

THE NOTION OF SUSTAINABLE TEAM IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION

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ABSTRACT

Sustainability has been a topical issue for more than 20 years not only dealing with environmental/ecological, social/cultural and economic issues. Combining social, economic, and environmental initiatives in education is a complex process that should result in a completely new vision of educational institutions. It raises the necessity for a management structure to encourage and support the sustainability initiatives within the organisation.

The article deals with one aspect of a larger scale and long-term grounded theory research to explore and define the concept of a sustainable team in educational institution. This article answers the research questions on how students are seen and perceived in the education management hierarchy of an educational institution, and what fosters the development of sustainable team in an educational institution. The data were collected by the content analysis of the education management hierarchy structure reflected on 33 homepages of educational institutions; content analysis of 62 students' teaching practice assignments on the education management hierarchy structure; 12 interviews with school administration on the state of the art of sustainable team. Research sample was 107 educational institutions: 23 primary schools, 66 secondary schools, and 18 state gymnasiums with broad geographical representation – the schools in the capital, cities, small towns, and countryside.

Sustainable team achieves institutional goals and cultivates a culture where collaboration, appreciation, and teamwork are valued. According to the data of the study, there is a misunderstanding of the notion of a sustainable team in educational institutions in Latvia. There is also a lack of evidence of students as meaningful players in how the education management hierarchy is seen and interpreted which slows down the implementation of the sustainability initiatives.

Keywords: *education management, students, sustainable team, teamwork, team performance*

Introduction

Education is a transformational tool in every society and should be held in high esteem. It is the acquisition of knowledge and skills required to sustain individual, groups, and organisational advancement at all levels

and spheres of life. Effective management of human, material, time and financial resources is highly crucial of the development of sustainability in an educational institution.

International Commission on the Futures of Education (2021) highlights the importance of sustainability for future education, especially in the field of education management, which includes teamwork, collaboration and culture of organisation. Among the priorities, there is mentioned steering education opportunities towards inclusion and sustainability. It also states that: “Educational institutions should unite collective endeavours and provide the knowledge, science, and innovative approach to shape sustainable futures for all anchored in social, economic, and environmental justice and prepare their teams for environmental, technological, and social changes on the horizon” (International Commission on the Futures of Education, 2021, p. 15).

In 2016, the National Centre for Education of the Republic of Latvia (Skola 2030, n. d.) started a project “Competence Approach to Curriculum” (Project School2030) to introduce a competence-oriented curriculum in all Latvian educational institutions from pre-school to general secondary school with the aim of promoting the acquisition of necessary skills for living in the 21st century. Project School2030 highlights the importance of team in educational institutions. The implementation of Project School2030 goals is related to significant changes in the structure of school and pre-school curriculum, the system of evaluation of learning outcomes, teacher education, and as a result, it affects the management of educational institutions. According to Project School2030, the elements of effective institutional performance include *education management support for development, a culture of cognition and innovation, teamwork and mutual learning, and a vision of student involvement in the organisational process*. Project School2030 promotes partnership and encourages students to be involved in school management process.

In the context of Project School2030, teamwork and sustainable development principles have recently become priorities and ambitious ideologies in education. Combining social, economic, and environmental initiatives in educational institutions is a complex process that results in a completely new vision of educational institutions that is student-centred. This necessitates the development of appropriate factors in order to identify a management structure within the organisation that encourages and supports the sustainability initiative. The importance of factors such as *involving every member of the organisation in decision-making; maintaining and improving the founders’ idea and vision; creating a sense of integrity; the greater the number of members of the organisation who identify with the organisation’s values, the stronger the feeling of its members’ identity; encouraging members to participate*

in the organisation's activity for developing a culture of sustainability determine sustainability.

Furthermore, the Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 618 on the procedure of the accreditation of educational institutions note the criterion "Support and cooperation" for evaluating the professional activity of the principal of an educational institution and point at the importance of the requirement that learners are involved in achieving the institution's priorities (Ministru kabinets, 2020). According to State Education Quality Service (Izglītības kvalitātes valsts dienests, 2021a), for a high evaluation of an educational institution, the principal should have a vision of what type of graduate this educational institution wants to raise and what the learning process should be for such students to grow up. This vision should also be shared with the administration team, teachers, school personnel, students, and their parents. The principal should ensure that learners' personal growth and development are successful throughout the proposed education process, including the civic participation experience available to learners throughout the education management process.

