instruction hours, in which the OECD average totals 7639 instruction hours for primary and lower secondary education.

The findings show that the OECD countries have more time in terms of minutes per instruction hour, with an average of 45-50 minutes, compared to Kosovo, with an average of 40-45 minutes, but the workload is reflected in the distribution of lessons into many instruction hours per subject, which leads to superficial teaching (Peffers, et al. 2005).

Cross-curricular issues in subject curricula. To find the relationship between curriculum enhancement (expansion), lesson contents and learning outcomes and compulsory instruction time, in response to the second research sub-question: Is there curricular overload caused by the way cross-curricular issues are included within the curricula?, we used the analysis of the subject curricula for grades 1, 3, 5, 6, 8 and 9, the part of the instructions for the implementation of cross-curricular issues.

The findings show that the instructions for the implementation of cross-curricular issues in the subject curricula are placed in order after the methodological instructions, in the first place they are considered to be part of the methodology, with a specific separation, which according to the way of placement goes beyond the methodological instructions. There are three forms of placing instructions for the implementation of cross-curricular issues in subject curricula of the same grade: (i) form of general description; (ii) only the specification of cross-curricular topics/issues, as a title, which ranges from 5 to 8 cross-curricular topics in only one subject curriculum; and (iii) the description of specific instructions for the topics/issues within the relevant subject curricula.

In primary education, out of a total of 9 subject curricula, the cross-curricular issues included in the largest number of subject curricula are: Education for sustainable development (in 8 subjects), Globalization and interdependence (in 8 subjects), Media education (literacy) (in 7 subjects), Peace Education (in 5 subjects), Education for democratic citizenship (in 4 subjects), Environmental Education (in 4 subjects), etc. The following figure shows the inclusion of cross-curricular issues in the number of fifth grade subject curricula.

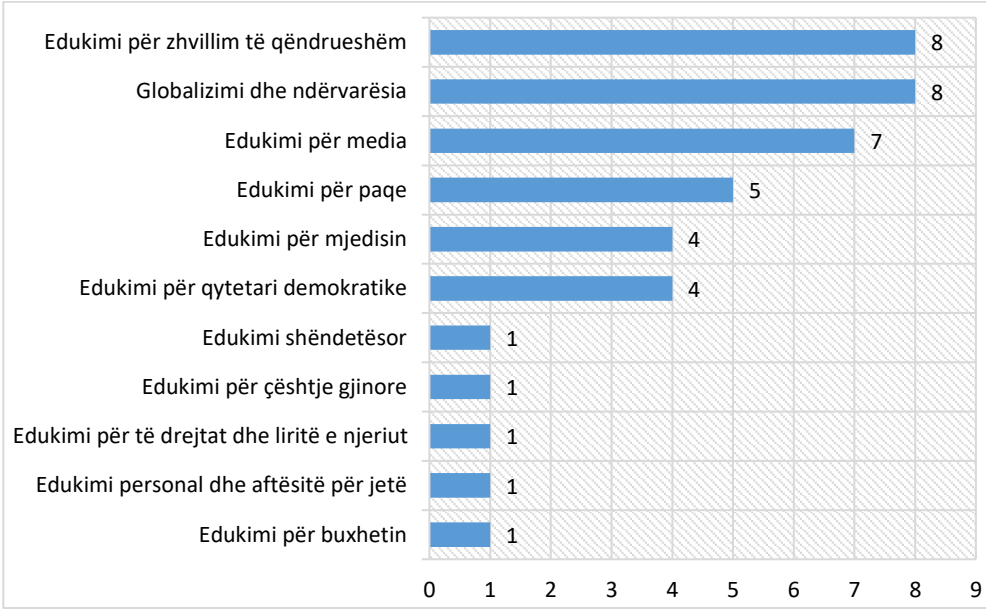

Figure 8. Integration of cross-curricular issues in the number of subject curricula /grade 5/

In relation to lower secondary education, there is a slight difference in the ranking of cross-curricular issues from their inclusion in subject curricula. The cross-curricular issues included in the number of subject curricula of the ninth grade, out of a total of 14 subject curricula, have this inclusion: Media Education (in 13 subjects), Education for Sustainable Development (in 10 subjects), Peace Education (in 7 subjects), Globalization and interdependence (in 7 subjects), Education for democratic citizenship (in 6 subjects), Environmental Education (in 4 subjects), etc. The following figure

presents integrated cross-curricular issues according to the number of subject curricula / grade 9/.

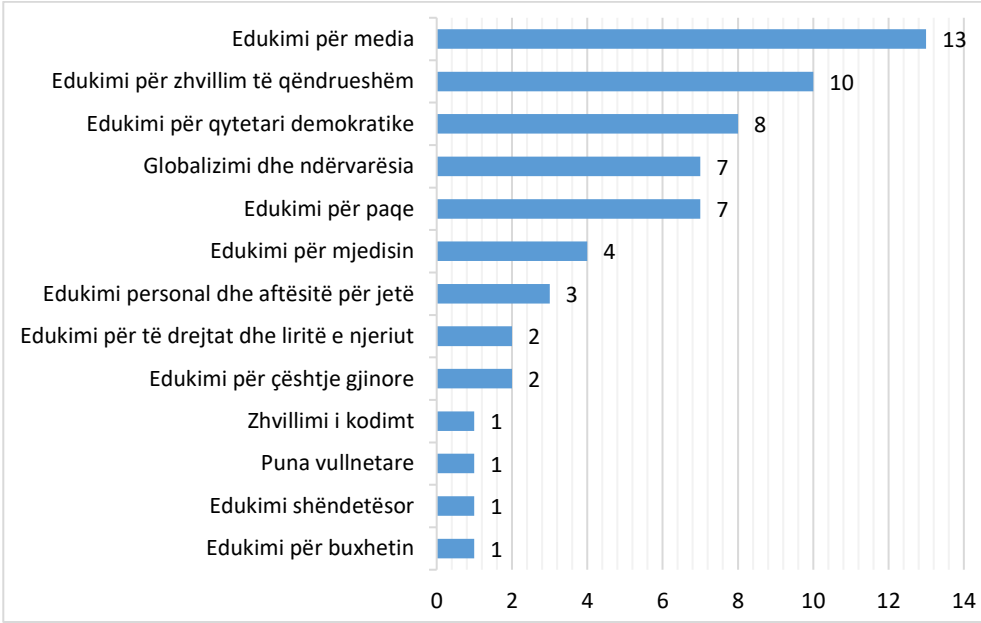

Figure 9. Integration of cross-curricular issues in the number of subject curricula /grade 9/

The way cross-curricular issues are integrated into the subject curricula, in most cases, is contradictory to the spirit of the competency-based curriculum, because the main competencies are considered to ensure interaction between subjects, covering also cross-curricular issues.

