


Efficient Strategies to Develop the Cultural Competence of Our Pupils. Recommendations for a High-Quality Management of Educational Activities

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Abstract

Keywords:

extracurricular activities; eTwinning projects; Erasmus+ projects; cultural competence; intercultural competence.

In this study, some effective recommendations were established through which pupils' cultural competence can be developed. We started from the premise that developing pupils' ability to live with others facilitates the accelerated development of pupils' cultural competence. Therefore, interviews with school principals and online surveys were conducted for parents and teachers to make useful recommendations for teachers and school leaders. From the perspective of the management of educational activities, it is very important to strengthen the relations between the school and the members of the community. Also, the Erasmus+ and eTwinning projects play an extremely important role in the development of pupils' cultural competence. The study revealed the impact and benefits of establishing active partnerships between educational institutions and members of the local or international community. It is also recommended to develop educational projects through which pupils can come into contact with community members to better understand the historical past and cultural heritage of their country. The study is useful for school leaders and teachers interested in developing pupils' cultural competence.

Zusammenfassung

Schlüsselworte:

außerschulische Aktivitäten; eTwinning-Projekte; Erasmus+-Projekte; kulturelle Kompetenz; interkulturelle Kompetenz.

In dieser Studie wurden einige wirksame Empfehlungen für die Entwicklung der kulturellen Kompetenz von Schülern erarbeitet. Wir sind davon ausgegangen, dass die Entwicklung der Fähigkeit der Schüler, mit anderen zusammenzuleben, die beschleunigte Entwicklung der kulturellen Kompetenz der Schüler erleichtert. Daher wurden Interviews mit Schulleitern und Online-Umfragen bei Eltern und Lehrern durchgeführt, um Lehrern und Schulleitern nützliche Empfehlungen zu geben. Aus Sicht des Bildungsmanagements ist es sehr wichtig, die Beziehungen zwischen der Schule und den Mitgliedern der Gemeinschaft zu stärken. Erasmus+- und eTwinning-Projekte spielen auch eine äußerst wichtige Rolle bei der Entwicklung der kulturellen Kompetenz der Schüler. Die Studie hat gezeigt, welche Auswirkungen und Vorteile der Aufbau aktiver Partnerschaften zwischen Bildungseinrichtungen und Mitgliedern der lokalen oder internationalen Gemeinschaft hat. Es wird auch empfohlen, Bildungsprojekte zu entwickeln, durch die Schüler mit Mitgliedern der Gemeinschaft in Kontakt kommen können, um die historische Vergangenheit und das kulturelle Erbe ihres Landes besser zu verstehen. Die Studie ist nützlich für Schulleiter und Lehrer, die an der Entwicklung der kulturellen Kompetenz ihrer Schüler interessiert sind.

1. Introduction

In the European Union, policies in the field of culture have been developed to help protect Europe's cultural heritage and promote shared values through cooperation between cultural institutions in different countries. Actions taken by educational institutions to develop pupils' cultural competence are in line with legislative documents drawn up at the European level and promote appreciation and respect for Europe's cultural heritage, for cultural and linguistic diversity. Educational institutions offer pupils the opportunity to develop their cultural competence and cooperation skills. The subjects included in the "Man and Society" curriculum area are also an important means by which knowledge about the culture and history of the European peoples can be transmitted, through which

the diversity of European culture can be promoted and through which a sense of belonging to the European Union can be developed. The study of foreign languages also helps pupils to initiate intercultural dialogues. Such approaches help pupils to understand the significance of Europe's cultural heritage and to become active citizens capable of taking steps to ensure social well-being. Schools are also a space for developing pupils' creativity. Schools' collaborative projects also facilitate pupils' involvement in intercultural dialogues.