The aim of the research is to explore and define the concept of sustainable team in educational institutions.

Research questions put forward are:

RQ1: How students are seen and perceived in the education management hierarchy of an educational institution;

RQ2: What fosters the development of sustainable team in an educational institution.

Literature review

In the scientific literature, the term of the sustainability of organisation is used as a synonym of sustainable development or organisation's social responsibility – organisation's sustainability is based on economic, environmental and social responsibility aspects (Bagdonienė et. al., 2009). A sustainable organisation is becoming one of the most popular and ambitious concepts because environment and organisational performance are closely related and its long-term success depends on the fact how the organisation is able to integrate human capital into the environment (Seivwright & Unsworth, 2016).

According to Project School2030 context, an educational institution has to implement the harmony between economic, social and environmental pillars, as well, perform effective management of human capital (teamwork) and the following factors of sustainable development in the organisation – management and leadership, culture, intellectual capital, processes, technologies and infrastructure (Seivwright & Unsworth, 2016).

The most effective means is the improvement of organisation's teamwork and reaching for the highest levels of maturity such as to build sustainable team. Sustainable team not only conditions the possibilities for the organisation to create a competitive advantage, but also to gain new competences corresponding to the economic changes.

According to Heller (2012), effective education management includes four factors that have a significant impact on organisational performance for long-term development: effective teamwork – leaders and group work, decision-making together, good team-building methods, and an emphasis on action.

Project School2030 – the initiative of the National Centre for Education of the Republic of Latvia emphasises the value of collaboration in educational institutions. It depicts an educational institution as a learning organisation that supports each student's learning and employs an in-depth learning approach. It operates as a learning organisation that is constantly changing and adapting to new circumstances. It teaches students, teachers, school administration, and other personnel members how to work together and individually achieve their own and common goals.

Jay Martin Hays and Hayo Reinders (2020) introduce sustainable learning and education as an emerging philosophy of learning and teaching based on sustainability principles. The authors stress the significance of systems and ecological thinking, as well as the critical role of self-sufficiency as a means and target in sustainable learning and education. The authors acknowledge the importance of building community: “the more we accept and appreciate our team members, organisations, and societies as important, interdependent, and deserving of a viable future, and the more we engage with them toward positive ends, the more universally accepted the imperative of sustainability will be, and the more likely we will achieve it” (Hays & Reinders, 2020, p. 68).

Also Marco Kools, Louise Stoll, Bert George, and others (2020) admit that the school as a learning organisation is associated with eight dimensions (see Table 1).

OECD (2016) provides an in-depth explanation of the learning organisation within the context of an educational institution. It identifies and operationalizes the characteristics of a school as a learning organisation in an integrated model comprised of seven overarching ‘action-oriented’ dimensions, as shown in Table 1.

Both sources put “learning of all students” in the first place. OECD (2016) is more specific in defining the dimensions by corresponding action verbs, whereas Kools et al. (2020) focus on the expected outcomes, but they also add one more dimension “partners contributing to school vision” which would be essential for the notion of sustainable team in educational institution.

Table 1. The characteristics of the school as learning organisation (OECD, 2016; Kools et al., 2020)

The school as learning organisation (OECD, 2016)	The school as learning organisation (Kools et al., 2020)
Developing and sharing a vision centred on the learning of all students	A shared vision centred on the learning of all students
Creating and supporting continuous learning opportunities for all personnel	Partners contributing to school vision
Promoting team learning and collaboration among personnel	Continuous learning opportunities
Establishing a culture of inquiry, innovation and exploration	Team learning and collaboration
Establishing embedded systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge and learning	A culture of enquiry, innovation and exploration
Learning with and from the external environment and larger learning system	Systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge and learning
Modelling and growing learning leadership	Learning with and from the external environment
	Modelling learning leadership

According to Project School2030 (Skola2030, 2020), the effective institutional performance consists of four elements, where students also play essential role:

1. A vision of student involvement in the learning.

All parties involved share the school's vision of engaging in learning that delivers and improves performance for each student. The school's vision inspires and motivates students by covering a wide range of outcomes – both cognitive and socially emotional. The vision is the result of a collaborative process involving all school personnel. The school, teachers, students, and others who have an impact on students' learning on a daily basis have clear, specific, realistic, time-bound, and measurable goals for each student's growth.