Also, they do not sufficiently guide teachers and schools in the planning and implementation of educational processes to enable the development of competences also with the inclusion of cross-curricular issues.

Cross-curricular topics should be used to promote the holistic development of students beyond traditional learning (OECD, 2020), therefore they should be placed in the context of the subject with specific instructions to ensure interaction with the subject topics, without creating overload for students, but also for teachers, and not necessarily 5-8 cross-curricular topics/issues should be addressed within each subject.

The relationship between student outcomes in compulsory education and instruction time. To find the relationship between curriculum expansion, learning content and learning outcomes and the compulsory instruction time, in response to the third research question sub-question: What is the relationship between students' outcomes in compulsory education and instruction time?, we used indicators of PISA 2015 and 2018 study scores, as well as the scores of the Achievement Test 2022, for the 9th grade.

The 2015 report of the OECD Program for International Student Assessment (OECD, 2016) states that the time spent learning during a day, both in school and outside of school, i.e. learning at home, is not related to students' academic performance. Despite the fact that Kosovo is not included in this specific OECD analysis, even though it was part of the PISA 2015 study for the first time, the analyzes made within the framework of other statistical indicators, reported by PISA, but also by MESTI in the case of of Kosovo, emphasize that the time spent by Kosovar students in learning during a day, both at school and at home, is not related to their academic performance.

Kosovo, with an average number of instruction hours in primary and lower secondary education (grades 1-9), of 947 instruction hours per year, has minimal achievements in PISA 2015, only 347 points in Reading, Mathematics and Science, or 150 points less than the average of OECD countries, which is 497 points, with small differences in PISA 2018, with only 353 points in Reading, Mathematics and Science. The percentage of Kosovar students who have not reached the minimum level of skills in PISA 2018 is very high (Science 76.6%, Reading 78.7%, Mathematics 76.6%).

Even the results of the Achievement Test, 9th grade, published by MESTI (2022), emphasize approximately the same thing, that the compulsory instruction time at school is not related to the academic performance of students. The average achievement is 50.75%. The differences between the average achievement and the compulsory instruction time for subjects that were part of the 2022 Achievement Test are shown in the following figure.

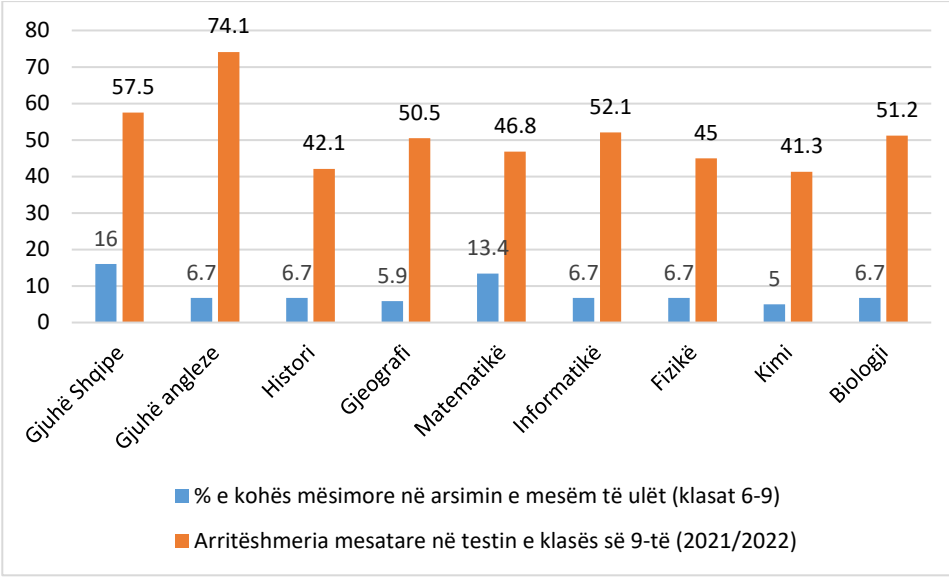

Figure 10. The relationship between the Achievement Test (2022) scores and the compulsory instruction time (grades 6-9)

As can be seen, the Albanian language scores are lower by about 16% than the English language scores, even though the instruction time of the Albanian language makes up 16% of the curriculum in grades 6-9, against the English language, which makes up 6.7% of the compulsory instruction time in these grades. Differences are also reflected in other subjects, e.g. in Mathematics, which has 13.4% of the curriculum in grades 6-9 with Achievement Test scores close to Physics, which has 6.7% of compulsory instruction time in these grades.

The time spent learning during a day, both at school and at home, is not related to the academic performance of students even in the assessment carried out by the Pedagogical Institute of Kosovo on the impact of the COVID pandemic on learning losses. According to this study, about 51% of the students of the seventh grade did not reach the minimum level of learning outcomes in the Albanian language subject, while 36% of the students from this grade did not reach at the minimum level of expectations the learning outcomes in Mathematics (Mehmeti, et al., 2021).

5.2. Overall perceptions on the curricular overload

Curricular overload is also measured based on the reactions of users, its implementers, such as teachers, students, school heads, but also other actors related to the curriculum, therefore it is extremely important to distinguish between real and perceived overload (OECD, 2020).

In response to the research question How is curricular overload perceived by representatives of the school community and actors related to the development and implementation of the curriculum? detailed data are presented in Chapter 4, in which the main findings from the processing and interpretation of the data obtained through semi-structured interviews and questionnaires carried out with respondents from the school community, as well as with experts and coordinators for the development of curriculum reform in pre-university education.

From all the groups of respondents included in the study: teachers, students, school heads, parents and experts/coordinators of curriculum development, the findings in the introductory discussions show information, general perceptions, but related to curriculum overload. Then, in more detail, in the following discussions, the issues of curricular overload, its factors and impacts are singled out.

Thus, when teachers initially talk about curricular changes, they refer to the general aspects of the changes, such as competencies, principles, curriculum areas, and do not delve much into the content aspects related to their curriculum.

The teachers, with their discussions, also touch on important elements related to the positive aspects of the new curriculum, the changes in their curricula that are familiar to them, the structure and coherence of the subject curricula, as well as provide an extensive list of difficulties that related to the implementation of the curriculum, starting from content, organizational, technical and administrative ones.

