

Student Podcasts for Strengthening Mental Resilience

Panagiota Souridi

Classics Teacher and Linguist, M.Sc., M.A. – 3rd Lower Secondary School of Argyroupoli
pansouridi@yahoo.gr

Abstract

This paper presents the objectives, methodology and results of implementing the European DEMPOD project with lower secondary school students. By using podcasts as tools for free expression and participation in social life, students recognised the value of digital tools as more than channels for consuming content: they can also serve as tools for social dialogue and democratic empowerment. Through training and the planning and production of a podcast series on a topic of their choice—managing stress among adolescents—the students experienced the importance of communication skills and digital literacy as prerequisites for acting consciously and effectively as agents of social change.

Keywords: communication skills, podcast, active citizenship

Introduction

Given that the Debate Club established by the author at the 3rd Lower Secondary School of Argyroupoli in 2019 is active, and considering the selected activities she coordinates as the person responsible for reporting on the school's participation in important networks such as the UNESCO ASPnet school network, Sustainable School and the SEMA AEP network, the school seeks synergies with organisations and institutions that share similar learning and pedagogical objectives. These objectives are closely linked to humanistic values and the principles of sustainability. Accordingly, partnerships are developed to strengthen communication skills through fruitful interaction with enduring human needs and with the contemporary opportunities offered by our technologically advanced age. Education provides a stable and secure foundation on which sustainable interventions can be designed to address the many challenges of everyday life.

The DEMPOD project (dempod.eu), an innovative European initiative aimed at empowering young people, particularly those with fewer opportunities, was an ideal way to activate students' knowledge and experience, capture their needs in real time and enable them to make a meaningful contribution by taking an active and responsible role. DEMPOD was developed with today's digital reality in mind, recognising that younger generations use social networks, streaming platforms and podcasting as key means of communication, expression and social intervention. The project's relevance and objectives made it appealing both to members of the Debate Club and to students in Years 7, 8 and 9 who expressed interest in taking part. Together, they formed a collaborative student team committed to completing the project successfully.

Among the project's clear advantages, with Action Synergy as the national coordinator, was the opportunity to collaborate and interact with young people aged 15–25 from five European countries: Greece, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Romania. The school's students actively participated in this intercultural group of 200 young people, whose goal was to produce 200 podcasts.

The Project

The main objective of DEMPOD is to empower young people, especially those with fewer opportunities, to use podcasts as a tool for increasing their participation in local communities and democratic processes.

The project's specific objectives are:

- To strengthen the skills of educators and youth organisations in using podcasts as a tool for empowering active citizenship.
- To increase young people's participation as agents of social change through the creation and dissemination of podcasts.
- To use digital platforms to ensure that young people's voices are heard on an equal footing, enabling them to act as active citizens at local, national and international levels.
- To promote digital participation and democratic dialogue.
- To develop skills and encourage a responsible digital presence.

Methodology

The project was based on the principles of non-formal education, experiential learning, participatory democracy, digital citizenship, media education and the amplification of young people's voices. Recognising that contemporary social and political participation is increasingly shifting into the digital sphere, podcasts and digital media offer a democratic and accessible means of expression. They enable young people to create content, develop public discourse, discuss social issues and participate actively in the public sphere. With an emphasis on developing critical thinking, combating misinformation, strengthening active participation, promoting social inclusion and empowering vulnerable and underrepresented groups of young people, the project approached podcasting not merely as a technical skill but as a pedagogical tool for democratic expression and social intervention. It should be emphasised that the project materials were developed following international research into the nature and forms of young people's digital participation in the five participating countries.

The proposal for the school to collaborate with the project, made after the first term of the school year, fitted very well into the educational process. Members of the Debate Club had already completed activities designed to help them recognise their abilities and strengthen their values—essential qualities for public speaking. At the same time, Year 7 students in the group had become familiar with their new school environment and had studied the factors and conditions required for effective communication in their Modern Greek Language lessons. They had applied these principles using various digital tools, including multimodal posters, articles and electronic presentations, while the e-class platform provided consistent access to the necessary resources. Students in Years 8 and 9 had developed these skills during the previous school year and therefore had strong motivation to learn and participate in the proposed project, which they were eager to explore.

The DEMPOD tools, designed around the project's objectives, offered the 12-member student team an engaging training experience based on multisensory learning and multiliteracies. The e-learning platform included educational videos, podcasts and materials for each thematic unit, complementing the handbook and combining theory with practical application, collaborative learning, creativity and familiarisation with the potential of digital tools. Distance learning provided students with ongoing support and opportunities to interact and communicate with the European group. After completing 12 international webinars involving 200 young people from the partner countries, the student team exchanged ideas and suggestions in a plenary session about the podcasts they planned to create. Based on students' actual

needs and a joint decision, they selected adolescent mental health—particularly stress management during this transitional stage of life—as their theme and decided to produce podcast episodes exploring it. The episodes reflected the student team's priorities: investigating the causes of adolescent stress, including the challenges of adolescence and school bullying, and exploring ways of managing stress, such as sports, the arts, the balanced use of technology and developing positive attitudes towards examinations.

Following the project-based learning method, students were divided into six smaller groups according to their chosen subtopic. They conducted online research using a corresponding webquest designed by the coordinating teacher. They then carried out action research through questionnaires, recording their classmates' attitudes and needs in relation to the selected subtopics. They presented their overall findings in a collaborative electronic presentation, which they shared with the whole group for information and feedback. This feedback was valuable in refining and complementing the content of the podcast episodes they were responsible for producing.

