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# SOCIO-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOLCHILDREN FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF INTERCULTURAL LEARNING

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### Abstract

The paper "Socio-emotional development of schoolchildren from the perspective of intercultural learning" is based on the applicative dimension, on how to capitalize the relationship between intercultural learning and socio-emotional development of schoolchildren in gymnasium, but also to highlight the complex mechanism of the process of intercultural learning that influences the construction of a consciousness of the educable that develops empathy, tolerance in communication and relationships. This approach aims to present to teachers solutions and methods through which they can capitalize in the teaching activity the connection that exists between intercultural learning and socio-emotional development of students, with direct effects on the adaptation of preadolescents to the culture of global society. Thus, in this process of intercultural learning, the aim is to increase the feeling of personal effectiveness in positive intercultural experiences, which offers the opportunity to know the roots of one's own culture and to reaffirm one's identity, but also to understand and respect cultures with which the educable comes in contact with, giving him space and time to reflect on the need for cooperation and collaboration to solve global problems. This study also took into account the increasing awareness of educables regarding the need for interconnection and adaptation to the requirements of today's society and active involvement in the contexts of intercultural communication through constructive dialogue.

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## 1. Introduction

In the context of the new policies of globalism, the aim is to redefine at the level of social, psychological and emotional dimensions of the identity of the modern individual and the diffusion of identity, in terms of the young generation assuming social responsibilities, by censoring their own needs and interests, through the adaptability and integration in the complex mechanism of the homogenization effects of the society, as well as a dimension of globalization, meant at the societal level to support the individual in order to integrate him more efficiently, but also in his involvement in social and professional partnerships, by developing flexibility, cooperation and collaboration of abilities, in order to support at community level of a socio-economic and political stability. The socio-emotional development of the individual from early childhood and until his adulthood offers the individual the opportunity to stimulate self-knowledge and overcome failures in academic and social life. Self-knowledge contributes to an efficient school orientation, offering the educable the possibility of an adequate career choice, in the context of a professional mobility as dynamic as possible. The context of intercultural learning from one day to other becomes more and more dynamic, it makes the educable aware of its cultural origins and its cultural heritage in order to assume an identity and integrate it as efficiently as possible in society.

In this social dynamic under the influence of globalization policies, a redefinition of the mental infrastructure is considered, and the educable is an integral part of this mechanism, which actively participates in the contextualized process of co-constructing its social identity, learns to prioritize needs and interests, and based on the significant experience being aware of the new structure of the co-construction of its existential reality (Cuc, 2013; 2014; 2020b; 2020c).

## 2. Problem Statement

Pre-adolescent age is an important period in the complex process of individual development, in general, but especially in the process of self-knowledge and socio-emotional development, in the most effective integration at the social level through a good functioning and adaptation to the social environment and establishing optimal interpersonal relationships through the learner's ability to initiate and maintain these relationships under the increasing influence of external pressure. It is the stage in which the educable becomes more and more vulnerable to the cultural models and norms disseminated in the online environment, to the standards that are imposed or are imposed on him, and under this pressure he often defines his social identity, neglecting his interests, needs or one's own qualities and abilities, pursuing in self-knowledge and personal development "ideal" directions of action under the influence of the need for affiliation and interaction with the new social group to which it aims to join. It is the age of initiation, in which the educable seeks and consolidates his self-identity, through new social experiences he accepts his own cognitive, physical, emotional, spiritual or social characteristics, builds and gradually enriches his self-image through a social report, through seeking external stimulation or attention.

If at first the self is inconsistent and often fluctuating, through the interaction of the emotional temperament of the learner with his own social experience and the emotional harmonization of others to the personal experience of the learner, his emotional development is achieved, because "attachment relationships and social and academic achievements are considered to be direct promoters of emotional

development and self-organization...regulation of affect is considered an essential aspect of development” (Greenberg et al., 2020, p.193). The preadolescent in his own journey of social initiation is looking for new social models, which he selects and relates to his own standards, requirements, needs and interests. These models are experienced by him passed through the filter of comparison and placed for the foundation of the ideal self. Thus, the self of the educable is identified with the complex mechanism of the process of self-organization, which from individual to individual receives a particular structure. In this context, the cultural diversity in the school supports intercultural dialogue, but also intercultural learning which is a complex and dynamic process between cultures favoring the development of higher self-regulation, but also a change within self-organization, and over time identifies to the educable a functional self, with irrelevant conflicts and tensions, without maladaptive emotional reactions or emotion disorder.

