THE VALORIZATION OF INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION
IN NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL EDUCATIONAL POLICIES

Olga DICUSARĂ,

Moldova State University

Intercultural education becomes an essential tool for developing a more tolerant and cohesive society, where diversity is perceived as a valuable resource. The analysis of the intercultural dimension in national and international educational policies highlights not only the necessity of integrating it into the school curriculum but also emphasizes the importance of developing intercultural competencies among all actors involved in the educational process (teachers, students, families, communities). The integration of diverse cultural values and practices into all aspects of the educational process must be carried out with care and responsibility, taking into account the specifics of each cultural environment and avoiding superficial or standardized implementations. Without well-thought-out measures and a deep understanding of diversity, efforts can become counterproductive, leading to stereotypes and inequalities instead of inclusion and mutual respect.

Keywords: intercultural education, intercultural competences, cultural diversity, educational policies, national and international documents, school curriculum, teaching staff, students.

VALORIFICAREA EDUCAȚIEI INTERCULTURALE
ÎN POLITICILE EDUCAȚIONALE NAȚIONALE ȘI INTERNAȚIONALE

Educația interculturală devine un instrument esențial pentru dezvoltarea unei societăți mai tolerante și mai coezive, în care diversitatea este percepută ca o resursă valoroasă. Analiza dimensiunii educației interculturale în politicile educaționale naționale și internaționale evidențiază nu doar necesitatea de a o valorifica în curricula școlară, ci relevă și importanța dezvoltării competențelor interculturale la toți actanții implicați în procesul educațional (cadre didactice, elevi, familie, comunitate). Integrarea valorilor și practicilor culturale diverse în toate aspectele procesului educațional trebuie realizată cu atenție și responsabilitate, ținând cont de specificul fiecărui mediu cultural, evitând implementările superficiale sau standardizate. Fără măsuri bine gândite și o înțelegere profundă a diversității, eforturile pot deveni contraproductive, conducând la stereotipuri și inegalități în locul incluziunii și respectului reciproc.

Cuvinte-cheie: educație interculturală, competențe interculturale, diversitate culturală, politici educaționale, documente naționale și internaționale, curricula școlară, cadre didactice, elevi.

Introduction

Intercultural education is essential in a globalized world where cultural diversity is an everyday reality. It is a fundamental pillar for promoting diversity, mutual respect and peaceful coexistence in an increasingly globalized world.

Through intercultural education, individuals acquire essential skills for navigating in a pluralistic world, including intercultural communication skills, empathy and tolerance. This form of education supports social integration and reduces prejudice and discrimination, facilitating the creation of an inclusive and equitable environment. Furthermore, intercultural education contributes to the development of a global identity, preparing individuals to participate actively and responsibly in diverse and interconnected societies.

Analysis of the national and international framework for addressing intercultural education

Knowledge of national and international regulations is essential to understand and implement effective educational policies that support inclusion and intercultural understanding.

By studying them, policy-makers can better understand evolving concepts of diversity in education and develop educational programs that not only respect but also celebrate cultural diversity.

Documents such as **the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948),** the **Convention on the Rights**

of the Child (1989) and **the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965)**, have laid the foundations for modern principles of intercultural education, promoting fundamental values such as equality, non-discrimination and respect for cultural diversity.

The adoption of **the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (2010)** reflects the commitment of member states to promote education that contributes to the development of a democratic culture and respect for human rights. The Charter sets out the principles, objectives and strategic directions necessary for the integration of education for democratic citizenship and human rights education in Europe's education systems [5].

Democratic laws and institutions can only function effectively when they are based on a culture of democracy. The development of **the Competence Reference Framework for a Culture of Democracy (Council of Europe, 2018)** was designed to support member states in integrating democratic values into their education systems, thereby contributing to the strengthening of democracy, human rights and the rule of law [4].

Adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO in 2019, **the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education (UNESCO, 2019)**, encourages international academic and professional mobility, promoting the recognition of academic qualifications and encouraging cultural exchanges [7].

Addressing cultural diversity in all its forms is also reflected in **UNESCO's Global Monitoring Report on Education (2020)**, entitled "Inclusion and Education: All means all", with intercultural education being emphasized as essential for building an inclusive society [26]. This vision is also reinforced by **the EU Strategy for Education and Training (2020)**, which emphasizes inclusive and intercultural education, promoting lifelong learning, mobility, international partnerships and the inclusion of disadvantaged groups in the educational process [31].

