

22nd

International Association  
for Adolescent Health  
(IAAH) European  
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Joint Event:

15th STATE OF THE  
ART Panhellenic  
Adolescent Health /  
Medicine Congress

*Youth Development Challenges in the post-COVID-19 era*

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## Children's perspectives on their learning experiences during the pandemic

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The present paper is based on two online surveys of the mix-method projects COVID-Kids I and II which investigated children's school experiences, emotional responses, and subjective well-being during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021. The data of the 2020 questionnaire stem from 1,773 children aged 6-16 from Luxembourg, Germany and Switzerland (Kirsch et al., 2021) and those of the second questionnaire from 502 children of the same age group in Luxembourg (Kirsch et al., 2022). The presentation will examine some of the participants' challenges with home schooling as well as selected outcomes and conclude with a few implications.

### 1. Challenges with home schooling

Around the world, schools closed shortly after the first Covid-19 lockdowns. The findings from the COVID-Kids I study show that teachers in primary and secondary schools in Luxembourg, Germany and Switzerland, as with those in other high-income countries, offered varied types of distance education in 2020, such as posting or emailing materials, sharing these through platforms, and teaching online. The participants who came mainly from families of higher socio-economic status, reported no issues with access to materials or resources. Furthermore, 80% of the primary school children (thereafter "younger") and 94% of the secondary school students (thereafter "older children") indicated coping "well" or "very well" with the technology (Kirsch et al., 2021).

The learning challenges reported related to stress and demotivation, brought on by the reduced contact with teachers and the need to organize their own learning schedule. Contact time and time spent learning influence academic achievements (Bonal & González, 2020). Results of the COVID-Kids I study echo those of other studies (e.g., Cuevas-Parra & Stephani, 2020; Huber et al., 2020), and show that, in general, secondary school students had more frequent contact with their teachers than primary school students. Nevertheless, there were large variations within and across countries. For instance, more older children in Luxembourg than in Germany or Switzerland reported having daily contact with teachers or contact three or four times a week. By contrast, very few older children in Luxembourg and Switzerland indicated having hardly any contact with their teachers compared to a fifth of students in Germany. As for time spent learning, the older children in Luxembourg, Germany and Switzerland, indicated spending more time on schoolwork than the younger. This is in line with other countries. The reported average time reported in Luxembourg and Switzerland was slightly higher than in Germany. In particular, the younger children in Luxembourg learned on average 3 hours 20 minutes per day and the older 4 hours 20 minutes. The differences between children in each country were striking. While 8% of the younger children indicated

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spending less than one hour on schoolwork each day, 7% spent more than 6 hours.

On account of the pandemic, distance education remained the norm throughout the academic year 2021/22 in many countries. In Luxembourg, over a quarter of the younger children and a third of the older reported having missed more than 6 weeks (Kirsch et al., 2022). The challenge of prolonged absences put the children and their parents and teachers under considerable pressure to meet the needs of the curriculum.

While many children in both COVID-Kids studies reported receiving parental support, this was not the case for all. As an example, parents helped access materials or complete schoolwork. In 2021, about a quarter of the older children reported their parents helping them organize their work and a third teach them additional subjects (Kirsch et al., 2022). Studies in many countries confirmed the variety in the kinds of support and in the amounts of time given by parents during the pandemic (Bubb & Jones, 2020; Bonal & González, 2020).

A final challenge reported on in this presentation is the inconsistency in the kinds of teacher support. In 2021, the majority of the older children indicated, for example, that the teachers frequently or very frequently held synchronous online classes and gave feedback, but only a fifth reported that their teachers advised on learning strategies or asked about their well-being. The quality of teacher support is important because it influences school satisfaction and academic achievement (Engel et al., 2021; Huber & Helm, 2020; Steinmayr et al., 2021).

## 2. Learning outcomes

Three learning outcomes are presented: perceptions of schoolwork, school satisfaction and academic achievements. Firstly, the participants were asked in 2020 and 2021 to rate how frequently their schoolwork was understandable, interesting, and useful. In 2020, about a fifth of the younger children and a quarter of the older reported that they did not understand their work and the majority did not find it interesting. In 2021, the participants were asked to rate the difficulty and the quality of their schoolwork under two situations: when they went to school and had to learn from home (at times when schools were closed, or students quarantined). In the data of the younger and older children, there were statistically significant differences in the reported levels of schoolwork being understandable, interesting, and useful. Furthermore, there were significant differences in the level of difficulty expressed by the older children. They found the work less difficult, easier to understand, and more interesting and useful when they learned at school. This finding helps explain that most of the younger children and almost all older children reported learning less at home than at school in 2021.

Secondly, as in other countries, the children's school satisfaction was influenced by the school closures and distance education. The study Covid-Kids I found a clear pattern of a fall in school satisfaction from before the pandemic to during it. In Luxembourg, for example, 90% of children reported having been satisfied or very satisfied with school before the pandemic while only 72% were satisfied with school during the pandemic.

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The findings in 2021 showed a different trend: 95% of the younger children and 75% of the older were satisfied or very satisfied with their lives at school. Findings in 2020 and 2021 showed that the perceived difficulty and quality of schoolwork correlated with school satisfaction as well as with negative feelings and worries (Engel et al., 2021; Kirsch et al., 2022).

Finally, most of the children's academic achievements dropped. In 2021, the participants were asked how well they performed during and before the pandemic. The comparison of these results shows a significant difference in the reported scores on performance. Given the small size of the sample and the overrepresentation of children of higher socio-economic status, we could not establish whether the learning loss differed according to age, gender and socio-economic status as in other countries (e.g., Andrew et al., 2020; Engzell et al., 2021). The findings of both COVID-Kids studies, showed, however that older children and girls reported more frequent negative feelings and worries than younger children and boys.

Based on these selected findings showing the impact of the pandemic on learning processes and outcomes, we suggest that teachers develop a safe and supportive learning environment and implement social and emotional learning modules which equip children with cognitive, behavioural, and emotional competencies that help them manage life's challenges and succeed academically.

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