2. Teamwork and mutual learning.

Teachers plan curriculum on a daily basis at the school level, within curriculum, across disciplines, within a group of classes, considering curriculum development by age, integrating transversal skills and value-based habits into the learning process, and in other ways as needed. All school personnel participate in professional development aimed at achieving school goals; it includes opportunities for each participant to evaluate their work and receive feedback; it has time and other resources; and the school culture promotes and supports all involved one's professional learning.

3. A culture of cognition and innovation.

School personnel desire and dare to innovate in their work; problems and errors are viewed as learning opportunities. Students are actively engaged in conducting research on the school as an organisation. The nature of change is understood by everyone at school. Setting goals at school is preceded by an assessment of the current situation; the school's development plan is based on available data, evidence, and self-assessment, and it is regularly updated.

4. Education management support for development.

School administration works as a team to achieve goals, motivate school personnel, and plan the learning of all school personnel. Leaders of educational institutions are change agents; they promote and develop a culture of learning, change, and innovation at their institutions. The principle's develops the culture of the school organisation and creates conditions for professional dialogue, cooperation, and the exchange of experience; ensures that the organisation's activities are consistent with its vision, goals, and values. The principal sets an example by learning, sharing, and delegating responsibilities, as well as developing management skills and the ability of personnel, including students, to accept responsibility (Skola2030, 2020).

Ligita Šalkauskienė (2017) admits that by combining the factors of teamwork (*management, leadership, decision-making, role change, coherence of organisational behavioural models, etc.*) and sustainable organisation (*management and leadership, culture and intellectual capital, etc.*), a sustainable team can be created in the organisation. Furthermore, the practice of sustainable activity and the formation of a sustainable team benefits the organisation.

The establishment of the organisational structure of an educational institution is determined by several documents in Latvia, such as Education Law (Saeima, 1998); Recommendations of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 2, Procedure for the Establishment of the Structure of a Public Administration (Cabinet of Ministers, 2010); Institution Model Law of the General Education Institution of the Ministry of Education and Science (State Service of Education Quality, 2021b) and Regulations of the State Service for the Quality of Education (State Service for the Quality of Education, 2021a). Additionally, the principal has the authority to hire personnel to assist in the achievement of the institution's goals as project managers, support team members, and interest education teachers. According to Project School2030, students should be placed in the centre of the organisational structure of an educational institution.

According to the research of Tamika Kampini (2018), organisational structure has an effect on employee performance, as well as, the results of the study show that building a good organisational structure is important

for employees to perform well in their work and it helps in motivating employees' performance. Also, Sylvia Maduenyi et al. (2015) admit that the performance of organisation largely depends on the structure of the organisation, as well as, authors indicate that there is a relationship between the specialisation of work process and labour productivity, and organisational structure affects the behaviour of employees in the organisation.

When analysing the development of a sustainable organisation, the concept of a sustainable team must be emphasised. Mycolas Dromantas (2008) and David O. Baker et. al. (2006) have examined the aspects of the sustainable team in the context of sustainable development and teamwork (see Table 2).

Table 2. The comparison between the teamwork and sustainable team. (Baker et al., 2006; Dromantas, 2008)

The characteristics of the teamwork (Baker et al., 2006)	The characteristics of the sustainable team (Dromantas, 2008)
Action (defines the activeness, achievements, search for solutions and development of the team)	Potency (competence, construct of personal effectiveness)
Structure (organisation, methods, process, strategy, tactics and discipline)	Meaningfulness (understanding the meaningfulness of the team)
People (communication, motivation, empathy, social contact)	Autonomy (an extent to which members of the team experience and understand freedom and independence of their actions at work)
Ideas (creativity, ideas)	Influence (members of the team seek, share and understand feedback received from other members of the organisation)

It can be concluded that there can be distinguished several types of the teams or several development stages for the team to reach the status of a sustainable team in an educational institution (see Figure 1):

1. The first stage is a team “a group of people who are interdependent in terms of information, resources, knowledge, and skills and who seek to combine their efforts to achieve a common goal” (Thompson, 2008: 34). Usually it is a small group of people working together, and they stick together due to common interests.
2. The second stage – administration team (Boles, 1975) is administering the management of an educational institution. The main functions of the administration team are the following: the formation of plans, policies, and procedures; setting up goals and objectives; enforcing rules and regulations, etc. The nature of the administration team is bureaucratic. It is a formal and appointed team of people responsible for forecasting,