### **3. Research Questions**

In a society in which we are connected to the phenomenon of globalization and implicitly to the effects that it has at political, economic, social, but also cultural level the school institution through the policies started in the educational system, but also the strategies established at institutional level comes to answer specific needs of society, but taking into account the dynamics of change and the new society redefined in terms of diversity, we propose that research be guided by the question:

To what extent are the principles of intercultural learning applied in the socio-emotional development of gymnasium students, in order to actively integrate at the social level, but also to develop lifestyle management skills to increase the quality of lifestyle?

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

In a society rebuilt based on the policies of globalism, in which labor migration from Romania is motivated by the search for a job, by building a better life for the family, the effects of this phenomenon leave their mark on cognitive, physical and socio-emotional development of learners. In this process in which one or both parents migrate, the family system is disrupted in its functionality, and children are left in the care of extended family members, who leave their mark on the school adaptation of students left in the country, but also on their socio-emotional development by losing the behavioral patterns of parents and diminishing and even inefficiency of the supervision process. Parents' departure triggers chain reactions from learners: somatic reactions, behavioral problems, most often inhibitory behaviors or behavioral disorders, feelings of vulnerability and guilt, confusion, banal or violent reactions to fundamental life problems, self-criticism, stress, anxiety or depression, and they are even stronger at the age when gymnasium students are looking for social identity, but also the development of the individual's ability to confront and cope with internal conflicts. In this new social-informational environment, generation z lives and builds its identity in a modern, dynamic society, open to a massive industrialization and technologicalization, increasing social mobility and urbanization policies so prominent in the lives of parents and implicitly theirs, the new online media of communication and interpersonal relationships offer them multiple possibilities to choose, manage alternative solutions and get out of a stereotypical

approach to the decision-making process started. The new lifestyle "identified" in the online learning environment, leaves its mark on cognitive and socio-emotional development, with psychological and psychosocial consequences, it is lost in the virtual environment so vast, is overwhelmed by the multitude of information, and becomes a Don Quijote, who is in a constant search for new and new information, relevant or not, regardless of their quality, becomes a Sisyphus of self-knowledge, who in his path of initiation discovers new ways to differentiate himself from other seekers of self-identity, to build a motivational system and to develop a strong sense of self-efficacy, but also strategies for controlling events that affect them life. In the context of the increase of intercultural interactions, the educables of generation z "influenced by the fight against terrorism, by the global recession, have made a mutation in the plane of communication and relations, which also attracts new changes in the level of cultural managed contents" (Cuc, 2020, p. 178), found that communication and interpersonal relationships differ depending on values, conventions, social behavioral habits and it is necessary to increase interaction with members of the host culture, but also intercultural training, an integral part of the intercultural learning process for learners (Marian, 2013).

## **5. Research Methods**

### **5.1. Research objectives**

Having as a starting point the new directions of research development on the contacts between cultures, but also the dynamics of research in developmental psychology and lifespan psychology, we considered the way in which under the influence of the family, historical, social and cultural context the educable builds self-awareness and develops effective emotional self-regulation, the fundamental role that emotions play in social and professional life. Intercultural relations have highlighted the fact that barriers to communication and intercultural relations are linked not only to verbal or nonverbal communication, but also to the development of noncognitive skills in individuals, a concept targeted from the perspective of the national curriculum and curriculum design based on recommended key competencies by the Council of the European Union, "they respond to the need for inclusive and sustainable growth, social cohesion and further development of democratic culture" (Recommendation 2018 / C 189/01, p.7).

The aim of the research was the analysis of the main elements of the intercultural learning process that contribute to the socio-emotional development of gymnasium students.

1. Studying the extent to which teachers apply in the instructive-educational activity the aims of intercultural learning in order to develop socio-emotionally the students of the gymnasium cycle and their active integration at social level;
2. Highlighting the possible solutions advanced by teachers in order to overcome barriers in the intercultural learning process, with lasting effects.

The study represents a pedagogical diagnosis on the different approach to intercultural learning in order to develop socio-emotional skills among learners by reference to certain indicators: human resources (initial and continuing training, professional skills, specializations), educational services, products and resources that promote the relationship school-educable -family -community, new access technologies. The objectives of the research are supported by formulating the working hypothesis.