2. Theoretical foundation

Culture is the totality of values, customs of life, and traditions of a people, which are transmitted from



generation to generation. Cultural competence is an integrated system of knowledge, skills, and attitudes formed in formal, non-formal, and informal educational contexts, necessary to accept cultural diversity and to understand the specificity of one's own culture (Chelcea & Iluţ, 2003). Intercultural competence is an integrated system of knowledge, skills, and positive attitudes that ensures effective communication with representatives of other cultures. Some specialists consider that between the two concepts, there is an equivalence relationship. Our teaching approaches are associated with the educational paradigm, in which the pupil is placed at the center educational process. From the present curricular perspective, both emotional and cognitive development are important. "Learn to live together" is the fourth pillar of education (Delors, 1996). School contexts are the main means through which cultural competence can be developed, but family and community members also play an important role in shaping cultural competence. For the development of cultural competence, the disciplines included in curricular areas such as "Language and Communication", "Man and Society", "Counselling and Guidance", "Arts" and "Technologies", the extracurricular activities, and some of the disciplines included in the curriculum at the school's decision play an important role. Cultural-artistic activities (literature, theatre, visual arts, dance, music, folklore, traditions, and customs) contribute significantly to the development of cultural competence. Cultural and artistic activities, as well as didactic activities specific to the subjects in the "Language and Communication" and "Arts" curricular areas, contribute significantly to the development of cultural awareness and artistic expression. From the perspective of the management of educational activities, it is recommended to organize activities that allow the development of pupils' creativity, the expression of ideas, and pupils' experiences through different forms: among which we mention: music, performing arts, literature, and visual arts. Cultural-artistic activities are a favorable opportunity for cultural-artistic education and the development of pupils' creativity. The study "How to Become a Memorable Teacher for Your Pupils?" (Marin et al., 2022) outlines the importance of interactive instruction, the presence of the members of the communities in the school space and the cooperation between more classes of pupils, during the didactic activities.

"Working and living in a global society requires the ability to create interactions and relationships with

people who are different from oneself. It is critical to know how to assess our cultural competency and evaluate our own cultural behaviors" (Rustamova, 2022, p. 6). Intercultural competence refers to intellectual and practical abilities very necessary for the citizens of the future (Deardorff, 2006; Eisenclas & Trevaskes, 2007; Hammer et al., 2003). Educational activities that contribute significantly to the development of cultural competence are based on effective communication between persons from many cultures (Rustamova, 2022). Promotion of diversity in school space is an effective practice with effective benefits on pupils' development (Neves et al., 2023). Also, experiential learning is associated with positive life experiences and effective development (Jackson, 2011). International projects provide pupils with excellent opportunities to develop their cultural competence (Wolff & Borzikowsky, 2018).

3. Research methodology

We have used a nonexperimental design in order to establish the answer to the following questions:

- Which school activities contribute significantly to the development of cultural competence?
- What recommendations can be made from an educational management perspective to facilitate the effective development of cultural competence?

The interview was the method used for collecting data from 30 specialists from the educational field (school principals and coordinators of educational projects and programs). Each of the specialists involved in our research has answered the following questions:

- What should be the main abilities, attitudes, and knowledge of the absolvents, with a high level of development of cultural competence?
- What educational activities could be organized to efficiently develop the cultural competence of the pupils?

We have also administered the questionnaires included in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 to establish which are the school activities that pupils and teachers desire to be initiated in the future. The sample of participants was composed of 44 primary school pupils, 64 gymnasium pupils, 108 high school pupils, and 222 parents.

4. Results

The interview revealed that pupils with a high level of development of cultural competency have

abilities, attitudes, and knowledge as the ones included in Table 1.

Table 1. Abilities, attitudes, and knowledge associated with the fourth pillar of education (Learn to live together)

Attitudes	Abilities	Knowledge
Civic spirit	Ability to empathize	Knowledge of national cultural specificities
Responsibility	Ability to cooperate	Knowledge of cultural diversity
Respect	Ability to manage conflicts	Knowledge about oneself
Tolerance and acceptance	Active listening skills	
Compassion	Flexibility and adaptability	
Empathy	Assertive communication skills	
Gratitude	Creative skills	
Dignity	Planning skills	
Honesty	Digital skills	
Solidarity	Language skills	

All of the persons who have participated in our study agreed that developing the empathy of the pupils and their sense of belonging to a particular culture are the main actions needed to develop children’s competencies needed to live in harmony with others.

Figure 1. Actions needed to form competencies related to the fourth pillar of education (Learn to live together)



Based on the answers provided by the school leaders involved in our research, we have built a model of the progressive development of cultural competence, presented in Figure 2.