The promotion of intercultural dialogue and respect for diversity among young people is also emphasized in **the Council of Europe's Youth Strategy 2030**, adopted in 2020 [32].

And, the **EU Action Plan against Racism 2020-2025**, proposes measures to combat racism and discrimination, including through intercultural education and awareness-raising in schools and other educational institutions [25].

These documents and regulations reflect the commitment of the international community to promote intercultural education as an essential part of modern education systems to ensure a more inclusive society that is respectful of cultural diversity.

This list of policies can be complemented by the **Incheon Declaration Framework for Action - Education 2030 (UNESCO, 2015)** [2], adopted at the Incheon World Education Forum, which focuses on Sustainable Development Goal 4 of **the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** [24].

The framework aims to ensure equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all people, regardless of gender, age, race and ethnicity, as well as persons with disabilities, migrants, indigenous people, children and youth, especially those in vulnerable situations.

The Republic of Moldova, being a European country with a shared history and values with the Member States of the European Union, is committed to implement and promote these values through **the Association Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Moldova (2014)**, thus facilitating gradual economic integration and deepening political association [1].

This Association Agreement seeks to strengthen respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including minority rights, democratic principles, the rule of law and good governance. The objectives of the political dialogue re-emphasize the importance of the intercultural dimension, contributing to the consolidation of national political reforms.

Education is considered a national priority in the Republic of Moldova, having a central role in generating and transmitting universal knowledge and values, developing human capital, strengthening national consciousness and promoting European integration.

The strategic vision of educational development is centered on the development objectives of **the National Development Strategy „European Moldova 2030"** [29]. One of the objectives of the strategy refers specifically to - *Raising the level of culture and personal development* - the education system by its

valences must ensure inter- and multicultural education based on values, national traditions, but also cultural diversity, as well as personal development and active citizenship.

The contradictions between the processes of globalization, internationalization, technologization of education and the ability of the education system in the Republic of Moldova to reflect these processes in a relevant and effective way have conditioned the elaboration of **the Education Development Strategy for 2021-2030 „Education 2030"** [28].

The Development Strategy "Education 2030" is focused on providing opportunities for all people to develop, from an early age and throughout their lives, the skills, knowledge, abilities and competences necessary to maximize their potential in both their personal and professional lives.

Provisions on respecting cultural diversity and promoting intercultural education in educational institutions are regulated by **the Education Code of the Republic of Moldova (2014).** The aims of education must allow openings towards diverse, renewed values that energize both the individual and society [6].

The implementation of changes of essence, provided by the Education Code of the Republic of Moldova, as well as other international documents are ensured by **the National Curriculum Framework of Reference** [3]. In this context, the development of the National Curriculum becomes a strategic direction for ensuring the quality of general education.

The National Curriculum includes competences and objectives related to intercultural education, ensuring that students are exposed to diverse cultures and perspectives through various subjects and educational activities. In fact, the curriculum represents one of the most targeted areas of intercultural development and re-dimensioning, both in terms of the written messages, formally structured to be „transmitted" but also the „hidden", implicit ones.

In its broad form, the intercultural curriculum is not only interesting in terms of content, what is taught or learned, how it is selected, but also how it is learned, how the specific characteristics of minorities are taken into account and enhanced in teaching. And, this means the realistic and creative integration of diversity in content, materials, methods, forms of assessment, organization of teaching and learning styles etc.

In the following, we will examine how intercultural education is valued in the school curriculum, through the prism of school subjects related to different curricular areas: *Language and Communication, Socio-Humanistic Education, Mathematics and Science, Arts, Technologies, Counseling and Personal Development and Sport.*

