THE TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT OF STEM LEARNING

Stavroula Lada
PhD candidate in University of Alicante

STEM education, involving science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, is the pilar of modern educational initiatives. This chapter includes quantitative research related to the impact of STEM approach on students' performance, carried out among educators in Europe. The main research question is: How does STEM education shape students' achievements?

Background

Margot and Kettler (2019) found that educators refer to the multiple benefits of STEM education, but encounter considerable challenges, including teaching-related obstacles, systemic setbacks, and shortage of assistance. Tunc & Bagceci in their research in 2021 mention that the collaboration between educators, effective professional development, and updated curricula are pillars for enhancing the implementation of STEM education. Moreover, according to the outcomes of the same analysis, educators underlined the substantial effect of STEM activities on students, particularly in developing 21st-century skills, like the 4 c's (collaboration, creativity, communication, and critical thinking). However, educators encountered setbacks in implementing STEM approach, including limited means, insufficient infrastructure, and lack of management assistance.
Another research (Bal and Bedir, 2021) aimed to interpret the perspectives of four educators who are trained and use STEM disciplines in science and math lessons. The research was based in semi-structured interviews. The findings outlined the enhancement in skills in science, math, engineering, and technology. They stated that there were positive academic performance, the students' self-esteem was elevated, and the lesson was mentioned as more pleasant and engaging. Moreover, according to the data, hands-on activities improved students' knowledge and skills.

METHODOLOGY of the research

This research utilizes a quantitative survey study approach to investigate educators' views on STEM education, its influence on learners, and the barriers encountered in implementing STEM-related activities. 144 educators took part in the survey, by diverse countries. Almost half of the sample consisted of Scientix ambassadors—participants of the European STEM education network—whose competence added valuable insight to the results.
The researcher chose participants who are extensively experienced with STEM learning. Scientix ambassadors' viewpoints are critical for this analysis. They are connected with the European STEM community, and implement STEM disciplines, guaranteeing reliable finding on the field. This selection corresponds to outcomes that emphasize the significance of examining biases in research and exploring more focused, tailored groups to reveal detailed barriers and opportunities (Winkler & Wofford, 2024).

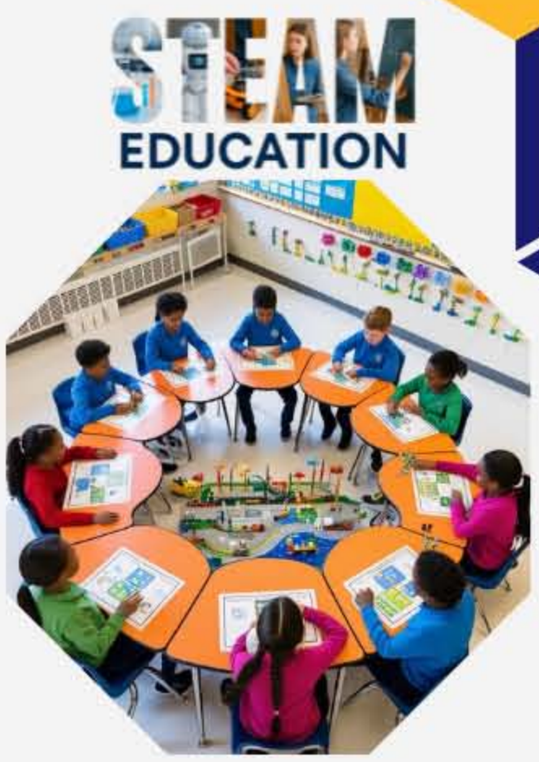
Results

The survey engaged 144 educators from various countries, with Greece having the highest participation (29.9%), followed by Turkey (15.3%) and Romania (9.7%). Other countries contributed around 1%. Unequal sample sizes are common in research and can enhance statistical validity. Over 60% of respondents are Scientix ambassadors, an international STEM education network, ensuring informed perspectives. Their participation strengthens the study's credibility. The data provide insights into regional STEM education trends, reinforcing the role of diverse educator representation in comparative analysis.

The survey results show strong engagement with STEM activities among educators, with 43.1% using them weekly and 20.1% daily. Project-based learning (29.2%) is the most preferred method, followed by hands-on experimentation (27.1%) and technology integration (25.7%). Cross-subject lessons (24.3%) highlight interdisciplinary approaches. STEM implementation enhances student engagement, creativity, and academic performance, benefiting diverse learners, including students with special needs. Initiatives like Erasmus and eTwinning foster collaboration, equipping students with real-world problem-solving skills. Expanding STEM access will sustain these positive outcomes.

STEM education significantly enhances problem-solving and critical thinking, with 75.2% of educators reporting improvements. The Chi-Square test confirms a strong link between STEM curricula and skill development. In science and mathematics, 98.7% of respondents observe performance gains, with 56.3% noting significant improvement. STEM also fosters teamwork, with 93.8% recognizing progress. Creativity and innovation benefit as well, with 95.8% of educators affirming its positive impact. These findings highlight STEM's role in developing cognitive, academic, and collaborative skills, preparing students for future success.

Survey results show moderate student engagement in STEM courses (M = 2.56, SD = 0.589) and lower beliefs about its academic and career impact (M = 1.53, SD = 0.528). A significant correlation ($r = 0.418$, $p < 0.001$) suggests that greater STEM participation is linked to stronger career beliefs, though external factors may influence this relationship. Key challenges include time constraints, limited resources, and the need for professional training. Solutions involve collaboration, interdisciplinary instruction, tech-based tools, and policy support. Strengthening teacher training and funding is crucial for sustaining STEM education's impact on academic success and career readiness.



Discussion

STEM education fosters student engagement, especially among those struggling with traditional teaching. Hands-on STEM projects enhance problem-solving, creativity, and teamwork, encouraging curiosity in science and technology. However, challenges persist—time constraints (77 mentions), limited resources (60 mentions), and lack of training (48 mentions). Teachers often integrate STEM into existing lessons due to tight schedules. Global initiatives like Erasmus and eTwinning support collaboration and skill-building. Institutional support, funding, and professional development are crucial for sustainable STEM implementation. Addressing these gaps ensures equitable access, stronger educator preparedness, and improved student outcomes.

Conclusion

This research highlights three key conclusions regarding STEM education. First, STEM enhances student engagement and academic performance, especially for those struggling with traditional methods. Hands-on learning and interdisciplinary approaches foster critical thinking and career readiness. Second, educators face barriers such as limited resources, time constraints, and a lack of professional development. Third, European initiatives like Erasmus, eTwinning, and Scientix provide crucial support, facilitating collaboration and innovation.
Despite its advantages, STEM education requires deeper investigation, particularly regarding long-term academic progress and effective instructional strategies. Further research should assess how cultural and financial disparities influence STEM implementation in schools. Additionally, future studies must quantify STEM's impact on student competency growth and compare instructional techniques to determine the most effective approaches.
Expanding access to STEM education and addressing existing challenges through policy reforms, funding, and institutional support will ensure equitable opportunities for all students, strengthening the foundation for future innovation.

References

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