

Study reveals how schools deal with challenges caused by crises



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Continuity and Change in Schools in Times of Crisis (KWIK) is the title of a study conducted jointly by the University of Hamburg and IEA, and supported by IPN Kiel.

School administrators and teachers were surveyed a total of three times: in early autumn 2020, summer 2021, and autumn 2022. The study aimed to capture information about how schools met the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The main focus was to identify which solutions proved successful and provided impetus for innovation in everyday school practice. More than 1,200 respondents—headteachers and teachers—took part in the third survey.

While schools were still busy dealing with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, they were faced with a new challenge: the reception and integration of children and youth who had escaped from the war in Ukraine. This demonstrated that the ability to cope with crises is a permanent task for schools. It is all the more important that they find ways to meet the challenges posed by crises in their "normal operations."

One of the results of the third KWIK survey is that schools place emphasis on in-person teaching. Around 70 per cent of participating teachers emphasized that they felt overburdened by the return to face-to-face teaching after the school closures. At the same time, however, they were prepared to accept the burden—because (according to one teacher): "Face-to-face teaching helps to build a beneficial relationship with the learning groups and between the pupils themselves, which is always the basis for good teaching." Almost all teachers stated that they enjoyed returning to face-to-face work in their classrooms.

The respondents' answers regarding the introduction of digitalization in schools were equally confident. While complaints about a lack of equipment and limited experience with digital media were widespread in the first survey, two years later, positive or optimistic reports predominated. The respondents reported a significant increase in their use of digital media.

Self-assessment of digital media skills, confidence in their usefulness, and willingness to acquire further skills in this area have also increased.

Schools have obviously caught up in the area of digitalization; this is one result of activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the need for further qualification in this area was also made clear. Our respondents' use of digital media to date has mainly taken place in the "classic" use of media: for example, when presenting information or tasks. The first thresholds for introducing digital processes in

the classroom have apparently been overcome; however, there is still room for improvement in order to fully utilize the possibilities for supporting educational processes with these tools.

One side effect of "crises" is that the diversity of living conditions and educational prerequisites among students became increasingly important for their educational success. This became apparent in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, in the opportunities families had to support their children in learning during lockdown. In the context of new immigration from Ukraine, the diversity of language requirements for participation in German schools was particularly evident.

One concern of the KWik study is therefore to see how schools are coping with the challenge of increasing diversity beyond times of crisis. The results of our study are also ambivalent in this respect. On the one hand, respondents reported that they were able to benefit from their previous experience with immigrants in order to welcome students from Ukraine. On the other hand, they reported that previously established measures had been dismantled and that the necessary support—for example by translators or interpreters—was not available. At the same time, however, many respondents said that their schools wanted to adapt more to diversity in the student population. As many as 56 per cent of respondents reported a change in their school's pedagogical concept with regard to linguistic and cultural diversity.

However, there is room for improvement. Only 32 per cent of teachers reported that they take greater account of individual learning requirements in the design of their lessons. Only a few respondents indicated that they cater use digital media for individuals or communication in a multilingual context. Overall, such possibilities received little attention.

The results of the KWik study indicated that it would be beneficial if more attention were paid to the opportunities associated with digitalization in regards to teaching practice, and learning processes in the context of diversity. In particular, information and training opportunities should be provided. This could contribute to the general resilience of schools—in other words, to their ability to successfully educate their pupils even in times of crisis.

About KWIK:

School principals in 295 primary schools and 484 schools of secondary level I in seven German federal states participated in the first part of the survey (autumn 2020), and have reported about the with regard to relevant problem-solving approaches used in their schools. The first results have been reported released and shared back with the participating schools at the beginning of March 2021 ([here](#)). A second survey took place in June 2021, where 260 school principals and 1026 teachers participated. The third survey took place at the end of 2022, in which 193 principals and 1032 teachers took part. In parallel, a further brochure with important results from the second round was prepared for the participating schools and was published and sent to schools at the end of October 2022 ([here](#)). The results from the third survey round were published in a final brochure in January 2024 ([hier](#)). For more information about KWik: www.iea.nl/de/kwik