- planning, organising and decision-making functions at the highest level of the organisation.
3. The collective team refers to small organisations which due to a small number of persons are considered as one group or whole. It can be also called a family team, but not involving the features of nepotism.
 4. The next stage – effective team is related to the development within the educational organisation (Don & Raman, 2019). The team’s combination of skills, experience, and judgement allows it to outperform a group of individuals. Individuals who are effective at work engagement and teamwork have traits such as high self-esteem and a desire to plan and review their work, as well as develop their skills to be effective team members.
 5. Finally, sustainable teams achieve corporate goals, progress in a timely manner, and cultivate an ethics and culture in which collaboration, admiration, and teamwork are developed and valued. Sustainable team management activities are centred on adding value to organisations. The sustainable team is linked to the core management strategy, creating value for both internal and external parties; therefore, cross-departmental bridges must be built (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). Well-being, internal effectiveness, and organisational performance are all related to long-term team’ performance (Warr & Nielsen, 2018).



Figure 1. Stages of the development of sustainable team management (created by authors)

According to the literature summary and conclusion, six interrelated elements that have an impact on the development of a sustainable team in an educational institution can be identified. They are *actively participating as an equal team member, strong leadership in the workplace, team-building and developing sustainable activities, supporting a culture of transparency and integrity, the three Ps of the team members – personality, performance, and potential, and work – life balance* (Warr & Nielsen, 2018).

Methodology

Due to the need of exploring theoretical notions and defining the concept “sustainable team”, the research was organized using grounded theory method research design. The authors of grounded theory method, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967) originally introduced it to facilitate

theory development that consisted of obtaining and analysing data. Tony Bryant and Kathy Charmaz (2007, p. 1) describe it as a method containing “a systematic, inductive, and comparative approach for conducting inquiry for the purpose of constructing theory”.

It is considered one of the most generally applied and popular qualitative research methods and is used in areas that have not been widely researched, or to acquire a new insight in previously researched areas (Mārtinsone, 2011). In order to develop a theory, the researcher should start by defining research questions, as well as selecting participants, using theoretical sampling, followed by data collection, data analysis and validation stages. This is what the present research article also reveals as it deals with one aspect of a larger scale and long-term grounded theory research. The theoretical saturation stage when theoretical saturation is defined, meaning that in the development of theory no new categories, concepts, dimensions or incidents arise and finally discovery and conclusion stage when the findings and restrictions of the research are demonstrated are not discussed in this article.

The data were collected by performing the content analysis of the education management hierarchy structure reflected on the homepages of educational institutions in Latvia ($n = 33$), followed by the content analysis of students' teaching practice assignments on the education management hierarchy structure ($n = 62$). Finally, the interviews with school administration on the state of the art of sustainable team in educational institutions ($n = 12$ principals) were carried out.

Research sample was 107 educational institutions: 23 primary schools, 66 secondary schools, and 18 state gymnasiums. 12 school principals represented four primary schools, four secondary schools, and four state gymnasiums, as well as geographically they were from the schools in the capital, cities, small towns, and countryside.

Results and Discussion

The content analysis of the education management hierarchy structures reflected on the homepages of educational institutions and students' teaching practice assignments was performed to search for the answer on the research question: how students are seen and perceived in the education management hierarchy of an educational institution in Latvia. 95 sources of the education management hierarchy structure were examined, including 33 structures from the homepages of Latvian educational institutions and 62 from students' teaching practice assignments on the education management hierarchy structure. According to Figure 2, the data of the analysis of the education management hierarchy structure show that 38 percent

(36 educational institutions) mentioned the student council in the education management hierarchy structure, and 27 percent (26 educational institutions) did not include students at all. Only 1% (10 educational institutions) have a student-centred education management structure, and both student councils and students are mentioned in their education management hierarchy structure.

According to the data, less than a quarter of educational institutions involve students in teamwork, indicating a lack of students' as meaningful players in how the education management hierarchy is perceived and interpreted in the context of Project School2030.

