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EVALUATION OF TEACHERS' AWARENESS, KNOWLEDGE AND INSIGHTS ON WASH EDUCATION IN GEORGIAN SCHOOLS

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მარიამ იზორია, ლევან ბარამიძე, ლევან მეტრეველი

მასწავლებლების ცნობიერების, ცოდნისა და ხედვების შეფასება წყლის, სანიტარიისა და ჰიგიენის საკითხებზე საქართველოს სკოლებში

თბილისის სახელმწიფო სამედიცინო უნივერსიტეტი, თბილისი, საქართველო
ლ.საყვარელიძის სახელობის დაავადებათა კონტროლისა და საზოგადოებრივი ჯანმრთელობის
ეროვნული ცენტრი, თბილისი, საქართველო

რეზიუმე

სუფთა წყლის, სანიტარიისა და ჰიგიენის (WASH) პირობები სკოლებში აუცილებელია ჯანმრთელი სასწავლო გარემოს შესაქმნელად და სტუდენტების კეთილდღეობის ხელშესაწყობად. მიუხედავად იმისა, რომ მსოფლიოში მიღწეულია პროგრესი WASH მომსახურებების გაუმჯობესებასთან მიმართებაში, ბევრი სკოლა, განსაკუთრებით განვითარებად ქვეყნებში, კვლავ გამოწვევების წინაშეა. აღნიშნული კვლევა აფასებს მასწავლებელთა ცნობიერებას, ცოდნასა და შეხედულებებს იმ სკოლებში, რომლებიც მონაწილეობდნენ აშშ-ის საერთაშორისო განვითარების სააგენტოს (USAID) და Coca-Cola Foundation-ის მიერ დაფინანსებულ WASH პროგრამებში საქართველოში 2015-2021 წლებში და ასევე იმ სკოლებში, რომლებიც არ მონაწილეობდნენ აღნიშნულ პროექტში. კვლევა მიზნად ისახავდა შეფასებულიყო საგანმანათლებლო პროგრამების მნიშვნელობა და მათი გავლენა პროფესიულ განვითარებასა და ცნობიერების ამაღლებაზე.

Water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) education plays a critical role in shaping children's health and academic performance, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Access to clean water, functional sanitation facilities, and effective hygiene practices in schools is essential for creating a safe learning environment (UNICEF, 2020). Despite the importance of WASH in educational settings, many schools in Georgia, particularly in rural regions, continue to face significant challenges related to water quality, sanitation infrastructure, and hygiene practices (World Health Organization [WHO], 2019).

This study evaluates the impact of USAID and Coca-Cola Foundation-funded WASH projects on teachers' awareness, knowledge, and teaching practices. These projects were implemented in rural schools in Georgia from 2015 to 2021, with a focus on improving access to clean water and sanitation facilities and enhancing hygiene education. Research has demonstrated that professional development opportunities focused on WASH can have a substantial impact on educators' ability to integrate hygiene and sanitation topics into the curriculum, as well as improve students' health and well-being (WASH in Schools Network, 2018). Therefore, understanding the impact of these projects on teachers' knowledge and practices is critical for improving WASH education in Georgia.

Methods - A total of 50 teachers from schools in the Adjara and Guria regions participated in the survey. The respondents were divided into two groups: beneficiaries, who were involved in the WASH projects funded by USAID and the Coca-Cola Foundation, and non-beneficiaries, who were not involved in the projects. The survey assessed teachers' perceptions of the WASH conditions in their schools, their professional development experiences related to WASH, and the challenges they face in incorporating WASH education into their teaching.

Results - WASH Conditions in Schools: Teachers from both groups were asked to evaluate the current state of water, sanitation, and hygiene in their schools. Overall, a substantial portion of teachers in the beneficiary group reported that the WASH conditions in their schools had improved, with 42.9% rating their schools' WASH conditions as excellent or good. In comparison, only 20% of teachers in the non-beneficiary group rated the conditions as excellent or good. Additionally, a higher percentage of teachers from the beneficiary group reported access to clean water and functional sanitation facilities.

Factors Influencing WASH Behavior Among Students: When asked about the factors influencing students to use school WASH facilities, teachers highlighted several key drivers. In the beneficiary group, awareness-raising efforts were the most frequently mentioned factor (41.2%), while in the non-beneficiary group, factors like sports classes (23.1%) and handwashing (23.1%) played a significant role. This indicates that the targeted WASH programs in the beneficiary schools were effective in fostering a greater sense of hygiene awareness among students.

Barriers to Toilet Use - Teachers were also asked to identify the main reasons students refrain from using school toilets. In the non-beneficiary group, the most common reasons were lack of hygiene supplies (47.4%) and the cleanliness of the toilets (26.3%). In the beneficiary group, the cleanliness of toilets was cited as a major barrier (36.8%), but fewer teachers in this group reported hygiene issues as a significant concern, indicating that the WASH projects may have addressed some of these challenges effectively.

Professional Development in WASH Education: A key finding of the study was the impact of professional development on teachers' knowledge and teaching practices. A higher proportion of teachers in the beneficiary group (60.7%) reported having participated in specialized WASH training, compared to 36% of teachers in the non-beneficiary group. Teachers in the beneficiary group also reported stronger improvements in their knowledge of WASH topics and their ability to integrate WASH into their teaching, with 28.6% of them stating that their training had directly improved their teaching practice. In contrast, the non-beneficiary group primarily cited general training in health and hygiene, with fewer teachers reporting specific improvements in their pedagogical strategies.

Impact on Teaching Practices: Teachers in the beneficiary group reported that their WASH-related training had a direct positive impact on their teaching practices. The most common outcomes included enhanced knowledge (28.6%), improved teaching strategies (10.7%), and increased focus on student hygiene (25%). These results suggest that WASH training provided to teachers in the beneficiary group had a tangible effect on their approach to teaching hygiene and sanitation, as well as their overall classroom management.

Conclusion - This study underscores the importance of targeted professional development in improving teachers' ability to deliver WASH education and promote hygiene in schools. The findings suggest that the USAID- and Coca-Cola Foundation-funded WASH projects have had a positive impact on teachers in rural Georgia, but there is still a need for further investment in school infrastructure and training to address ongoing challenges in water, sanitation, and hygiene.

Recommendations

1. **Expand WASH Education Programs:** Continued support for professional development programs focused on WASH education is essential to further improve teachers' ability to integrate hygiene and sanitation topics into their teaching.

2. Address Infrastructure Issues: Improving the cleanliness and functionality of school toilets, as well as providing hygiene supplies, should be a priority to ensure that students are encouraged to use school WASH facilities.
3. Sustain and Scale Successful Interventions: The success of the WASH projects in the beneficiary schools should be used as a model for expanding WASH education and infrastructure improvements in other regions of Georgia and similar contexts.

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SUMMARY

Access to clean water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities in schools is essential for creating a healthy learning environment and promoting the well-being of students. Despite global progress in improving WASH services, many schools, particularly in rural areas of developing countries, still face significant challenges in providing adequate WASH facilities. This study assesses the awareness, knowledge, and insights of teachers in schools involved and not involved in USAID- and Coca-Cola Foundation-funded WASH programs in Georgia between 2015 and 2021. It aims to evaluate the impact of these programs on teachers' understanding of WASH conditions, their professional development in this field, and how these factors influence their teaching practices

Keywords: WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene), Teacher, Awareness, Knowledge, School Sanitation

