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APPROACHING NON-FORMAL EDUCATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF COMPETENCES

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This article addresses the issue of valorizing on the concept of "competence" in the non-formal education system. The notions of "non-formal education" and "extracurricular education" are broadly defined, the emphasis being on the approach to non-formal and, specifically, extracurricular education from the perspective of competences. The advantages of this approach are argued and a classification of competences for this education system is proposed.

Keywords: *non-formal education, non-formal learning, extracurricular education, extracurricular learning, key competences, general competences, specific competences, fields, and profiles of extracurricular education.*

ABORDAREA EDUCAȚIEI NONFORMALE DIN PERSPECTIVA COMPETENȚELOR

În articol este abordată problema valorificării conceptului de „competență” în sistemul de educație nonformală. Sunt definite pe larg noțiunile „educație nonformală”, „educație extrașcolară”, accentul fiind pus pe abordarea educației și învățământului nonformal și, la concret, extrașcolar din perspectiva competențelor. Se argumentează avantajele acestei abordări și se propune o clasificare a competențelor pentru acest sistem de educație.

Cuvinte-cheie: *educație nonformală, învățământ nonformal, educație extrașcolară, învățământ extrașcolar, competențe-cheie, competențe generale, competențe specifice, domenii și profiluri ale educației extrașcolare.*

Introduction

In the specialised literature, but also in the educational practice with reference to education outside the classroom and official institutions, several terms are applied: “*non-formal education*”, “*extracurricular education*”, “*extracurricular learning*”, “*complementary education*”, “*free time education*”, “*education outside the classroom*”, etc.

As there are several points of view on the concepts “*non-formal education*”, “*extracurricular education*”, “*extracurricular learning*”, but also in order to ensure a coherent and relevant perception of the terminological framework, it is necessary to explain and delimit these notions:

- ***Non-formal education*** – general form of education and an integral part of education in a broad social sense.
- ***Extracurricular education*** – specific form of student education, but also organised and managed process, in order to form and develop students' personality, carried out in educational institutions and extracurricular education, being an integral part of non-formal education (part of a whole).
- ***Extracurricular learning*** – system, process, and purpose of education, training and personality development of students and an integral part of extracurricular education in a broad pedagogical sense.
- ***Education outside the classroom*** (in the narrow pedagogical sense) – an activity of training some qualities, attitudes, concrete features of the student's personality and an integral part of extracurricular education.

When it is necessary to delimit or concretize the notions “*extracurricular education*” in a broad pedagogical sense, “*extracurricular learning*” applies the combination of “***education and extracurricular learning***” [1].

At the same time, it should be noted that the Council of Europe and the European Union recommend the term “*non-formal education*” as a basic one. In this context, the competent European structures focus on classifying the forms of education (formal, non-formal, informal) on the answers (criteria) to the following **questions** (criteria):

- ? Is the educational process carried out within the school education system?
- ? Are there official confirmations of study (diplomas)?
- ? Is there a well-defined educational purpose?

The concept of non-formal education and development directions

At the beginning of the 21st century, three **tendencies regarding the development of non-formal education were confirmed** at the European level: (1) Non-formal education is carried out outside the formal education

system; (2) Non-formal education is opposed to formal education; (3) Non-formal education has some similarities/elements of formal education.

At the same time, three **concepts of non-formal education are highlighted**: (1) *Non-formal education has the function of recovering the "gaps" of formal education*; (2) *Non-formal education has the function of complementing formal education*; (3) *Non-formal education has its own specific functions and purposes* (which obviously do not contradict those of formal education).

For a comprehensive approach to the concept of non-formal education and to establish the development guidelines of this system from the perspective of competences, it is necessary to identify the main characteristics and methodological options [2].