## 5.2. Research hypothesis

Acquiring the necessary resources to develop socio-emotional skills in the context of intercultural learning and practicing the mobilization of these resources by students in gymnasium determines the positive reaction to streamlining their social relationships.

In the pedagogical research we considered the operation of sampling the subjects, so the sample of subjects was composed of 60 subjects, based on the simple random sampling technique, teachers from pre-university education, who came from six institutions and related structures, with a cultural diversity of the school population. In order to describe the sample of subjects, the following were taken into account: initial training and continuous training, completion of psycho-pedagogical training programs, seniority in the institution where he is holder, seniority in the education system and seniority in the speciality, but also teaching degree obtained. In accordance with the research objectives, the working methods and tools were established, through which to ensure the sustainability of the ascertaining research, the sample of subjects involved in pedagogical research through the technique of semi-standardized and non-standardized interview offered suggestions and opinions on the issues they face. In the educational environment, they managed the questions in the questionnaire in the possibility of the time they can allocate, offering possible solutions with lasting effects in order to overcome barriers at the level of intercultural learning and socio-emotional development of learners. The pedagogical research also used the method of researching curricular documents and other school documents, but also the tools and research methods used in data collection, whose analysis to validate the hypothesis.

## 6. Findings

Following the analysis of the data obtained from the sample of subjects, the results of the pedagogical research were drawn, based on which the conclusions of the research were formulated. In the initiated research, the proposed goal was achieved, and the analysis and interpretation of research data, provided new directions of action in designing an educational intervention program tailored to the age characteristics of gymnasium students, but also taking into account the issues they face in self-knowledge and personal development, in general, but also in order to acquire socio-emotional skills, in particular, necessary in initiating and maintaining efficient social and constructive relationships, for resolute management necessary to increase the quality of individual and social life of learners (Băban, 2011; Boncu & Ceobanu, 2013; Cuc, 2019a; 2019b; 2019c; Dafinoiu & Boncu, 2014; Lemeni & Miclea, 2010; Lovin, 2018; Lupu, 2013; Modrea, 2006; Neculau, 2004; Pânișoară, 2011; Pânișoara et al., 2016). The objectives of the research were correlated with the research hypothesis, this was confirmed by emphasizing the coherence and validity of the pedagogical intervention.

The research also aimed the increasing availability of teachers to be actively involved in educational approaches which aim the familiarization of educables with the principles of intercultural learning: cultural relativism and the principle of reciprocity, through which gymnasium students were familiarized with equal status for all cultures, with the mechanism of connection that exists between them, based on moral and social responsibility, cooperation and collaboration, which supports the desire that cultural diversity at the global level is a value in itself for humanity in all that is the complex mechanism

of freedom, democracy and implicitly, of nationalism. From this point of view, intercultural learning becomes a dynamic process, of connection between cultures, where each individual is connected to the other, learns from the other, but also together with the other, from his entire historical and social experience. Thus, a percentage of 83.33% of the interviewees highlighted that they are concerned in the educational approach with the development of the mechanism of sociopsychological adaptation in educables, through which they achieve a balance between internal and external activity and living conditions, but also the environment of development, all contributing to the increase their adaptive potential; also the teachers affirmed the need for in the educational activities to develop the empathy skills with other cultures, because ethnorelativism develops on the desideratum of accepting the cultural difference and knowing one's own values, representing for the individual the stage towards his social adaptation. Developing this solution a percentage of 75% of the interviewees underlined the fact that the adaptation for the educable represents an assumed process, in which it coming in contact with different values, behaviors, visions on the society, unconditionally accepts his own person and those around, but for this, it is necessary for the educable to learn to accept himself with imperfections and values, realizing that his own perception of the other and his unconditional acceptance is influenced by his own culture and the experience of learning and training gained. Also, 91.66% of the respondents stated that in the Romanian society where the events have become more intense and more dynamic, because "Romania continues to be an emigration country, the phenomenon of emigration being the second biggest cause of the usually resident population decline" (Press Release No. 212, 2019, p.2), empathy in the process of intercultural learning is the ability by which the learner adopts the perspective of the other from another culture, understands why he lives a certain emotion towards a value, can communicate intelligible the experience and emotion he feels in the new cultural environment, the development of this ability gives him the openness to acculturation.