Fig. 1. Approaching the intercultural dimension through curricular areas.
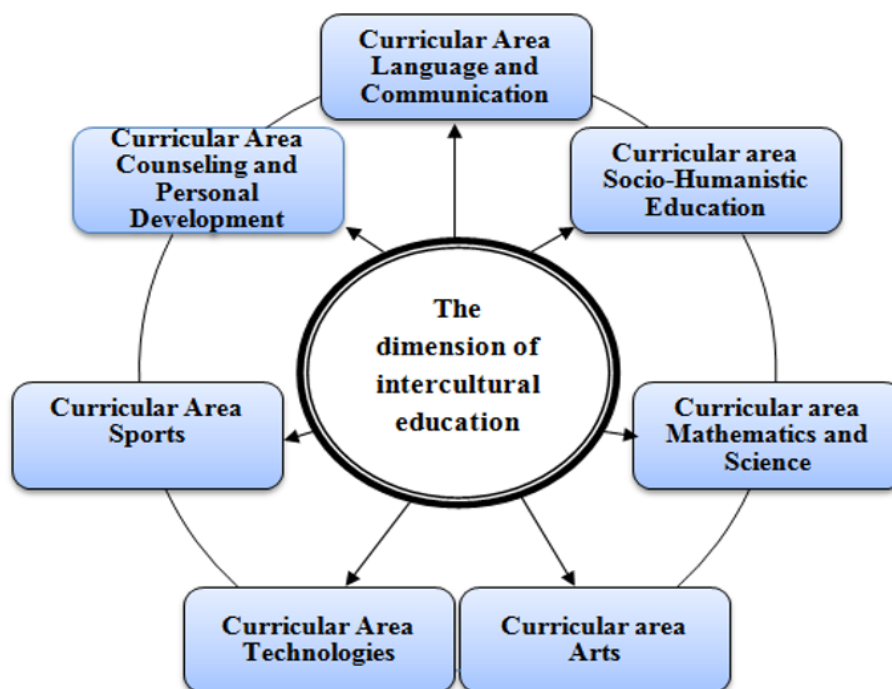
Curricular Area Language and Communication

The integrated study of ***Romanian Language and Literature*** [20] aims, in particular, at the formation and development of communication/linguistic competences, organically combined with the formation of reading and value competences. The intercultural dimension is emphasized in each of the components of these competences:

- Through the study of language and literature, they are centered on the image of the world and the mother tongue, factual knowledge of the country in which the language is spoken: geographical, demographic, economic, political data. *Intercultural awareness* is oriented towards the regional/territorial diversity of the Romanian language, also reflected in some artistic texts.

- *Intercultural skills* and competences consist of the ability to establish links between one's own culture and other cultures, sensitization to the notion of culture, the ability to mediate in situations of cultural misunderstandings and conflicts, the ability to overcome stereotypes.

- *The existential competences* formed through the subject reflect the set of attitudes (situating, in relation to cultural differences; thus cultivating positive otherness towards what enters, as a result of cultural contacts, into our life and our language), motivations (desire and need to communicate; an interest in other languages and in communicating with their speakers), values (ethics and morals; adequate expression of one's own identity through awareness of belonging to the linguistic community of Romanian speakers), beliefs, cognitive styles, personality traits.

The principles of selecting literary texts for study and reading offer openings in particular for the realization of values education, education for citizenship, education for democracy, global education, education for peace and tolerance, etc.

However, sometimes, in the natural and necessary intention of strengthening patriotism and appreciation for one's own culture, clearly ethnocentric attitudes are often brought to the fore, exaggerated self-glorification of our cultural background, using outdated formulas which are not convincing for today's generation.

Studying ***Foreign languages*** has always been a priority for the educational area of the Republic of Moldova.

The foreign language curriculum [19] is based on four major axes in the formation of the types of competences - good knowledge of the foreign language, familiarization with new cultures, connection with other subjects and acquisition of foreign language learning methods.

The variety and complexity of the subject-specific competences is fully in line with the variety and multiplicity of curricular areas of foreign language exploitation identified by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR): public, private, educational and the American conception of the Massachusetts Foreign Language Curriculum (MFLC): communication, culture, connection, comparison, with easy sensitization in the community.

From the perspective of the intercultural dimension, it becomes essential for our research to notice the competences formed in the field of *foreign language culture*. Thus, the emphasis is placed on the formation of:

- Socio/pluricultural competences which imply the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes indispensable for orientation in the socio-cultural space of the allophone country (traditions, customs, holidays, historical, cultural personalities, etc.). This group of competences brings the learner into contact with the surrounding reality and places him/her in a multidimensional world where different races, nationalities and peoples communicate with each other, thus enhancing the universal heritage of knowledge.

The school curriculum offers a broad opportunity to promote interculturality, but success in harnessing this potential depends to a large extent on the skills and competences of teachers in bringing this content to life.

Curricular area Socio-Humanistic Education

The subject of ***History*** contributes to the formation and development of European and national key competences, particularly in terms of the qualities of the future democratic citizen [18]. The mission of History as a school subject is primarily oriented towards understanding one's own past and the diversity of cultural and historical traditions of the peoples of the world in order to remove prejudice and encourage tolerance between people. History gives meaning to the notion of time, space and heritage, and it is history that should lead pupils „to know and understand their own culture as well as other cultures" [23, p. 79].