The teachers, as a majority, when they discuss the changes in the curricula, they relate almost everything to the changes in the textbooks, which are

referred to as the main source for the students, but also for their work with students.

Even school heads and quality coordinators in schools, when they talk about curriculum changes, refer to the general aspects of curriculum changes and delve into the elements of curriculum implementation, emphasizing their role in coordinating curriculum implementation activities at the school level, which has few elements of focus on the role of leadership in curriculum implementation.

Then, school heads and quality coordinators in schools talk about providing evidence on the implementation of the new curriculum, which are collected in different forms, but their use for the purposes of improving school work is minimally present in the specific topics identified from discussions with this group of respondents. This shows that the school lidership does not have a well-defined orientation on the implementation of the new curriculum reform (Buleshkaj & Koren, 2022).

Heads of schools and quality coordinators in schools express an increased positivity about the readiness of teachers for the implementation of the curriculum, which is described as having faced vacillations in different phases of the implementation of the curriculum. Information about complaints, difficulties, challenges and concerns of teachers, students and parents, related to the new curriculum, takes a wider place in their discussions.

Heads of schools and quality coordinators in schools give few clarifications on how this information is used to address the issues raised, which are mainly expected to find solutions from outside, from the MEDs and from MESTI. Although in some cases there is no lack of efforts to address some of the problems related to the curriculum, especially by school directors and QAC, who are curriculum trainers or have been involved in the development of curricula and textbooks.

Students describe their engagement in learning, which largely depends on the way lessons are explained by their teachers, on the teachers' communication approach about the lessons, to the students' own interest in learning and on many other factors.

Regarding the engagement of students in learning, the findings show that, in relation to the time allocated for learning at home and for homework, there are many differences, which time depends on the obligations they receive from teachers and the way they learn.

From the findings with students, it results that more than half of engage only in homework, on average during a day up to 2 hours, about 1/3 of them up to1 hour, while the others up to 3 hours only in doing of homework.

Parents, with their descriptions, show that in schools there is no well-organized system for informing parents about changes in the curriculum and for advising them on how to work with children to support them in the learning processes related to the school curriculum. Parents have little information about the developments in the curriculum, provided by the form teachers, but also by their children. They talk about numerous problems and concerns related to the new curriculum, for which they mainly refer to the information heard, but also discussed with teachers and students - their children.

Unlike the respondents from the schools, the curriculum coordinators and experts initially, when they talk about the developments around the curricula, they refer to the circumstances on which the changes in the curriculum were developed, the unexploited opportunities from the concept of the competency-based curriculum approach, to reduce the number of subjects, but also the enhancement of the curriculum.

Curriculum experts and coordinators confirm some of the changes made in the subject curricula, which indicate the use of concepts in the form of concentric circles for the breakdown of learning topics within the subject curricula, as a novelty, but also for the addition or reorganization of some learning content from previous curricula - movement from grade to grade, or from level to level of education.

Also, the curriculum experts and coordinators show that there is a growing positivity on the readiness of the teachers for the implementation of the curriculum, which is described as having been challenged and there are still some vacillations to ensure a greater mobilization towards the

implementation of the main elements of the curriculum related to the role of teachers.

5.3. Factors that have fueled the perception of curricular overload

The main findings point to different perceptions of the factors that have fueled the perception of curricular overload. They come from the nature of dealing with the curriculum, from the knowledge of the curriculum, but also from the knowledge of real challenges and problems related to the implementation of the curriculum.

The nuances of the differences are in the number of fueling factors, in the ranking of the factors, the language of the formulation, the level of primary or lower secondary education with which the respondents relate more, depending on the specific context of dealing with situations where curricular overload was seen or experienced.

In relation to primary education, the perception of curricular overload is driven more by the number of subjects taught in grades one through five. This is clearly stated by class teachers, school heads, quality coordinators, parents, but also curriculum experts and coordinators.

Class teachers and curriculum experts as factors of curriculum overload single out also the learning contents to be addressed in the instruction time planned for primary education grades, the number of learning outcomes, the high requirements and expectations of learning outcomes. In particular, the curricular load with learning content is specified and difficulty of the requirements of the learning outcomes in the subject Man and Nature, in almost all grades of primary education.

Other factors, which have driven more the perception of curricular overload, according to teachers and in particular students and parents, are textbooks and homework, namely the content and volume of textbooks with excessive data, but also the frequency and content of homework, which take a lot of time and are daily for students.

The overload of students with textbooks is described by loaded backpacks for students, with a large number of textbooks. These show that excessive use of textbooks, learning materials and homework is a driving factor in the perception of curricular overload (OECD, 2020).

Due to the fact that homework turns out to be a factor of student learning overload and affects the well-being of students, they should not be given in the way they are done today, not daily, not without any purpose, not without instructions. They are a great untapped opportunity. Homework should be in the form of projects, weekly, monthly, individual, in pairs, linked to learning outcomes, assessed, etc. Time lost for the teacher at the beginning of the lesson, to check the homework, if he/she checks it, for children discouraging as to why I did the homework and this leads them to not complete the next homework.

Homework should have more weight and should be planned in a much more creative way, so that through them children are given the opportunity, through different learning styles, to show the inclinations, abilities and work results (Nj/K1).

Students and parents, to a large extent, have a perception of curricular overload induced by the approach to student assessment, specifying the frequency of tests assessment in three teaching periods. Likewise, the inducing of students' and parents' perception of curricular overload comes from teachers and teaching methods, the ways in which teachers burden students with lessons, homework, often with tasks and projects without instructions, without prior explanations, etc.

On the other hand, teachers' perception of curricular overload also comes from administrative work, which most teachers identify with lesson plans, pedagogical documentation, checking student evaluations and reports. The triggering also comes from the frequent changes in the curricula, which are described as hurried, without proper preparation and very burdensome for a significant part of the teachers.

Other inciting factors are the large number of students in urban schools, the conditions and work environment in the school not suitable for the implementation of the curriculum, etc. A summary of the factors which,

according to the subjects of this study, contributed to their perception of curricular overload, is presented in the following table.

Table 33. Factors of overload according to the perception of the participants in the study

Subjects participating in the study	Factors that have fueled the perception of curricular overload
Teachers	- Textbooks; - Administrative work; - Large number of subjects and learning topics; - Learning outcomes loaded in number and content; - Insufficient time available for elaboration of topics; - Assessment of students; - Approach to teaching and working with textbooks; - Excessive engagement of students with homework; - Unsuitable conditions and work environment in schools; - Large number of students in classrooms, in urban areas;
Students	- Frequency of test assessments; - Learning contents, lesson topics/units; - Textbooks; - Homework; - Teachers, approach to teaching.
Parents	- Textbooks, weight of backpacks; - Number of subjects; - Learning contents in textbooks; - Homework; - Teachers and forms of teaching; - Frequency of assessments with tests.