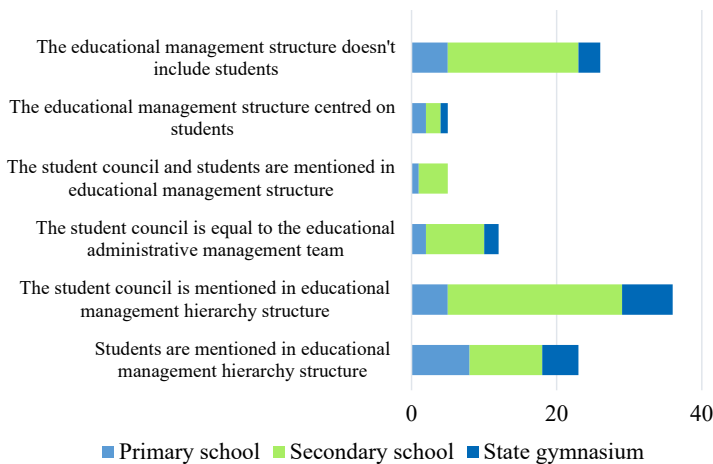


Figure 2. Data of the analysis of education management hierarchy structure

Twelve interviews with educational institution principals were conducted to analyse the policy of school regarding student involvement in teamwork. According to the data collected, the majority of principals had meetings with students both remotely and in person, and they collaborated with the student council. Principals acknowledged that the student council represented students' interests at educational institutions, and that individual consultations aided in involving students in education management processes. Furthermore, 60 percent (8 educational institutions) acknowledged the importance of teamwork and mutual trust, and the majority of schools involved students in the development of project planning. In addition, school administration conducted annual surveys on the improvement of school management.

In order to find out what fostered sustainable team in educational institution, the principals were asked, "What is the evidence that your school is performing as a team?" 25% (three educational institutions) named their teams

as families, it should be noted that the principals represented small primary and secondary schools, where the teaching personnel did not exceed 20 teachers. 41% (five educational institutions) emphasized that they promoted teamwork and cooperation, organised teacher-building events, cooperated with supervisors (especially during Covid-19), and organised parent and teacher events. 16% (two educational institutions) admitted that they did not pay enough attention to teamwork cooperation, which was influenced by the frequent change of teachers, Covid-19 pandemic and the workload of teachers. 16% (two educational institutions) noted that the school personnel had not changed for several years, but in connection with what had been happening in the world in the last two years, faced a shortage of teachers. They were actively attracting new teachers and colleagues to join their team, also, with the support of the local government offered bonuses and benefits to teachers for demonstrated initiatives, like providing additional vacation days.

Only eight of the twelve educational institutions had active student councils, and five (three secondary schools and two gymnasiums) had two student councils: primary school student council (from Forms 7 to 9) and secondary school student council (from Forms 10 to 12).

According to the findings of the interviews, the majority of educational institution principals agreed that a student-centred participatory approach was related to teacher' performance in terms of personal gains by teachers and students ranging from increased self-esteem to the ability to work in teams and develop leadership skills.

The majority of principals admitted that primary school student councils were more motivated to participate in education management and learning processes, whereas secondary school students were more focused on their studies and exams. Furthermore, principals emphasised that students lacked knowledge and experience in managerial processes, so it could be very useful to create guidelines to guide students for a better understanding of their contribution and involvement in education processes. According to the findings of the interviews, principals mentioned the areas of school management that students could influence, such as *“organisational climate and environment, teamwork with teachers, student academic performance, organisational performance, promoting the school's name on a local and national level, implementing and participating in school projects and events, as well as taking the initiative and participating in youth and NGO conferences and forums”*.

According to the findings of the interviews, students were mostly involved in “project and lesson planning with teachers”, and only 42 percent (five educational institutions) focused on *“teamwork culture and organise team-building events for teachers and students, excluding regular school events such as class events, excursions, and visits to cultural events”*.

Less than half of the interviewed principals, 42 percent (five educational institutions), continued to focus on *“student well-being and the joy of learning at school”*, indicating, *“principals and administration teams do not understand how to develop and maintain sustainable team management”*. Furthermore, the educational institution lacked *“an appropriate environment for the long-term development of their team and organisation”*.

What is more, principals admitted that they had *“encountered problems with student involvement; students do not understand how they can help improve education processes at educational institutions”*. For a better understanding, they suggested having *“student involvement guidelines,”* which would define the importance of student involvement, as well as areas of education management processes where students could contribute, and describe how cooperation would benefit the administration team, teachers, and students.

According to the findings of interview analysis, 8 percent (one education institution) operated as administrative teams (Figure 1), 50 percent (six educational institutions) operated as a collective team, 34 percent (three educational institutions) functioned as an effective teamwork, and only 16 percent (two educational institutions) understood how to create an environment for a sustainable team in an educational institution.

