Knowledge hub
-
Collection of best practices

Summary of the best practice

1. Title of the best practice (e.g. name of policy, programme, project, etc.) *

Skills Labs

2. Country or countries where the practice is implemented *

Greece

3. Please select the **most relevant** Action Track(s) the best practice applies to *

☑ Action Track 1. Inclusive, equitable, safe, and healthy schools

☑ Action Track 2. Learning and skills for life, work, and sustainable development

☐ Action Track 3. Teachers, teaching and the teaching profession

☑ Action Track 4. Digital learning and transformation

☐ Action Track 5. Financing of education

4. Implementation lead/partner organization(s) *

   Ministry of Education of the Hellenic Republic (Greece)
   Institute of Educational Policy, Greece

5. Key words (5-15 words): Please add key descriptive words around aims, modalities, target groups etc. *

   Skills cultivation, sustainability, collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, communication, mental health, rights, active citizenship

6. What makes it a best practice? *

   The Skills Labs are a best practice because they aspire to bring about a paradigm shift in education in Greece: to move away from a knowledge-centric model to a skills-based approach where teacher and student work together to cultivate essential skills and to learn how to learn. It is also innovative because the Skills Lab adopt a whole-of-society approach whereby specific teaching modules are prepared by civil society (NGOs, universities, teachers' groups, international organizations) and evaluated and approved by the Institute of Educational Policy. Finally, the Skills Labs also aim to create a space in which the major issues of our times are discussed (e.g., climate change, human rights, mental health issues) and promote the participation of the student, the teacher, the school unit, the local community and beyond.

Description of the best practice

7. Introduction (350-400 words)
   This section should ideally provide the context of, and justification for, the practice
   and address the following issues:
   i) Which population was affected?
   ii) What was the problem that needed to be addressed?
   iii) Which approach was taken and what objectives were achieved? *

The main target population of the Skills Labs is all students between the ages of 4 and 15 (primary and lower secondary education), which covers all the years of compulsory education in Greece. Teachers are also affected since this is a novel module that differs significantly from more traditional ones. To that end, teacher training has been offered specifically for the Skills Labs program.

The problem that needed to be addressed is the disconnect between traditional education and the skills necessary to thrive in a rapidly changing world. The Skills Labs' main goal is the cultivation of such skills, which include both fundamental life skills related to health, safety, and social interaction, as well as more elaborate skills related to education and life-long learning. Particular emphasis is placed on the 4Cs of 21st century skills – communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity – along with digital skills.

The approach taken when designing the Skills Labs had two main components: Firstly, to move away from a content- and teacher-centric module to a skills- and student-centric paradigm, to empower students and provide them with the necessary tools to continue learning throughout their lives. Secondly, to promote and bring into effect the UN Sustainable Development Goals, with particular emphasis to Goal 4.7 to "ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development."

The Skills Labs program has been very successful. It was awarded the Global Education Network Europe (GENE) Global Education Award (2020/2021) and was selected for its innovative educational approach and its promotion its alignment with the Maastricht definition (2006) of Global Education that is an "education that opens people's eyes and minds to the realities of the world, and awakens them to bring about a world of greater justice, equity and human rights for all." The award is designed to "offer recognition and to disseminate learning from examples of quality Global Education among policymakers."

8. Implementation (350-450 words)
Please describe the implementation modalities or processes, where possible in relation to:
i) What are the main activities carried out?
ii) When and where the activities were carried out (including the start date and whether it is ongoing)?
iii) Who were the key implementation actors and collaborators? (civil society organizations, private sector, foundations, coalitions, networks etc.)?
iv) What were the resources needed (budget and sources) for the implementation? *

The Skills Labs are part of the mandatory national curriculum for all students in kindergarten, primary, and lower secondary education (mandatory education). Students in kindergartens and elementary schools dedicate 3 hours per week and students in lower secondary education dedicate 1 hour per week (to be expanded soon). For kindergarten and elementary school students the time allotment to Skills Labs stands at least at 10% of the total time of the mandatory curriculum.

Students explore four thematic cycles, all of which are imbued with a human rights perspective in their curricula. The first thematic cycle "Well-being" focuses on issues of physical and mental health, from nutrition to road safety, substance abuse and self-esteem; it also introduces sex education for the first time in the Greek curriculum. The second pillar "Social Empathy" explores the nature of human rights and the idea of a diverse and democratic culture. One of the fundamental aims is to combat xenophobia and racism, to promote human dignity, and to instill a belief in the equal value of all individuals. The importance of sustainable development for our future well-being and the well-being of future generations is explored in the thematic pillar "Environment". Last, through the fourth pillar "Creative Thinking and Innovation", children are encouraged to develop their creativity, hone their digital and technological skills and envision their future and work towards its realization.

The roll-out of the Skills Labs had two phases. In June 2020, the Ministry of Education and the Institute of Educational Policy published a pilot curriculum for each thematic pillar/workshop, developed for all grades of compulsory education, starting from preschool education. An in-service e-training of teachers followed, involving 2,500 teachers in 217 schools (58 kindergartens, 58 elementary, 57 secondary and 44 model schools), focusing on (i) how to organize an emotionally safe school climate; (ii) how to design and implement class action plans for the cultivation of 21st century skills; and (iii) how to stimulate inquiry through participatory inclusive learning methods. Through a feedback process, results and lessons learnt from the pilot study were integrated in preparation to the national roll-out.