School principals and quality coordinators	- Number of subjects per grade (emphasis is placed on primary education); - Textbooks, the content of the textbooks and the terminology used; - Number of learning topics and learning outcomes; - Instruction time in relation to content and SLOs; - Approach to teaching; - Unequal teaching periods and assessment; - Homework; - Aspects of the organization of learning contents in curricula; - Administrative work of teachers; - Infrastructure for learning, etc.
Curriculum development coordinators and experts	- Approach to curricular reform, high expectations in core curricula; - The number of subjects, the large number of SLOs, the number of high requirements within a learning outcome in the subject curricula; - Learning contents not in relation to instruction time for their development; - Textbooks - work only with textbooks, without reliance on curriculum documents; - Teaching - approach to teaching where content-oriented learning prevails; - Homework - approach to homework and their number; - School infrastructure, including the large number of students in the classroom/school.

From the data above, it is confirmed once again that the main factors that fuel the perceived curricular overload, in the context of the Kosovo curriculum, are numerous.

It is worth re-emphasizing the factors of overload which are apostrophized by all the groups included in this study, related to the curriculum documents,

highlighting the number of topics and learning outcomes that must be developed in relation to the assigned instruction time.

While other factors that incite the perception of curricular overload, which are apostrophized the most by the participants of this study, are: textbooks and the work of teachers based mainly on textbooks, homework, the approach to teaching, the frequency of assessment of students with tests, working conditions and environments in schools, the level of preparation of teachers for the implementation of the curriculum, as well as the large number of students in urban schools. According to Rexhaj (2019), when school knowledge (provided in textbooks) is completely dominant, it marginalizes the real needs and practical knowledge of students.

5.4. How curricular overload affects the results and well-being of students and teachers?

As for the overload factors, also for the impact of curricular overload on the results and well-being of students and teachers, the main findings show different perceptions, depending on the specific context of dealing with situations where the impact of curricular overload has been seen and experienced.

Impact on student achievement/results. From the participants in the study, the impact of curricular overload on student achievements/results is confirmed. According to them, the impact is reflected in learning difficulties, focus on mechanical learning, low results in natural sciences and mathematics, low results in international assessments, as is the case with the results in the PISA study, moving from grade to grade without mastering the learning outcomes from the previous grade, etc. This shows that an overloaded curriculum can put pressure on students but also on teachers to teach the whole subject, potentially with a superficial coverage of the content (OECD, 2020).

According to curriculum coordinators and experts, when there is a departure from curriculum requirements for any reason, or they are misinterpreted, they do not provide satisfactory results in learning. The way of learning in

our schools is singled out as an aspect with a lot of influence on student results, and this is also reflected in the PISA results and in other international assessments, such as TIMSS and PIRLS, in which Kosovo has participated.

An overloaded curriculum requires quality time for its acquisition, due to the fact that in current studies increased instructional time has been found to provide more learning opportunities and is associated with higher academic achievement, helping lower performing students catch up with higher performing students. However, more instruction hours do not automatically translate into better results and quality learning (Alexander and Flutter, 2009).

This is roughly what the 2015 report of the OECD Program for International Student Assessment (OECD, 2016) says, which pointed out that the time spent learning during a day, both in and outside of school, namely learning at home, is not related to students' academic performance (OECD, 2016).

The lack of quality learning time is also reflected in the results of Kosovar students in the PISA 2015 and 2018 study, who, even though they have an average of 947 hours of learning per year, have minimal achievements, or a high percentage of students who have not reached the minimum level of skills in PISA 2018 (in Science 76.6% of students did not reach the minimum level, in Reading 78.7% of students, while in Mathematics 76.6% of students).

Impact on student well-being. The participants in the study confirmed the impact of curricular overload on the well-being of students. From their point of view, the impact is reflected in student stress, fatigue, appearance of lack of confidence to achieve learning outcomes, uncertainty in student abilities, concerns, loss of students' ambition to engage in learning, loss of interest in learning, physical fatigue , fatigue and uncertainty in homework, mental and emotional overload, student frustration, non-involvement of students in extracurricular activities, etc.

The findings show that curricular overload affects all dimensions of student well-being, as described in the OECD (2017) study "Student Well-being in

PISA 2015", including aspects of student well-being from the psychological, social, cognitive and physical dimensions of well-being.

Students themselves confirm that their fatigue often appears as a result of excessive engagement or overload with learning time, lessons and assignments related to lessons. The signs of fatigue, as described by the students, are different, such as: distraction, reduced ability to follow the lesson normally, emotional disturbances, stress, low mood, etc.

In relation to lessons and homework, students describe stress and fatigue from the fear of not completing assignments and lessons at home, from the lack of information and instructions for doing homework.

The students also express their sensitivity in relation to the concerns they have noticed in their parents regarding the lessons and the results that the students have achieved. According to the students, the burden of multiple assignments and the parents' expectations for their success in learning, in grading, are their parents' biggest preoccupations and concerns. This shows how little work has been done with parents in informing them about the importance of developing competencies in their children, beyond numbers and assessment grades.

Students are different, they have different learning styles, but they also manifest progress and stagnation with different ways of behaving. The latter is also said by the students included in this study, when they talk about the changes and concerns observed in their peers with average or low success/results in learning. According to them, behaviors are often manifested with stress, loss of control, sometimes even conflicts with teachers and conflicts between students, up to bullying between students.

In relation to the impact on students' well-being, as perceived by parents, it is worth noting that parents describe some details of their children's emotional and behavioral changes from being overloaded with lessons and assignments during school, but also during lessons and homework. Parents' descriptions show that children are often moody, tired, stressed, nervous and anxious, and in certain cases they show panic, trauma, mental fatigue, lack

of sleep from the load of successive tests, hesitation, loss of patience and motivation for learning etc.

Parents also express their concerns about the children's well-being, which are manifested by worries, preoccupation, commitment to support their children, but sometimes also by pressure on the children to learn more. It must be noted that the concern of parents about the results of their children from grade evaluations is a dominant concern.

A summary of the impacts of curricular overload on students' well-being, according to the subjects of this study: students, parents, teachers, school principals, quality coordinators and curriculum development coordinators and experts, is presented in the following table.