The student podcasts were recorded at the school on 6 February 2026, in cooperation with the national coordinator, Action Synergy, which provided the necessary equipment and specialised staff. One classroom was transformed into a recording studio, much to the students' excitement. The project team clearly and simply explained both the technical aspects and the communication context of recording, maintaining a positive attitude that significantly strengthened students' confidence and initiative in personal expression. Five hours of recording resulted in six completed podcasts, intended for publication on the project's digital platform, <https://the-podium.eu/>. The six subtopics were: Recognising Adolescent Stress; School Bullying; Managing Exam Stress; Sport: Suggestions from Teenage Athletes; Young People and Video Games; and Art and Personal Expression During Adolescence.

As part of disseminating and presenting the project's results, an online festival was planned for September 2026, in which the student team would participate actively, having contributed significantly to the project's success.

Conclusions

The project “DEMPOD – Democratic Participation of Young People through Podcasting and Digital Activism” represents a distinctive educational journey with multiple benefits, foremost among them the strengthening of students' communication skills. In an era when visual and auditory stimuli shape everyday communication environments, personal expression and the ability to convey one's position through language are priorities, with the aim of fostering fruitful and creative interaction. Students also recognised the added value of paralinguistic features, which play a decisive role in conveying meaning in oral communication. The prepared spoken language used in producing the recordings offered an ideal combination of the advantages of both oral and written expression in everyday life. At the same time, students experienced how different text types—such as description, narration and argumentation—can convey meaning in a multisensory environment that simulates live communication.

In addition, the participation of lower secondary school students in the project revealed the potential of modern technological media, while underscoring that people must remain their protagonists and creators. Becoming familiar with the technical specifications and choices that shape podcasts according to the communication context and purpose provided valuable opportunities to analyse and combine these possibilities in pursuit of the best communication outcome. In the interdisciplinary process of developing digital literacy, experimentation and experiential learning were particularly valuable, taking account of students' multiple intelligences and trusting in their abilities and initiative. Reflective learning, creativity and the activation of students' strengths through multiliteracies were important advantages of the project,

which was fully aligned with the objectives of the new Modern Greek Language curriculum. The project also accommodated different learning styles, respecting both diversity and students' prior knowledge and experience.

The composition of the student team itself—with voluntary participation from members of the Debate Club and students from Years 7, 8 and 9—demonstrated the project's appeal as a comprehensive example of contemporary educational innovation, connecting non-formal education, digital literacy and young people's democratic participation. The project's principles aligned exceptionally well with the school's learning culture, which is based on humanistic values and sustainability. Particular emphasis was placed on the Sustainable Development Goals: Goal 3, Good Health and Well-being; Goal 4, Quality Education; Goal 5, Gender Equality; Goal 10, Reduced Inequalities; and Goal 17, Partnerships for the Goals. Through research, educational materials, digital resources and the production process, the project gave young people's voices meaningful support and advanced our shared vision of a participatory, democratic and inclusive society based on equality and acceptance. In their qualitative evaluation, participating students highlighted stronger collaboration and participation, freedom of expression and the supportive environment they had jointly created as a learning community extending beyond the school. In this way, they became ambassadors for humanism and sustainability, using their communication skills as a means of action.

The active citizenship skills acquired and developed through the project should also be emphasised. These strengthened students' identities as citizens at national, European and international levels and included critical thinking, political and social literacy, decision-making, empathy, solidarity, respect for human rights, active listening and negotiation, cooperation, teamwork and project management. In a globalised era, local and national challenges directly affect the global social and political landscape. Young people need active citizenship skills to contribute meaningfully to everyday life and to individual and collective progress. The students' own choice to focus on adolescent stress management demonstrated how the project encouraged them to assume responsibility and make a personal commitment to active engagement. Through this process, students gained valuable experience and, through their emotional involvement, developed sound judgement and positive attitudes, helping them face everyday life with optimism, initiative and determination and use the power of knowledge and collective action to achieve change.

At a time when adolescent mental health is a national strategic priority, the students' decision to explore this topic in depth is noteworthy. The project gave them an opportunity to amplify the younger generation's voice on prevention and care and to participate on an equal footing in public dialogue, where good practices and partnerships that support emotional well-being can be shared. Stress is a common mental health challenge that can overwhelm adolescents, causing fear and sometimes panic, often accompanied by physical symptoms and withdrawal from goals. It can affect performance, social relationships, school achievement and self-confidence. The student podcasts conveyed the realities of adolescent everyday life in a distinctive way while offering alternatives to which adults, educational stakeholders and public authorities need to respond effectively.

Finally, feedback from the European project partners about the student team's participation throughout the learning journey was particularly positive. They highlighted the students' enthusiasm, consistency and active presence in both the online training sessions and the in-person workshop held at the school. The students showed strong interest and commitment to the production process, approaching their assigned work and research into mental health and stress with responsibility, maturity and creativity. This led to the completion of all six recordings. The evaluation of the school's contribution emphasised the partners' satisfaction and recognition of the work that helped make the project successful. In assessing the skills developed through the educational process, the partner organisations reported improvements in

collaboration, communication, critical thinking and creative expression, as well as students' personal development throughout the project.

Given that today's school functions as an open system, it is important to highlight both the benefits of the project and the value of the school environment in creating learning communities. In these communities, knowledge, needs and skills meet and interact creatively in pursuit of individual and social progress. Young people are the protagonists in such communities: equal participants in learning and education and, ultimately, co-creators of the present to which they belong and the future they envision.

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