Moreover, „in many countries, national history is the backbone of the entire school curriculum". The inter-cultural re-dimensioning of the teaching of history is a matter of purging prejudices, stereotypes, thickened nationalist messages, and the fetishization of certain heroes. The most effective position for reporting historical facts is obviously the balanced one. Balance is also required in the selection of content, because often „history gives more space to conflicts, wars, diplomatic crises than to peace initiatives and various contributions to the legalization and improvement of the framework of international cooperation" [27, p. 41-47].

The ratio in teaching and learning content units is 50% - universal space, 45% - Romanian space and 5% - local space (region, locality, family, school). This significant proportion indicates, on the one hand, the commitment of History to integrating values, traditions and perspectives from all over the world, as studying the global context enables students to understand different cultures, develop intercultural competences and recognize the connections between them.

On the other hand, it emphasizes the importance of national identity and Romanian cultural values. Getting to know the local community, the region, the family and the school contributes to developing a sense of belonging.

By inevitably referring to other areas, populations, communities, **Geography** is a very generous field for intercultural valuing, for getting to know different spaces and cultures, for crossing borders, for discovery. Through its complexity, this discipline educates and informs, develops skills but also attitudes, crystallizes values.

Explaining specific environmental phenomena and processes at local, regional and global levels, as well as appreciating the social, civic and cultural aspects of the geographical space at local, regional and global levels are the aims of study, objectified in *the specific competences* of the Geography subject [17].

Natural phenomena and processes at local, regional and global levels have a direct impact on how different cultures and communities develop and interact with their environment. The geographical environment shapes cultural diversity and how people in different regions adapt their economic, social and civic activities to the natural resources available. This leads pupils to show respect for the ways of life of other cultures and encourages intercultural dialog based on common environmental challenges.

Moral-spiritual education, which is concerned with the formation and nurturing of the ethical and spiritual values of the individual, finds an additional dimension in the context of interculturality, where these values are applied in a global and culturally diverse setting.

The subject *Moral-Spiritual Education* [11] proposes, but does not impose, moral and spiritual values underlying national and European culture, values to which pupils should have free access and which have a formative role. This axiological frame of reference includes: general-human values (life, truth, good, etc.), national values (country, people, state symbolism, etc.); educational values established on the dimensions of education: intellectual, moral, aesthetic, physical, technological, etc; collective values: class, group of pupils, social groups, family, etc; individual values (identity, family, faith, friends, etc.).

Through intercultural education, these values become a point of connection between different cultures and civilizations. Regardless of cultural or ethnic background, moral values can function as a common language, facilitating understanding and cooperation between people from different backgrounds.

Developing students' competences for a democratic culture is also part **of Education for Society** [13], a compulsory subject which covers the curriculum area Socio-Humanistic Education. The curriculum is based on psychocentric (focusing on the pupil with his/her particularities and needs, his/her own pace of learning and development) and sociocentric (focusing on the assumption of the values of democracy, human rights, the rule of law and cultural diversity) approaches.

The Education for Society curriculum aims at a complex process of developing competences for a culture of democracy, using key concepts such as: identity, diversity and pluralism, responsibility, conflict and communication, rules and law, governance, equality, rights and freedoms, media.

The subject *Education for Society* explicitly contributes to the realization of the educational ideal by capitalizing on the European reference framework, consisting of 20 competences for a democratic culture (Council of Europe, 2016/2018), considered as subject-specific competences, conventionally grouped into 4 core components: *1) values; 2) attitudes; 3) skills; 4) knowledge and critical understanding.*

What we note important for our research is that each of these components reflects and addresses the dimensions of intercultural education directly and not tangentially. Thus, within the subject, emphasis is placed on the following:

At the level of values: valuing human dignity and human rights; appreciating cultural diversity; valuing democracy, justice, equity, equality and the rule of law;

Attitudinal: openness to cultural differences and other beliefs, practices and world views; respect; tolerance of ambiguity etc.

Skills: developing empathy, cooperation skills, conflict resolution etc.

At knowledge level: knowledge and critical understanding of the world; knowledge and critical understanding of self etc.

The content of the curriculum fully promotes interculturality by promoting learning about and with other cultures, helping to reduce prejudices, combat stereotypes and develop empathy and tolerance.