Table 34: Summary of the characteristics of the manifestation of the impact of curricular overload on the well-being of students

	Impact of curricular overload on student well-being
Students	- Fatigue and exhaustion from the weight of the backpack; - Stress from lessons at school; - Stress from homework; - Low mood and stressed by excessive assessments; - Nervous during the time of school lessons load; - Worried about not comprehending the homework; - De-concentration in learning; - Excited, stressed and afraid of failures in learning; - Fatigue and fear of incorrect solving of homework problems; - Loss of control by students who do not have good results; - Conflicts with students and teachers by students who do not have good results; - Loss of interest in learning.

Parents	- Too much fatigue and stress; - Worried; - Lack of motivation; - Hesitation, nervousness, loss of patience; - Panic, trauma, mental fatigue, lack of sleep; - Homework complaints; - Lack of interest in assignments.
Teachers	- Stress in students; - Student fatigue; - Lack of interest in learning; - Overload with heavy backpacks, body deformities; - Low mood, lack of will to learn, refusal to learn; - Withdrawal from lessons; - Appearance of lack of confidence in achieving results in learning; - Unsecurity about student abilities, concerns; - Disappointment and, as a result, loss of desire for learning; - No ambition for engagement in lessons; - Decrease in students' interest in learning; - Doubts in capacities for learning achievements; - Problems with engaging in class.

School principals and quality coordinators	- Lost, unfocused in learning; - Tiredness from homework; - Passivity in some students; - Student stress and as a result "bullying"; - Fatigue, stress, harassment due to the large number of students in classrooms; - Students with disabilities are very challenged; - Passive and uninterested in learning; - Physical load with the weight of the backpack; - Loss of interest in learning; - Fatigue from working with many textbooks.
Curriculum development coordinators and experts	- Fatigue from lessons in many subjects; - Concerns, stress and load; - Total ignorance; - Loss of interest in learning; - Fatigue with homework; - Uncertainty in homework; - Psychic and emotional overload; - Lack of time for extracurricular activities.

All these characteristics of the manifestation of the impact of curricular overload on the well-being of students are indicators that require institutional addressing, a large part of them at the school level, but also from the system, given the fact that curricular reform is a process, which must be managed continuously in the interest of the students' well-being. Putting student well-being at the center of curriculum reform and education in general is necessary to ensure an inclusive, sustainable and creative society (OECD, 2020).

The impact of curricular overload on the work and well-being of teachers. Same as for students, also for teachers, from the participants in the study, the impact of curricular overload on the work and well-being of teachers is confirmed. By teachers, school principals and quality coordinators, curriculum overload is seen as an obstacle to the work and efficiency of teachers.

According to this group of respondents, to a large extent the emphasis of the teachers' workload is related to the administrative aspects for the curriculum, preparations for the curriculum with multiple formats of teaching planning models, with provision of resources and adaptation of materials from existing textbooks, lack of texts in some grades in accordance with the curriculum, the large number of students in classes in urban schools and, in particular, the pressure of the instruction time they have for the development of the contents determined by the subject curricula.

On the other hand, the findings from these groups of respondents show that the impact of curricular overload on the well-being of teachers is evident, which is reflected in psychological load, loss of emotional calm, keeping under pressure, loss of creativity at work, additional time beyond the teaching hours for preparation of lesson plans and assessment of students, ineffective due to work focused only on textbooks, uncertainty and mistrust at work.

They also see the impact of curricular overload on teachers' well-being in loss of motivation for work, fatigue and fear from frequent changes, fatigue and nervousness from overload in certain situations, numerous debates related to the implementation of the curriculum, resistance in certain cases to the implementation of the curriculum, a greater focus on working with the administrative elements required by the school around the curriculum, etc.

A basis for teachers' workload comes from the lack of formal and proper division of teachers' duties and responsibilities and their balancing with teaching hours. This has caused an overload for a number of teachers, who, in addition to the full teaching norm, also have additional responsibilities, as heads of departments, form teachers and other roles related to the development of the school.

Various educational systems have made a balancing of the division of tasks and responsibilities of teachers with working time beyond teaching, determining which of them are mandatory for all teachers and which for a part of teachers, who must have special engagements. Balancing additional duties and responsibilities, in relation to teaching time, has made it possible to avoid part of the teachers' workload[16].

It is important to reiterate that curriculum overload is not the same as teacher workload overload. Many other factors, besides the curriculum, have an impact on teacher workload, such as changes in the administrative structure and responsibilities, but also the large number of students in classrooms (Easthope and Easthope, 2000). However, curriculum overload can threaten teachers' abilities to cope with expectations, affect their levels of satisfaction with the profession and deprive them of their sense of freedom, leaving no room for creativity in their work (OECD, 2020).

5.5. Anticipation of solutions by study participants for dealing with and mitigating curricular overload

Given the fact that curricular overload is relative, influenced by many factors, depending on the context of dealing with situations that reflect curricular overload, strategies should also be based on real needs and in the context of solving the problem related to overload.

There is always a space, reason and need to envisage possible solutions, action strategies for handling and mitigating curricular overload, from the processes related to the development of the curriculum, the scope of its implementation and, in particular, for the process of its implementation by schools and teachers, as direct implementers in working with students.

Therefore, looking at the idea of the role of all groups involved in this study, these aspects have been discussed and important ideas and orientations have been found, which await individual and institutional actions.

[16] More in detail, see the part of the findings of this study on teachers' working time (4.2.6. Teachers' working time).

For the central level, MESTI, it is suggested and required to start the revision of the curriculum, in the areas/parts that are considered basic as a real curriculum overload, including:

- Redefining the number of subjects in the CC, with special emphasis on primary education;
- Intervening in subject curricula where there is an overload of lesson topics, learning outcomes and other issues raised as concerns argued by teachers and other actors;
- Continuation of the integrated approach with curricular areas;
- Provision of quality textbooks and in accordance with the curriculum;
- Change in the approach of working with schools in the processes related to the implementation of the curriculum;
- Students and parents, in particular, from MESTI, expect and request the lightening of students' backpacks load from many textbooks;
- The support of teachers by competent trainers, who substantially know the philosophy of the curriculum and the substantive and practical side of its implementation;
- Counseling, instructions and additional guides for teachers;
- Avoidance of bureaucracy in the curriculum reform process, or a clear address for responding to the demands and needs of schools for issues related to the curriculum;
- Continuous monitoring of curriculum implementation, etc.