The phenomenon of parental migration in Romania has attracted both negative and positive consequences, multiplied opportunities for family members, led to high living standards, increasing the economic and social status of the family, the purchasing power of the family, access to high standards education system, reduced the unemployment rate, etc., these were moderating factors on the development of children left at home. From the contacts that educables have with parents who have emigrated to developed countries, but also the experience of travelers abroad in the new cultural environment, it offers them a new perspective of learning based on cultural differences, facing new values, behavioral patterns, new ways of interpersonal communication and relationship, which involves the development of realistic self-assessment skills of one's own characteristics for the development of emotional and behavioral self-regulation mechanisms in different communication and relationship contexts. From this point of view, 88.33% of the respondents emphasized that it is necessary to train and improve socio-emotional skills in gymnasium students, it becomes a continuous process for them, which requires for teachers monitoring and for students practice and monitoring. The same percentage highlights the consequences of poor functioning of educables in the educational and social environment, facilitated by the reduced capacity for self-knowledge and effective self-regulation of the individual, difficulties that gymnasium students feel, in general and especially, the consequences of migration, separation, the inability to cope with the specific demands and difficulties of pre-adolescence, requiring the identification

of resilience factors that can contribute to their school and social adaptation. The data provided by the respondents in the survey based on the written questionnaire and the survey based on the interview also provided information about the difficulties encountered by educables in developing the social and emotional skills necessary for more effective cultural integration, a process of emotional and intellectual stimulation: 81.66% are anchored in identifying specific strategies for experiential intercultural learning (Kolb, 1984), in terms of building a concrete experience of the educable, the interviewees use guided imagery, metaphors, interdisciplinary team teaching, didactic films, applying the topics taught to personal situations and discussions in working groups; In the stage of reflective observation, interactive methods are used, the reflection diary, the creation of a motivational mental image, Sapiro's tree or brainstorming that aim to raise awareness and understand the complex process of self-image construction, self-compassion, awareness of how to activate motivation, in order to achieve personal goals, emotional self-awareness, etc. ; the abstract conceptualization is revealed in the didactic activity through analogies, the reading of some therapeutic stories, following as objectives the management of problematic situations that tend, at educable, to favor the appearance of maladaptive thoughts and dysfunctional emotions, but also emotional and behavioral self-regulation; active experience in the educational approach is designed through role-playing games, projects, case studies aiming the active involvement of learners in order to gain an overview of the complex emotions experienced in different contexts, understanding how the other's opinion, but also personal opinion influences a context, increasing the level of comfort in communication and interaction, setting priorities on the work agenda, etc.

Also in the new context of online learning, online guided tours by teachers, specialists in the field invited on educational platforms have ensured students in gymnasium to develop prosocial behaviors of tolerance, empathy, help and collaboration, a high degree of familiarity with the language and literature of a culture, ensuring a high level of understanding of customs and rituals, learning the differences between one's own culture and another culture, of the ways of communication and relationship with individuals whose cultural reports are totally different in terms of values, principles or patterns of behavior.

The solutions advanced by the respondents are the psychological and educational counseling activities that integrated in the school institutions follow the need of self-knowledge and personal development of the students from the gymnasium, of ego strengthening, of psychosocial adaptation and intercultural integration. From this point of view, in addition to the optimal functioning of the educable from a physiological, somatic, mental point of view, and the optimization of its functioning at emotional and social level, to prevent self-doubt in students, risky behaviors assumed in the educational or community environment, conflicts of communication and interpersonal relationships, emotional self-regulation in the decision-making process, overcoming crisis situations, etc.

The data and information obtained from the interviewees in the interview-based survey highlighted the need to streamline the initial and continuing training of teachers, a problem that specialists seek solutions at both macro and micro level, by diversifying training programs, which to meet the needs and professional interests of teachers in the education system, in order to ensure the quality of the education process, in a blended learning and online education system, adapted to the characteristics of the context of the COVID - 19 pandemic both globally and nationally, pursuing "the development of didactic competence and digital skills, in order to adapt the teaching strategies and teaching means specific to the