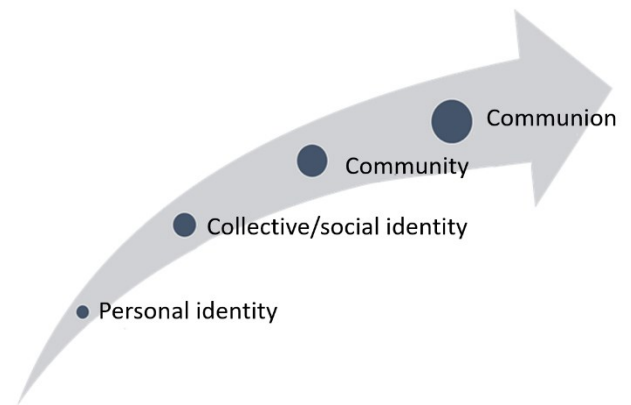
The model presented in Figure 3, outlines that intercultural communication competencies are touching at the highest level of development when there is openness to intercultural dialogue. Communion is the result of building strong and united communities. Valuing this perspective, the didactic activities should be organized with the purpose to

facilitate the understanding of personal identity, to understand the specifics of their local community, and to increase the sense of belonging to a community.

Figure 2. Progressive development of cultural competence



Figure 3. Communion, the result of an effective intercultural dialogue



Our research revealed that are necessary the following didactic approaches, in order to form and develop the cultural competence of our pupils:

- Educational activities through which pupils learn about their traditions, history, and spiritual values;
- Activities through which pupils develop empathy and interpersonal skills;
- Activities in which pupils interact frequently with members of the community;
- Activities that promote European cultural values;
- Activities through which pupils understand differences and similarities between people;
- Experiential learning activities;
- Activities included in international projects (for example eTwinning and Erasmus+ projects).

The questionnaires included in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 were administered to establish the preferences of the pupils regarding the persons that could be invited into the school space and regarding the topic of the activities. Some of the pupils enrolled in the primary and at the gymnasium level mentioned that they enjoy the activities based on the presence of their parents, as guests. Also, most of the high school pupils mentioned they want to know people who had success in life and to learn from their life experiences.

Table 2. Members of the community who could be invited to the educational activities organized in schools

Category of respondents	Category of guests that could be invited to school
Primary school pupils	Police officers, visual artists, military personnel, performance athletes, choreographers, car mechanics, performers, lawyers, psychologists, programmers, magicians, volunteers, priests, mayors, doctors, beekeepers
Gymnasium pupils	Sportsmen and women, veterinarians, first aiders, doctors, mayors, NGO representatives, actors, singers, policemen, writers, entrepreneurs, firemen, experts in various fields, retired teachers, mountaineers, military personnel.
Highschool pupils	University professors, people working at the anti-drug center, contemporary artists or writers, doctors, successful school graduates, nutritionists, fitness instructors, entrepreneurs, judges or lawyers, representatives of environmental NGOs, actors, athletes, psychologists, IT and architecture/design specialists, policemen, education/positive influencers, mayors, singers, entrepreneurs, writers, students, volunteers from various NGOs
Parents	Researchers, coaches, priests

Based on the data collected using the questionnaires included in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2, we have established, that the most attractive activities for all the categories of ages of the pupils are excursions (see Table 3). Other activities mentioned by pupils enrolled at the gymnasium level are risk behaviors prevention activities, legal education activities, and cooking workshops. Also, the high school pupils mentioned that would like to be organized risk behaviors prevention activities, visits to economic agents or institutions nearby, anti-drug activities, art workshops, and programming activities.