Some possible solutions for handling and mitigating curricular overload, which are suggested for MESTI, extend beyond the curriculum, but which are influencing factors in the perception of curriculum load and are seen by curriculum development coordinators and experts as actions that positively affect the treatment of curricular overload, as:

- Review of pre-service teacher preparation programs;
- Coordination of MESTI with the faculties of education for the teacher preparation;
- Review and development of programs for the training of in-service teachers, in the spirit of the curriculum;

- Review and description of teachers' duties, in accordance with the teachers' development framework;
- Norms/standards and instructions are needed for the internal organization of the school.

Some of the actions that should be taken by the MEDs, which are expected to have a positive impact on addressing concerns from schools about curriculum overload, suggested by the respondents of this study, are:

- Creating the conditions and equipping with ICT tools, for the effective implementation of the curriculum, stable internet;
- Focus more on the content that affects the entire educational process and not focus only on the form, towards accountability requirements from schools/teachers;
- Support in the organization of school work and in the training of teachers;
- Supporting schools with tools, didactic equipment and other aids;
- Reducing the number of students in classrooms/schools with a large number of students, creating and equipping cabinets with tools accessible for practical work, internet, etc.
- Continuous supervision of the work of the schools and the performance of the educational staff;
- Coordination of work with school principals for the implementation of the curriculum.

The actions that must be taken by the school are related to the management of school processes and, in particular, to teaching, the approach to working with students, with parents, but also with teachers and all other personnel in the school that is related to the educational process. Some of the actions that are suggested for schools related to a change in approach, and for which it is expected that their undertaking will lead to the treatment and reduction of curricular overload, are as follows:

- A more creative role in the leadership of the school, with opportunities for different organization of the instruction schedule, organization of the class, always in the interest of the students, towards their fulfillment and avoiding overload;

- A more dynamic role in the teaching process, adapting, changing the teaching and assessment approach. It is necessary to avoid what is redundant and to simplify the lessons for students, because it is not mandatory that every content and task in the textbooks be developed with students;
- A different approach to the problems identified by the school's internal mechanisms, going in the direction of solving the problems, not only their ascertainment, towards the development of a culture of transparency and accurate evidence of the achievements and obstacles of the implementation of the curriculum during the learning process and the actions undertaken by the school;
- A different distribution of responsibilities within the teaching staff in schools, where each teacher has an additional role in the school, beyond teaching.

In order to make the curricular paradigm change a reality, educational institutions must seriously address the strategies suggested above for dealing with and mitigating curricular overload, in particular, schools are called to rethink what to change in the scope and structure of the organization of teaching, what should be prioritized or removed from the teaching contents, without creating a conflict in the formal aspect, how to manage the change process, etc. (OECD, 2020).

The context of the curriculum of the pre-university education in Kosovo enables the flexibility and autonomy of the school, it allows the possibilities for the school to operate within the curricular stages, without being obliged to respond to every demand of the subject curricula, always in the interest of the students, their development and progress.

However, the work tradition of schools and teachers in Kosovo challenges this to a large extent, also due to the views that "having fewer topics to cover more deeply in a curriculum often raises concerns about lowering the achievement standards of students" (UNESCO, 2002).

On the other hand, according to studies by Coker et al., (2016), Schwartz et al., 2009) and Laird et al., (2008), learning fewer lesson topics in greater

depth helps students to develop higher order thinking that can be transferred beyond specific subjects, to other learning areas and new problems.

Among other things, studies argue that a focus on deep learning can improve not only student academic achievement, but also student satisfaction (OECD, 2020). Therefore, schools and teachers should have a more creative approach to the processes of curriculum planning and implementation to ensure the development of students' competencies and a holistic approach to teaching.

CHAPTER VI

Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings from this study show how important such a case study was, for the context of developments in the curricular reform in pre-university education in Kosovo, which is conceived based on the key competencies.

The competency-based curriculum is seen as an attempt to make a change of the curricular paradigm a reality, a change which responds to the demands of society, social, technological and economic changes, but also in an effort to avoid curricular overload from the content-based approach.

The analysis of the curricular documents in implementation, of the aspects related to the compulsory instruction time, as one of the important factors for the possibility of implementing the curriculum, as well as the involvement of the main layers, or stakeholders, related to the development and implementation of the curriculum in the research sample (teachers, students, parents, school heads and quality coordinators, curriculum development coordinators and experts), was extremely important. This is due to the fact that we discussed the findings with the evidence in the curricular documents, according to the hierarchy of the documents, as well as confronted the views of the research sample in an attempt to answer the question constantly discussed by the educational community: *Is curricular overload reality or perception?*

6.1. Conclusions

The summary of conclusions refers to the purpose of the research and the research questions, which guided this study. According to the results of the current study, similar to the results of other studies on learning overload, curricular overload (Bekteshi, 2009; Alexandre & Flutter, 2009; NCCA, 2010; Majoni, 2017; OECD, 2020, etc.), elements of curriculum overload, which comes from many factors, related to curriculum documents and their resources, but also from the perception of those who are related to the development of curricula and their implementation in school, are confirmed.

The present study reports on multiple factors of curriculum overload, similar to the results of other studies, which refer to curriculum overload in the context of new developments in curriculum reform. (NCCA, 2010; OECD, 2020 etc.).

The factors of curricular overload, which are revealed by the findings of this study, are: (i) curriculum enhancement with subjects, topics of new content in the curriculum, in response to new social demands; (ii) the overload of contents and expectations for students in relation to the compulsory instruction time; (iii) the overload related to the school, from the approach to the organization of the learning process, teaching, use of textbooks, homework, assessment of students, which is reflected as overload perceived mainly by the school community related to their role in implementing the curriculum.

According to the results of the study, the impact of curricular overload is evident both in the success and well-being of students, and in the efficiency and well-being of teachers. The impact is manifested in the psychological, social, cognitive and physical dimensions of well-being (OECD, 2020).

In relation to the first research question: *How evident are the aspects of curricular overload in the set of curricular documents in implementation, in primary education and lower secondary education in Kosovo*? The study highlights important evidences that confirm various elements of curricular overload. The main conclusions, based on the study's findings for this question, are as follows:

- Curriculum expansion (enhancement) with subjects, content, in response to new social demands, begins in the CFPE document, widens up with the core curriculum documents and takes on a greater dimension of expansion with subject curricula, where from the first grade of primary education it is started with 10 subjects, to expand to 15 subjects, up to the ninth grade of lower secondary education.