Since October 2021 the Skills Labs have been rolled out to all classes throughout the country as part of the mandatory national curriculum. In addition, 75,000 educators (almost 100% of the total of targeted teachers) have either enrolled or completed the Skills Labs module teacher training (32-hour online workshop). 60,000 educators have completed the training and the remaining 15,000 are enrolled to attend in the coming months. More than 400,000 euros has already been committed to the Skills Labs teacher training.

Skills Labs modules and materials are developed by all interested parties including universities, non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations, citizens' groups and civil society, local government, private research centers with scientific, research and educational activities as well as educators. The Institute of Educational Policy supported by the Ministry of Education have a decisive role on the evaluation, selection, and monitoring of submitted modules safeguarding their educational quality in terms of content, approach, and values. All modules are assessed in terms of scientific validity, pedagogical suitability and the structure of class action plans. Approved modules, for example, have been designed by:
• The General Secretariat for Demography and Family Policy and Gender Equality
• The UN High Commission for Refugees
• Amnesty International (Greek branch)
• The Philosophy Department at the University of Athens
• The World Wide Fund for Nature WWF (Greek branch)
• The Centre for Research and Action for Peace (ΚΕΔΕ),
• Action Aid Greece

9. Results – outputs and outcomes (250-350 words)
   To the extent possible, please reply to the questions below:
   i) How was the practice identified as transformative? (e.g., impact on policies, impact on management processes, impact on delivery arrangements or education monitoring, impact on teachers, learners and beneficiary communities etc.);
   ii) What were the concrete results achieved with regard to outputs and outcomes?
   iii) Has an assessment of the practice been carried out? If yes, what were the results? *

   The Skills Labs are a transformative practice, because the bottom-up approach to module creation and selection constitutes a significant change in the highly centralized Greek education system. This move towards decentralization and pluralization of the school environment is tightly linked to the government's efforts to provide a more active role to teachers and school units in designing and implementing curricula as well as further integrating schools within their local communities. Specific teaching modules are prepared by civil society (NGOs, universities, teachers' groups, international organizations) and selected by teachers from among the list of approved modules by the Institute of Educational Policy. The Skills Labs are transformative also because they move away from a knowledge-centric model – where the teacher conveys information the student is asked to receive and memorize – to a skills-based approach where teacher and student work together to cultivate essential skills and to learn how to learn.
   The Skills Labs program has been very successful. It was awarded the Global Education Network Europe (GENE) Global Education Award (2020/2021) and was selected for its innovative educational approach and its promotion its alignment with the Maastricht definition (2006) of Global Education that is an "education that opens people's eyes and minds to the realities of the world, and awakens them to bring about a world of greater justice, equity and human rights for all." The award is designed to "offer recognition and to disseminate learning from examples of quality Global Education among policymakers."
   A nationwide assessment of the Skills Labs was recently caried out. A survey was sent to all school units and the responses were very positive. Preliminary results show that around 60% of respondents rate the Skills Labs program overall highly (4 or 5 out of 5), while more than 75% of respondents agree that the thematic pillars cover all the areas that contribute to the cultivation of skills in students.

10. Lessons learnt (300 words)
    To the extent possible, please reply to the following questions:
    i) What were the key triggers for transformation?
    ii) What worked really well – what facilitated this?
    iii) What did not work – why did it not work? *

    The key trigger for transformation was primarily the need to address the widening disconnect between conventional education methods and the skills necessary to thrive in a rapidly changing world and respond to major global challenges. Additionally, there was a desire to introduce new practices to education in Greece: moving towards a skills-based approach to learning, and including more actors in the education process (NGOs, universities, teachers' groups, international organizations).
    As the results of the assessment presented above show, the Skills Labs have been very successful in achieving these and cultivating skills in students. There is of course room for improvement: Preliminary results show that there is a preference among some schools for greater depth in the modules covered as well as further resources to complete more creative and ambitious programs. There is also a preference for a greater number of modules specifically targeted towards students with particular kinds of disabilities and special educational needs.

11. Conclusions (250 words)

Please describe why may this intervention be considered a "best practice".
What recommendations can be made for those intending to adopt the documented
"best practice" or how can it help people working on the same issue(s)? *

The Skills Labs should be considered a best practice as they cultivate important 21st century skills in students, by:
• Promoting the rights of the child and defending the rights of vulnerable social groups
• Promoting democracy in schools, equity, social cohesion, inclusion as well as active citizenship
• Cultivating an awareness of sustainable development
• Raising awareness in relation to social contribution and volunteering
• Enhancing public and individual mental and physical health and well-being
• Raising awareness of young people to global problems (climate change and environmental degradation, economic shocks, health crises, human rights violations) and prioritizing the development of skills to solve them
• Connecting with schools' social context and strengthening the acceptance of common principles, such as non-violent conflict resolution and non-violent language and behavior
• Promoting respect for diversity including cultural diversity
• Supporting inclusive education by promoting the idea of a single, unitary school for students of all needs and help teachers create a safe and supportive school climate on the basis of mutual respect, cooperation, responsibility, tolerance, freedom, honesty, and kindness.

12. Further reading

Please provide a list and URLs of key reference documents for additional information
on the "best practice" for those who may be interested in knowing how the results
benefited the beneficiary group/s. *

https://digital-skills-jobs.europa.eu/en/inspiration/good-practices/european-award-skills-labs-greece