Table 3. The ranking of the activities preferred by pupils, considering their age level

The position in the ranking of activities desired by pupils	Primary school level	Gymnasium level	High school level
First place	Excursions	Excursions	Excursions
Second place	School celebrations	Sport activities	Vocational counseling activities
Third place	Environmental protection activities	Environmental protection activities	School celebrations
Fourth place	Sport activities	Financial education activities	Financial education activities
Fifth place	Activities to learn how to live a healthy lifestyle	School celebrations	Volunteering
Sixth place	Road safety education activities	Health education activities	Legal education activities
Seventh place	Activities to help the elderly or children from low-income families	Road safety education activities	Health education activities
Eighth place	Pottery activities	Visits to economic agents or institutions nearby	Environmental protection activities
Ninth place	Volunteering	Volunteering	Road safety education activities

5. Discussions

To develop the cultural competence of our pupils, it is recommended to initiate teaching approaches focused on: intellectual development, personal development, and the development of their socio-relational skills. The results of the study are useful for school leaders and teachers. Based on the results obtained we can affirm that educational activities that can accelerate the process of developing the cultural competence of the children are based on systematic interactions with other persons and are organized in various educational contexts. The main limitation of

the study is related to the number of participants. The list of good practices and recommendations could become larger if many participants had been involved in our research.

6. Conclusions

Based on the results obtained, we can formulate the following recommendations for school principals and teachers:

- is necessary to be initiated actions to strengthen the system of relationships between individuals, groups of individuals, institutional structures, institutions, or organizations, by setting common goals, increasing involvement, mutual motivation and support, collaboration, and assuming mutual responsibilities;
- it is beneficial to include in the calendar of school educational activities very diverse programs, projects or activities, to ensure cooperation between the different areas: social, cultural, artistic, religious, etc.;
- organizing interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary teaching activities by making the most of team teaching and ensuring the interdisciplinary coherence of the curriculum;
- valuing the necessity of developing children's socio-relational competencies, needed in order to live in harmony with others.

Authors note:

Diana-Crina Marin is an associate professor at the Specialized Department with Psycho-Pedagogical Profile of the University of National Academy of Music "Gheorghe Dima" and a primary school teacher at "Pavel Dan" Theoretical High School of Câmpia Turzii. Her research areas are aimed at discovering innovative modalities to consolidate the school-family partnership, considering that the school and family should be real partners in children's education. She is also interested in finding the most efficient teaching practices that could be successfully used in the educational process.

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Appendixes**Appendix 1**

Questionnaire for pupils

Please complete this questionnaire to help us organize educational activities that you will enjoy participating in.

1. Choose one or two areas in which you have achieved outstanding results and in which you feel you are talented. (several answers possible)

- Artistic
- Sports
- Literature
- Scientific
- Mathematical
- Music
- Dance
- Other fields such as:

2. List one or two of your successes so far that you would like your teachers to know about. If you wish, include your full name.

3. eTwinning projects are activities in which pupils from several countries take part in joint activities. Mention the title or theme of a project you would like to be actively involved in.

4. What activities would you like to participate in? (several possible answers)

- Financial education activities
- Volunteering
- School celebrations
- Excursions
- Activities to learn how to live a healthy lifestyle
- Sport activities
- Environmental protection activities
- Road safety activities
- Vocational counseling activities
- Other activities such as:

5. Would you like your most important achievements to be promoted on the school's Facebook page as part of a campaign to promote successful pupils?

- Yes
- No

6. Suggest an activity that could take place after school that you think you and your classmates would enjoy participating in.

7. Would you like to know how smart you are and what your most developed skills are?

- Yes

No Don't know

8. Suggest a guest who you would like to participate in educational activities at school.

9. Suggest other activities you would like to participate in this school year with your classmates.

Appendix 2

Questionnaire for parents

Through this questionnaire, we aim to investigate your opinion about the extracurricular activities you would like to see organized by our teachers in the school year 2022-2023.

1. Please suggest some extracurricular activities that you think would meet your child's interests: (several answers possible)

- School celebrations
- Excursions
- Visits
- Sport activities
- Environmental protection activities
- Road safety education activities
- Health education activities
- Risk behaviors prevention activities
- Financial education activities
- Legal education activities
- Science activities
- Volunteering
- Vocational counseling activities
- Other activities such as:

2. Would you like to be invited as a guest to school activities? If yes, please write your full name and phone number in the field below and indicate what you would be able to talk to pupils about.

3. Please mention the names of people from our community who would be worth participating as guests in the extracurricular activities organized by our school.

4. Give, if appropriate, other examples of activities that could be organized and that meet your child's interests and age (e.g. activities to identify children's abilities, about professions, or career guidance).

5. In which class is your child enrolled?