- High expectations in the core curricula, the number of requirements within a learning outcome for curricular areas and their depth,

without a standard of generality level, regardless of the instruction time defined for a curricular area, constitutes a basis of curricular overload, which is then expanded with subject curricula, textbooks and the approach to teaching.

- The subject curricula show a tendency to expand the learning contents, by the number of learning topics, the number of learning outcomes and in many cases by the number of requirements within a subject outcome (SLO) and the depth of the contents, which in a number considerable number of subjects do not correspond to compulsory instruction time as a measure of curriculum implementation. Man and Nature and Mathematics in primary education, as well as Geography in grades 8 and 9 are specifically singled out.
- Cross-curricular issues in the subject curricula, from the way they are integrated into the subject curricula, show that there are discrepancies between the subjects and there are elements of overload, if all the cross-curricular topics within a subject are taken to integrate them into teaching, alongside other learning content loads in the same curriculum.
- Compulsory instruction time in primary and lower secondary education, in number of instruction hours, is a total of 8524 instruction hours, with an average of 947 instruction hours per year, higher than in OECD countries with 7639 instruction hours, with an average of 807 instruction hours per year. In relation to the duration of lessons in Kosovo, with an average of 40-45 minutes per lesson and an average of OECD countries of 45-50 minutes per lesson, the instruction time is approximate. However, the challenge lies in the quality of the use of instruction time and the lack of alternative forms for supporting students' learning.
- Kosovo, although with a relatively good average of instruction hours in primary and lower secondary education (grades 1-9 = 947 instruction hours per year) and with a relatively high distribution of

compulsory instruction time for the curriculum areas/subjects Mother tongue, Foreign languages, Mathematics, Science, with about 59% in lower secondary education, has very minimal achievements in PISA 2015 and 2018. This shows that time spent learning is not related to academic performance of students (OECD, 2016).

- The relationship between students' results in compulsory education and instruction time is not sufficiently reflected in the Achievement Test (2022), with an average of 50.75% and lower averages in subjects with longer compulsory instruction time. Of course, the results are also influenced by other factors, such as the number of requirements and their difficulty levels, which require other analyses, which were not the subject of this study.

Also in relation to the second research question: How is curriculum overload perceived by representatives of the school community and actors related to the development and implementation of the curriculum? the study highlights important issues of perception of curricular overload both observed and experienced. The main conclusions based on the study findings for this question and its sub-questions are as follows:

- Our assumption that there is real and perceived curricular overload was also confirmed by the research sample (teachers, students, parents, school heads and quality coordinators, curriculum development coordinators and experts). They reported evidence of overload in different subjects, above all they reported their different perceptions about the factors of curricular overload, which come from the nature of dealing with the curriculum, its implementation, but also from the knowledge of the curriculum. The nuances of the differences are in the number of motivating factors, in the order of the factors, the language of the formulation, their role, as well as depending on the specific context of dealing with situations, where curricular overload has been seen or experienced.

- Factors that have encouraged the perception of curricular overload by teachers are: Textbooks, administrative work, large number of subjects and teaching topics, learning outcomes loaded in number and content, and insufficient time available for elaboration of teaching topics.
- Factors that have increased the perception of curricular overload by students are: Frequency of assessments with tests, learning contents - lesson topics/units; textbooks; homework; teachers and approach to teaching.
- Based on the students' answers, with a high degree of confirmation, more than half of the study sample with students, it is confirmed that students engage in learning and homework on average 4-5 hours during a day, about 40% about 1 -3 hours, the rest over 5 hours. Only for homework, half of the students emphasize that on average during a day they allocate for homework 2-3 hours, about 1/3 of them 1 hour, while the others more than 3 hours only for doing homework.
- Factors that have encouraged more the perception of curricular overload **by parents** are: Textbooks; backpack loads; the number of subjects; teaching contents in textbooks; homework, teachers and teaching methods.
- Factors that have encouraged the perception of curricular overload, by **principals and quality coordinators** in schools, are: Number of subjects per grade (emphasis is placed on primary education); textbooks, textbook content and terminology used; the number of learning topics and learning outcomes; instructional time relative to content and SLOs and teaching approach.
- Factors, which have encouraged more the perception of curricular overload, by **curriculum development coordinators and experts**, are: Approach to curricular reform and high expectations in core curricula; number of subjects, large number of SLOs, number of high requirements within a learning outcome (SLO); learning contents not in relation to learning time for their development; textbooks - work

only with textbooks without reliance on curriculum documents; and teaching - the approach to teaching, where only content-oriented learning prevails.

- According to the results of the study, it is confirmed that the impact of curricular overload on student achievements/results is reflected by the partialization of learning, superficial learning, learning difficulties, focus on mechanical learning, etc.
- There is no doubt that the well-being of students is affected by curricular overload. This is also confirmed by the results of our study. Based on the perceptions of the respondents of the study sample, the impact of curricular overload on the well-being of students is observed by fatigue and stress, the loss of ambition of students for engagement in learning and interest in learning, etc., these are more highly expressed reflections about the impact of curricular overload on students' well-being.
- In general, teachers and school heads are informed about the elements of student learning overload and about the effects of overload, but they do not confirm institutional and systematic approaches to the treatment and mitigation of curriculum overload, rather they have expectations that this should be done by the central level, as a developer of educational policies.
- Also, the results of the study confirm the overload of teachers, which is largely related to the level of knowledge of the curriculum, to the administrative aspects related to the curriculum, preparations for the curriculum - with numerous formats of teaching planning models, the large number of students in classrooms in urban schools. In particular, the overload of teachers comes from the pressure of the teaching time they have for the development of the contents determined by the subject curricula, but also from the relation with the tradition of teaching based mainly on contents and textbooks.
- In line with the load of teachers from curricular overload, the impact of overload on the work efficiency of teachers and on their well-

being is also reflected. According to the results of the study, the impact is reflected in psychological load, keeping under pressure, loss of creativity at work, uncertainty and mistrust at work, loss of motivation for work, fatigue and fear of frequent changes, resistance in certain cases to the implementation of the curriculum, as well as a greater focus on working with the administrative elements required by the school around the curriculum, versus focusing on students.

The experiences related to the development and implementation of the curriculum, the lessons from these experiences, especially from the confrontations with the curricular overload, encouraged the respondents of this study to express different opinions about possible solutions - the strategies for dealing with and mitigating the curricular overload. They are linked and suggested for the central level/MESTI, the local level/MEDs, the school and the teachers, depending on the roles and responsibilities.