Therefore, researchers Constantin Cucos [3] and Florica Orțan [4] consider that **the main characteristics of non-formal education** are:

- non-formal education is facultative or optional;
- the actions included in this area are characterised by great flexibility, offering a better possibility to fold on the interests and abilities of the trainees;
- the main activities that can be included in non-formal education are the extracurricular ones (improvement, retraining, etc.), respectively post-school ones (visits to museums, excursions, school camps, participation in clubs or scientific circles, watching drama shows, etc.);
- trainees are involved in the design, organisation, and implementation of these activities;
- the evaluation of results obtained as a result of these activities is not rigorous and is not done by grades (with the exception of the Schools of Music, Arts and Fine Arts in the case of the Republic of Moldova);
- non-formal education allows the widening of the cultural horizon, the enrichment of knowledge in certain fields, the development of special skills and interests;
- the activities included in non-formal education can be financed through various sources and modalities;
- non-formal education can be a help for those with special needs to access normal schooling;
- the activities are organised by specialists/animators who benefit from adequate training for this purpose;
- non-formal education creates new opportunities for the gradual development of students' competences, which correlate with their own interests and skills.

Thus, for example, for M. Marinescu [5, p.29] the conceptual "non-formalist", which is the basis of the term used today, refers to something outside the forms established in an organised way for a certain mode of activity. With reference to the educational phenomenon, the author refers to those educational activities that are designed and carried out outside the institutional framework and which, thus, assign a facultative or optional character. Given that such activities are not included in the normative and mandatory documents of the educational institution, they are less rigorous and official, they can also be called "out-of-school/extracurricular activities". It is equally true, however, that the activities specific to extracurricular (non-formal) education can also be organised by other institutions, whose main purpose is not necessarily education (e.g., church, mass media, non-governmental associations, etc.) [6, p.10].

From the above, it can be seen that the analysis of non-formal education characteristics is done by referring to the formal, institutionalised one. On the one hand, non-formal education is much more flexible and open in relation to the interests and possibilities of the trainee, the pedagogical design of extracurricular activities is less formalised, being oriented, rather, towards interdisciplinarity and permanent education. The didactic evaluation is non-formalised, taking into account what the trainee can do with the acquired knowledge, and the costs necessary for extracurricular activities are lower compared to those of formal education. On the other hand, despite such an approach, non-formal and formal education are interdependent, in the sense that the former provides an excellent framework for training students' competences in the context of formalized teaching activities offered by the educational institution. Non-formal education, thus, creates a good opportunity for trainees to develop certain domain-specific competences and transversal competences necessary for daily life by optimally combining the knowledge, attitudes, and values acquired in the classroom with the real situations in which they must be applied. Here are just a few reasons why, although less formal, non-formal education has a special formative impact on the trainee and must always be promoted by all agencies with educational responsibilities [7, p.101].

According to the cited authors, there are four **methodological options for achieving extracurricular education**: (1) *focused on content, in the case of the Republic of Moldova, on fields (arts, sports, culture, technologies, etc.)*; (2) *focused on problems of daily life, usually on profiles*; (3) *focused on awareness of the need to know and respect the fundamental rights of the individual*; (4) *focused on the problems of humanities education – the formation of a correct image about one's own person, confidence in one's own capacities of initiative, insertion, and decision, etc.*

The analysis of these characteristics and methodological options ensures the non-formal approach as a flexible and creative way of achieving education, complementary to that produced in the official framework of educational institutions. Non-formal education comes to support the formal one, offering those interested either the opportunity to improve in a field they are already familiar with or to discover a new field, still unexplored. Moreover, through non-formal education, the subject has greater freedom of decision on the field of action, but also of work strategies, thus responding better to personal interests and generating intrinsic motivation. All these elements make the impact of non-formal education on the individual stronger than that of formal education [8, p.30].

Analysing the literature, we can draw attention to at least two aspects of utmost importance. First of all, the target group of extracurricular education is represented by persons interested in improving themselves in a field in which they have already had an initial training offered by a specialised institution, but which they cannot complete in a formal framework, persons interested in accessing a new field that corresponds to their concerns, respectively vulnerable people to whom the educational institution can no longer provide proper education. Secondly, the variety of activities that can be included in extracurricular education is extremely diverse, covering artistic, sports, entrepreneurial training, literacy, pre-vocational training outside the educational institution, respectively students with special educational needs, different community development programmes or subsumed to new educations, etc.