physical school to the particularities and requirements of the virtual school, complementary to the physical school” (Order No. 4862/2020, art. 2, paragraph 4). Interviewees stated that an analysis is needed focused on the particularities that teachers face in the daily work of the virtual school, in the new context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the elimination of prejudices and stereotypes, labeling, lack of interest in concerns and the needs of the other lead to defensive reactions and generalizations that affect the ethnic or minority group, and unfavorable experiences lead to the formation of prejudices and stereotypes related to the minority or social group. Thus, 80% of teachers highlighted the moral, social and professional responsibility for promoting the mental, emotional, social and spiritual health of learners and ensuring well-being throughout the educational process, and the attitude it has towards a minority group or a disadvantaged social group, the way it communicates and relates, manages a conflict with students from socially disadvantaged groups is an example for learners, from this point of view it is necessary to realize that it makes a transfer of patterns, stereotypes to learners. From this point of view, the interviewees highlighted as a solution - the quality that the teacher needs to have in professional relationships with students in gymnasium, the teacher-coach, who in his teaching evaluates the behavior of the learner, designs personalized intervention programs, but does not judge his behavior, in the counseling approach supports him, has an attitude of unconditional acceptance, collaborates and cooperates in the development of decision-making skills, assumes responsible role and respects deontological principles and norms, has a positive thinking focusing on the development of the learner's self-image and the development of his personal skills and abilities, and the support of an efficient communication between the teacher-student is the active listening, but also the management of questioning techniques to students, which makes preadolescents aware of their own feelings, thoughts, behaviors, attitudes, beliefs or conflicts of social maladaptation, is aware of the crisis situations they are going through and the alternative ways to adopt them in order to manage them, the potential they have in clarification of personal values. In the solutions that the teachers drew, they emphasized the function of the teacher - coach by “providing a supportive feedback” (Pânișoară, 2009, p.281) to the educables in order to increase the social responsibility, to be aware of the impact that emotions have on the decision-making act, the development of decision-making skills with a direct effect on personal life, but also the development of a positive attitude towards learning and knowledge, in order to achieve constructive interests. In the current educational context, the respondents highlighted the need to focus on continuing professional development programs focused on distance learning, online courses for developing digital skills, in order to adapt teaching strategies for intercultural learning to the specific features and requirements of virtual school, by familiarizing teachers with the functionality of educational platforms and the advantages of these platforms in the intercultural learning process, which can promote international exchanges between students, but also for teachers; promoting through online platforms conferences, workshops, meetings with specialists in the field of professional development of respondents, aiming the quality of professional training, but implicitly also the quality of didactic design in the process of intercultural learning in the new online environment.

Also, the provision by technical specialists in the field of new technologies of technical support, manuals and digital working tools, diversified teaching material for online intercultural learning, by creating multimedia and interactive educational platforms for e-learning on schooling cycles, area

curriculum and discipline, which should ensure the storage of teaching experiences in an online educational platform in order to ensure examples of good pedagogical practices, information of the latest generation, both for teachers and for educables.

## 7. Conclusion

In the context of new educational paradigms, it is necessary to manage through Educational Platforms intervention programs aimed to streamline the intercultural learning process for gymnasium students, by dynamizing the individual value system and the selection and processing the acquired experiences, tolerance and empathy in communication and relationships. Thus, it is necessary for educables to develop the capacity for contextual assessment, by developing the skills to cope with change in different contexts and cultural situations, thus leading to reduced risk behaviors by solving emotional problems and conflict situations in an inappropriate way. Thus, resolution skills allow students to manage not only risk situations, but also to ensure a high level of individual and social quality of life. Also through personal self-reflection, the teacher awares the educable of the final stage of intercultural integration, constructive marginality (Bennett, 1993; 2004), which approached in a global society, prepares the future young person to act dynamically, to adapt to diversity, complexity and interconnection developing their ability to act autonomously and flexibly within these global communities by relating to the diversity and complexity of promoting visions on new realities of the world, globality. This exercise of good practices was promoted for the efficiency of educable communities specific to intercultural educational institutions, in order to develop mechanisms of emotional and behavioral self-regulation, to develop a high self-esteem through which the preadolescent can be involved in community activities, by assuming responsibilities in educational and social tasks, identifying in the fields of activity in which he is competent to manage the solution of new tasks, thus developing the feeling of self-efficacy in the educational and social environment.

In this dynamic of globalization, it is necessary to acquire effective intercultural learning strategies based on cooperation and competition, can lead to a better understanding of the cultures of global society, to the recognition of the common heritage of values, where borders and differences between cultures are found among educables in terms of the value they place on school learning and the expectations related to the results of the intercultural learning process through which educables will be able to adapt to diversity, complexity and interconnection with new global communities, but also to social interrelationships.

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