The educational institutions which operated as a sustainable team in the education management process involved principal, administration team, deputies, support team, as well as students', parents' and school councils. They kept focus on teamwork relations, social activities, intelligence enhancement, emotional intelligence, activities of class teacher-tutor, mentoring, class group as a social group, extra curriculum activities, as well as the programme *“Latvian School Bag”*.

Principals acknowledged that collaboration was critical for successful organisational performance and it was of importance in the establishment of school priorities. *“First, the administration thought about strategic and organisational issues, then they put forward the changes in the short and long term plan, afterwards there was a meeting with the school and students' councils. When they received feedback and discussed this, final decisions we made and development plan was accepted when all parties had given their opinion about it”*.

The principals of sustainable team educational institutions had a special strategic plan how to engage students in organisational processes, delegating responsibilities for active student council involvement such as *“every class has a leader who is responsible for class needs and surveys”*. The principals had experienced that it helped to plan working day, education process and create the development plan of educational institution.

According to the findings of the interviews, the principal said: *“It is important for us that students feel good they give us direction, and we drive and*

organize it. Students set a goal, optimize their strategy, and learn what they do not know along the way in order to develop comprehensively. Young people can act as a feedback loop”.

It is critical to emphasise this when answering the question, *“Without who would your school team not exist?” “What are the requirements for the team to continue operating successfully?”.*

Only two principals responded that students and teamwork were important, with the most popular responses being *“teachers, support personnel, school values, municipal support, administration, and the parents’ council”.*

Principals responded that the most important factors for sustainable team development were *“organisational culture, well-being and welfare of the team, shared responsibilities in the team, strategy for education management, teamwork and cooperation, involving students and parents in decision-making, emotional intelligence, financial support from government and municipality, international cooperation such as Erasmus projects and other grants”.* Some principals mentioned skillful conflict resolution and putting students at the centre, but agreeing on the *“limits of power”.*

According to the analysis of interviews, the elements that foster the development of sustainable team in an educational institution are principal, administration team, deputies, support team, as well as students’, parents’ and school councils, also, the focus on teamwork relations, social activities, intelligence enhancement, emotional intelligence, activities of class teacher-tutor, mentoring, class group as a social group, extra curriculum activities, and for effective implementation there should be created a special strategic plan how to engage students in organisational processes.

Conclusions

The notion of a sustainable team in an educational institution is based on such factors as potency, meaningfulness, autonomy and influence. The fundamental element for the evidence of sustainable team is collaborative relationships with students. Involving students as equal decision-makers in teamwork is one of the most important aspects of creating a sustainable team in the educational institution. Whereas, the effective institutional performance can be defined by the following elements: education management support for development, a culture of cognition and innovation, teamwork and mutual learning, and a vision of student involvement in the organisational process. Besides, there are several types of the teams and several development stages for the team to reach the status of a sustainable team in an educational institution such as team, administration team, collective team, effective team and sustainable team.

The development of a sustainable team in an educational institution depends on equally participating active team members, strong leadership in the workplace, team-building and sustainable activities, a culture of transparency and integrity, the three Ps of the team members – personality, performance, and potential, and work – life balance.

Based on preliminary data of a larger scale and long-term grounded theory research, it can be concluded that the structure of the educational institution reflects the involvement of students in the education management process of the educational institution to the greatest extent possible. The analysis of the data shows that 38 percent (36 educational institutions) mention the student council in the education management hierarchy structure, and 27 percent (26 educational institutions) do not include students at all. Only one percent (10 educational institutions) has a student-centred education management structure, and both student council and students are mentioned in their education management hierarchy structure.

It can be concluded that according to the analysed data of the interviews, fewer than a quarter of educational institutions involve students in teamwork, indicating a lack of students' as meaningful players in how the education management hierarchy is perceived and interpreted in the context of Project School2030. In addition, students are not recognised as equal team members of an educational institution that does not meet the needs of students or the Project School2030 vision.

Based on the analysis of interview data, there can be summarized the following criteria that foster the development of a sustainable team in an educational institution, such as sustainable team involves principal, administration team, deputies, support team, as well as students', parents' and school councils, also, keeps focus on teamwork relations, social activities, intelligence enhancement, emotional intelligence, activities of class teacher-tutor, mentoring, class group as a social group, extra curriculum activities, and for effective implementation creates a special strategic plan how to engage students in organisational processes. It should be admitted that is necessary to describe the concept of a sustainable team in an educational institution at the national level, as well as the role of students in it must be defined. In addition, there is no shared understanding of sustainability among the members of the education management teams in educational institutions.

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