Therefore, extracurricular education designates an educational reality that is less substantiated but has a special formative character. In addition, the activities proposed in extracurricular education are characterised by diversity and flexibility, while responding to the interests and options of trainees. As we have found, a relationship of complementarity and interdependence is established between the two mentioned forms of education (to which the informal one is added) through activities organised outside the classroom (circles, contests, Olympics, other artistic manifestations, cultural, sports, etc.) and those organised outside the general education institution (visits, excursions, camps, exhibitions, creative centres, etc.).

Extracurricular education complements the activity of the general education institution or the education realised in the family. This allows the deepening of knowledge and the development of competences in the areas of interest of trainees, respectively the cultivation of their interests, trends, and talents for certain fields. It allows the efficient and pleasant use of the trainees' free time, the development of associative life and of the cooperation capacities in solving some complex tasks, the formation of the positive personality traits, etc. Also, extracurricular education allows the involvement of trainees in optional activities to a greater extent than curricular activities would allow [9].

In this sense, it is important to establish the factors that influence the opinion of trainees to participate in various activities of extracurricular education, offered by formal education institutions and extracurricular education institutions.

Starting from the concept of learner-centred education, students' interest in the proposed subject can be seen as a dominant factor. Another factor that motivates the choice of extracurricular activities is related to the educational offer of general education institutions or extracurricular education institutions: sports, culture, art, etc.

One of the most important factors in choosing extracurricular activities is the impact that extracurricular education has on the development of the student's personality.

It is considered that the effects of extracurricular education are beneficial for the development of the student's personality, contributing to the optimisation of learning outcomes, to the increase of activism and the process of involvement in various institutional and community activities, etc.

An important factor in motivating trainees to participate in extracurricular activities is related to the psycho-pedagogical experience of teachers, providers of extracurricular educational services.

In general, we can see that extracurricular education has an extremely important role in the formation of a harmonious and balanced personality, which aims to ensure the most vigorous support for formal education

through its complementary actions. The resonance of extracurricular education on the psycho-intellectual and psycho-affective sphere of trainees depends on the way in which it manages to correspond to the needs and particularities of each person. In this sense, by its very nature, extracurricular education is extremely flexible and adaptable, and the premises are encouraging [8, p.28].

Taking into account the need to link extracurricular/non-formal education to *the National Curriculum Framework* [10] and *the Extracurricular Education and Learning Framework* [11], it is obvious that the reorganisation of extracurricular education for the training of competences in students is an indisputable fact.

The concept of competency in the extracurricular education system

Competency is defined as an integrated system of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values, acquired, trained, and developed through learning, whose mobilisation allows the identification and solving of different problems in various contexts and situations [12, p.19].

J. Henry and V. Cormier state that competency is: *complex* – it integrates knowledge, strategies, skills, attitudes in a complex process of manifestations; mobilises cyclically and repeatedly, in increasingly complex contexts, a process that requires all its components simultaneously, so competency develops gradually; *relative* – although it is an outcome of education, competency never obtains a final formula, being developed continuously throughout life; *potential* – unlike a performance, which can be measured or ascertained and refers to the past or present, the competency can be designed and evaluated, the possibility of its mobilisation generating different performances in the future, in different contexts of independent learning; *exercised in a certain situation* – it develops gradually by changing the educational situations; *transferable* – applies in new situations (changing means or improving procedures); *conscious and associated with needs and intentions* – includes the idea of finality and can be managed by the one who holds it, thus advancing in metacognition (self-knowledge, Socratic) [13].

In the context of its definitions and characteristics, we bring the following terminological concretions. Competency, in its various forms of manifestation and complexity, represents as finality: a measurable result obtained within the educational process; a projected goal (what the teacher intends to achieve in the educational process); a terminal goal (what the student must achieve in the educational process); a learning objective (what the student actually acquired).

Depending on the purpose/result, the competency is presented in at least two forms: a) of process – carrying out actions, activities; b) of product of the learning act: projects, models, schemes, poems, etc.

In the psychological sense, competency is a complex, inextricable, indivisible, inoperable behavioural acquisition [14, p.6].