There is high diversity in ideas about possible solutions, strategies for handling and mitigating curricular overload, both in the representative sample from schools and from curriculum development coordinators and experts.

The diversity of ideas for possible solutions ranges from ideas where it is suggested and required to begin with curriculum revision, to what is considered basic, as a real overload of the curriculum, to suggestions for addressing the many issues related to pre-university education that directly affect curriculum implementation, including pre-service teacher preparation, teacher development, duties and responsibilities of MEDs, schools and teachers.

6.2. Recommendations

The recommendations of the study *Curricular overload in primary and lower secondary education in Kosovo - reality or perception*, are based on the main findings of the study, the ideas and suggestions of the respondents of the study, who in a way have seen and experienced different dimensions of curricular overload.

- Curricular overload, presented in this study, being real and perceived, at a stage when there are still contradictory dilemmas and discussions about the curriculum within the educational community, should not be neglected. The system should address curricular overload as a separate problem, from a broader perspective, in the real context and in light of the main lessons learned from OECD countries in dealing with curricular overload (OECD, 2020).
- The education system is at a good stage after the completion of the extension of the implementation of the new curriculum in all pre-university education grades, where it can initiate and undertake action strategies to deal with curriculum overload during a curriculum review process, respond appropriately to arguments and opportunities for careful redefinition of what can be removed as overload, what can be carried over to other grades, and what is essential to be learned in relevant subject curricula.
- For each stage of curriculum review, it is considered important to develop and establish standards on the number of learning outcomes, the level of generalization of learning outcomes, in relation to the available instruction time, always maintaining and taking into consideration the specifics of curricular areas/subjects, but with the idea of prevention against curricular overload.
- Reorganization of advisory and support mechanisms for schools and teachers, closer to school and teachers, in local authorities and in schools, beyond addressing administrative and reporting requirements, are necessary for quality assurance, ensuring sustainable support in the implementation process of the curriculum. The approach to the reorganization of advisory and support mechanisms must respond to the needs for the organization of learning processes in schools, beyond a traditional routine, towards opening the school to new alternatives that provide enabling environments and approaches for students to be supported, developed and to be less burdened, always to ensure quality in learning and well-being for students.

- Institutional mechanisms need to support schools, through the development of a set of practices for the distribution of tasks and responsibilities of teaching staff in schools, where each teacher has an additional role in the school, beyond teaching, to support and factorize teaching. Likewise, to increase the care for the well-being of teachers by reducing workloads, which can/should be done through the way the new tasks and responsibilities are allocated (OECD, 2021).
- Reconceptualization of the practice of leading the implementation of the curriculum at the school level is needed, so that it is sustainable and institutional, and also addresses the problem of curricular overload, from a real and perceived perspective. A change in the approach to leadership is recommended, in the development of practical actions that focus on the well-being of students and that ensure appropriate support for students in meeting learning expectations.
- The focus of teachers in working with students must change. The continuation of teaching with a focus on the development of learning content, on the explanation of lessons and based only on textbooks, does not allow the re-dimensioning of the competency-based teaching approach. Changing the approach to teaching and working with students has no alternative, for which teachers must reflect seriously in order to offer a holistic approach to teaching.
- In addition to the learning process and teaching in the classroom, the focus of care by teachers for the well-being of students should be on the content and number of homework assignments, on changing the pedagogical approach to assigning homework, emphasizing longer-term assignments , project-based and research alternatives that promote the Successful Learner competency. A balance must be struck between complex and overly simple homework (OECD, 2020).

- Parents should be more involved in their children's school life, monitoring their progress, creating an enabling environment for independent learning, managing the home learning schedule and maintaining a balance between learning and free activities, relaxing activities and time with peers. On the other hand, the school should intensify cooperation with parents, because empowered parents are the best partner for an effective school (Rexhaj, 2019).
- The ideas and suggestions made by the respondents of this study for possible solutions, strategies for dealing with and mitigating curricular overload, are an added value, a perspective of opportunities to take them into consideration, for the establishment or revision of an educational policy that essentially has a feasible strategy for the treatment and prevention of curriculum overload during curriculum revision, but also in the management of the processes that have promoted the perceived overload, which in various ways hinders the quality of the learning process.

Recommendations for further research. The main findings from the study open the perspective for further studies, for a more complete exploration of the problem of curricular overload. In this regard further study is warranted about the overload from:

- Didactic content and apparatus of school textbooks;
- Didactic content and apparatus of homework;
- Direct approach to teaching, through observation of a significant number of lessons in different grades, in schools with different organizations in the educational process.
- The content and quality of teachers' professional development programs as well as their coherence with teachers' needs.
- Also, it is worth studying the transition of students from one level of education to another level of education and the connection with the efficiency of teaching approaches.

For the implementation of all the recommendations from this study, it is necessary to coordinate institutional actions, between decision makers and professionals (Mehmeti et al., (2021). Findings from this study, about curricular overload, in the context of primary and lower secondary education, and not only, present a clear reference for taking concrete, well-planned steps to reduce overload and its impact on the well-being of students and teachers, but also to mitigate inequality in schooling, which comes as an obstacle to learning, a process which is also hindered by many factors that affect the success and well-being of students (OECD, 2017).

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Annexes

Annex 1: List of schools included in the study

No.	Name of the school	Location / Municipality
1	PLSS "Faik Konica"	Prishtina
2	PLSS "Arfi Shala"	Korrotica e Poshtme, Drenas
3	PLSS "Zekeria Rexha"	Gjakova
4	PLSS "Asdreni"	Peja
5	PLSS "Emin Duraku"	Prizren
6	PLSS "Ilmi Bahtijari"	Bllaq, Dragash
7	PLSS "Fan Noli"	Kamenica
8	PLSS "Martin Camaj"	Gurrakoc, Istog
9	PLSS "Fazli Grajçevci"	Shipol, Mitrovica
10	PLSS "Tefik Çanga"	Ferizaj
11	PLSS "Vëllezërit Frashëri"	Lipjan

Annex 2: List of education officials and curriculum experts interviewed

No.	Name and Surname	Position
1	Lindita Boshtrakaj	Expert in education and curriculum reform (part of the technical team for the drafting of the Curriculum Framework)
2	Nizafete Kutllovci-Bardhi	Deputy Coordinator, curriculum area: Languages and Communication
3	Mustafë Kadriu	Coordinator, curriculum area: Mathematics
4	Mirlinda Dehari-Zeka	Deputy Coordinator, curriculum area: Natural Sciences

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