In the context of this approach, competences for extracurricular (non-formal) education are deduced from the system of key competences for lifelong learning.

Key/transversal competences are an essential curricular category. Defined at a high level of abstraction and generalisation, they record the expectations of society, aiming at both the school career of children/students as a whole and the most general performances that should be achieved by them at the end of schooling (of some levels of schooling), including through extracurricular (non-formal) education.

Key/transversal competences are the expression of educational policy options, as well as of the type of personality that is proposed to be formed.

At the same time, the key/transversal competences are stipulated in the following documents, which reflect the development trends at the international level: New Recommendations of European Council on Key Competences (22 May 2018); Report of International Commission on Education in the 21st Century, UNESCO Recommendations, etc.

Key competences are those competences that all citizens need for personal fulfilment and development, employment, social inclusion, a sustainable lifestyle, a successful life in peaceful societies, a life management that takes into account issues related to health and active citizenship. They are developed from the perspective of lifelong learning, from early childhood and throughout adulthood, through formal, non-formal, and informal learning in all contexts, including family, school, workplace, neighbourhood and other communities.

All key competences are considered equally important; each of them contributes to a successful life in society. Competences can be applied in different contexts and in different combinations. They overlap and intertwine; key aspects in one area can support skills in another area. Skills such as critical thinking, problem-

solving, teamwork, communication, and negotiation skills, analytical skills, creativity and intercultural skills are an integral part of key competences (Council of Europe Recommendations on Key Competencies for Lifelong Learning, Brussels, 22 May 2018).

Literacy competences are the synergy of cognitive skills (identifying, understanding, expressing, creating, and interpreting concepts, facts, phenomena, feelings, opinions), communication skills and establishing connections with other people. Literacy, in this context, is the basis for further learning, linguistic and social interaction. Literacy skills are largely in line with "functional knowledge".

Multilingual competences are related to the use of several languages in an appropriate and effective way to communicate. They are largely related to literacy, based on the ability to understand, express and interpret concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts, and opinions, both orally and in writing (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), in different situations of social and cultural life according to each one's wishes and needs. Multilingual competences integrate the linguistic, historical, and intercultural components and are based on the ability to act as a mediator in case of differences in languages and communication media (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages).

Competences in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics

Competences in science, technology, and engineering involve understanding the changes caused by human activity and the responsibility of every citizen and include the basic principles of nature, scientific concepts, theories, fundamental methods, technological products and processes, and understanding the impact of science, technology, engineering and of human activities in general on nature.

Competences in the field of mathematics are defined as the ability to develop and use mathematical thinking and reasoning to solve problems in different contexts.

Competences in this category include critical analysis and curiosity skills, a concern for ethical issues and support for both safety and environmental sustainability.

Competences in the field of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics are developed during general education (and throughout life) starting with early education in *Science and Technology*, then with *Science* in primary classes and continues with the study of special disciplines (autonomous or integrated) – mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, computer science, etc. (see competences specific to school subjects).

Digital competences involve the correct, critical and responsible use of digital technologies, as well as their use for learning and active participation in social life. These include information literacy and data processing, communication and collaboration in digital environments, media literacy, digital content creation (including programming), digital security (including digital welfare and computer security competences), intellectual property issues, problem-solving and critical thinking.

Personal, social, and learning-to-learn competences involve self-reflection, effective time management, information, constructive teamwork, maintaining resilience and managing one's own learning and career process, sustaining physical and emotional well-being, maintaining good physical and mental health, conflict management.

Citizenship competences require the ability to act as a responsible citizen, to participate fully in civic and social life, based on an understanding of social, economic, legal and political concepts and structures, as well as global developments and sustainability.

Entrepreneurial competences refer to the ability to act in relation to opportunities, ideas, intentions and to turn them into values for others.

They focus on creativity, critical thinking, problem solving, initiative, and perseverance, collaboration and activity in order to plan and manage cultural, social, or financial problems.

Cultural awareness and expression competences involve understanding and respecting the way ideas and meanings are formulated and communicated creatively in different cultures and through a range of arts and other cultural forms. At the same time, they involve participating in understanding, developing, and expressing one's own ideas and feelings of belonging or role in society in various ways and contexts [15].

In summary, we can say that **the key competency**, in this form of presentation is the source and means of designing general competences, but also specific for extracurricular (non-formal) education, one or more of them being a priority for a field or another of extracurricular (non-formal) education.

In this context, the competences for extracurricular education are structured on general and specific competences. In turn, the general competences are structured on the fields: CULTURE and SOCIETY; ART;

SCIENCE. TECHNIQUE. TECHNOLOGIES and SPORT, TOURISM and RECREATION, and the specific competences are structured on the profiles corresponding to these fields of extracurricular education:

- ✓ CULTURE and SOCIETY Domain: *Social-pedagogical* profile and *Social-psychological* profile include content areas, such as leisure education, mass media education, environmental education, personal development, communication culture, skills, and life abilities, etc. The activities are carried out on the basis of complex development centres, in debate clubs, associations in the field of life skills development, circles, clubs of future pedagogues/psychologists, etc.; *Socio-economic* profile includes content areas, such as: civic education, social education, economic education, financial education, home education, etc. and aims at preparing young people for economic practices, social and financial inclusion, guidance in the world of goods and the labour market, etc.; *Intercultural, ethnocultural* profile includes content areas, such as intercultural education, ethnocultural education (ancestral customs and traditions), folk crafts, ethnography and folklore, communication culture, school museums, etc.; *Democracy and human rights* profile – it largely includes new education; *Ethnography* profile includes content areas, such as European countries and capitals, European history, European geography, culture and civilization, etc. The activities aim to broaden knowledge about the geography and history of Europe, European and world cultures and civilizations, ethnography, etc. and take place on the basis of group walking tours, trips, excursions, studying the homeland history and culture.
- ✓ ART Domain: *Music* profile; *dramatic/theatrical art, cinematography* profile; *Choreographic art* profile; *Plastic/visual arts, decorative* profile.
- ✓ SCIENCE. TECHNIQUE. TECHNOLOGIES Domain: **Mathematics and science** profile - consists of content areas, such as mathematics, science and technology (computer science, chemistry, astronomy, etc.). Non-formal training activities in these fields are carried out in interest groups, in circles of physics, chemistry, astronomy, mathematics, information technology, etc.; **Ecological-biological sciences** profile includes content fields, such as natural sciences, ecology, biology, chemistry, geography, etc.; the activities are carried out on the basis of clubs/circles of young naturalists, young ecologists, young biologists, chemists, associations that study nature; **Technical sciences** profile includes the activity that takes place within the circles of technical creation: aircraft modelling, ship modelling, car modelling, radioelectronics, carting, cinema, photo, video, etc.; **Information and communication technology** profile includes activities of using computers and ICT systems, programming and modelling of ICT systems, etc.; **Artistic modelling** profile; **Decorative collages; culinary art and health; creative recycling; folk crafts etc.** include modelling, cooking, crocheting, embroidery, pottery, etc.
- ✓ SPORT, TOURISM and ENTERTAINMENT: **Recreational sports** profile – the sport for all, which includes content areas, such as table tennis, football, volleyball, basketball, badminton, chess, etc. The activities are carried out for recreational purposes, based on health strengthening and initial training groups, preparing groups through training; **Applied sports** profile - forms of sports - applied exercises that include: applied routes/applied games; elements of sports/walking tourism; applied sports; rescuing activities etc., in order to increase the level of functional capabilities of the human body, motor coordination, ensuring effective adaptation to various everyday factors; **Adaptive sports** profile - sports for people with locomotor/auditory/visual deficiencies; recovery and remaking; **Tourism** profile includes all forms of applied sports that ensure the formation of general-human skills; **Performance sports/sports training** profile aims to achieve the highest possible level of sports training (technical-tactical, physical and intellectual training) specific to a sports test to obtain the highest possible results in a competitive activity of different levels [16].

Conclusion: The approach to non-formal education from the perspective of competences ensures continuity between the formal and non-formal framework, creates more favourable psycho-pedagogical conditions for achieving the options and interests of each student, but also opens new directions for developing this domain.

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