Curricular area Mathematics and Science

If in the case of history or geography, opportunities for an intercultural approach are seen as easier to discover, combining the imperatives of valuing cultural diversity with the profile of subjects such as mathematics, physics or chemistry seems more difficult and certainly more novel. This is because, for example, ***Mathematics*** is not immediately associated with a cultural background, being universally applicable and applied.

Thus, although mathematics is taught in ethnically diverse schools, the cultural origins of the subject are often ignored, which can leave the impression - as N. White [32, p. 115] remarks - that mathematics „either fell from the sky or was invented by teachers just to complicate the lives of students". Without clarification from educators, students might conclude that all mathematical knowledge comes from one culture. Such a misperception does not contribute to a positive attitude towards cultural diversity.

Even though *the curriculum for the Mathematics* [21] subject aims to instill values and attitudes in students, such as respecting laws, obligations, and civic responsibilities, as well as national and state-specific values; fostering open, creative thinking and a spirit of objectivity, impartiality, and tolerance, the content that would create favorable contexts for enhancing the intercultural education dimension is not reflected in the curriculum.

In other words, mathematics is rarely viewed through the lens of the cultural contributions that have supported the development of this field, with essential aspects related to the history of mathematical concepts, prominent figures in mathematics, the implicit values of mathematical language, and applications in everyday life being overlooked.

The multicultural re-dimensioning of subjects such as *Science, Biology, Chemistry and Physics* is a constant concern for many educational systems, convinced of the vulnerabilities present in this area and the need for new emphases in their theoretical and practical foundations.

By limiting these fields to certain contexts, students are given a narrow perspective on cultural influences in contemporary developments. As a result, „most students are unaware of the contributions of non-Western civilizations, such as the fact that the following inventions originated in China before being „discovered" by Europeans: the compass, magnetic induction, the steel plow, the suspension bridge, paper, fishing line, the umbrella, porcelain, chess, the mechanical clock, printing, paper money, endocrinology, the seismograph, gunpowder, and Newton's first law" [apud 23, p. 70].

If we analyze the curriculum for these sciences through the lens of interculturality, the authors of ***the Biology*** curriculum, for example, emphasize the interaction between the individual and the community through *specific competencies* of the discipline:

- The competence to personally engage in activities that maintain health provides an active and responsible approach to one's own health and that of others, involving not only individual actions but also contributions to community health. This promotes a healthy lifestyle and collaboration among individuals to create a health-friendly environment, emotional support, tolerance, and respect.

Learning ***Chemistry*** opens up opportunities for acquiring fundamental knowledge in this field and appreciating national/universal scientific values. Experimental investigation of the properties and production of chemical substances, as well as the study of the effects of certain chemical products and processes on

humans and the environment, highlights the necessity of ensuring personal and social security and promoting a healthy lifestyle. Teachers will create a favorable climate in lessons, open to cooperative relationships based on universal human values, mutual respect, dialogue, tolerance, tact, consensus, and empathy.

However, the scope of the content is limited to specifying the achievements of chemists from the Republic of Moldova at the national level, without extending 'beyond' the horizon of scientific discoveries [9].

Curricular Area Arts

The arts, as the ultimate expression of cultural creativity, play a fundamental role in intercultural approaches within schools. Due to their specificity and transnational nature, artistic manifestations contribute to building confidence in one's own cultural traditions and identity while simultaneously affirming an individual's belonging to a broader spiritual community.

Musical education, through its objectives and content, aims to achieve artistic education as a component of spiritual culture [12].

The specific competence of the subject - emotional participation in the musical act of interpretation, reception, and promotion of national and universal musical values - reflects interculturality. Music, as a universal form of expression, allows individuals from different cultures to connect emotionally and share common experiences.

Through this goal of *Musical Education*, students can strengthen their own cultural identity while becoming more aware of their place in a global context. This dual perspective - national and universal - is essential in intercultural education, which values both the unique characteristics of each culture and the unity among them.

Visual Arts, another compulsory school subject, serves as a tool for cultural development, sensitization, and the formation of a dialogue between the child and the world of arts. At the same time, it contributes to developing pro-active and creative capacities. Familiarization with the language of the visual arts sensitizes students to both national and universal visual culture and provides an effective opportunity for developing aesthetic feelings and the ability to perceive and express artistic-plastic messages [14].

Through *the specific competencies* of the subject - namely, the artistic perception of visual art from both national and universal cultures - students are exposed to a variety of artistic expressions that reflect different cultural identities. This helps them to understand the richness and diversity of cultures and overcome the limitations of a monocultural perspective.

Curricular Area Technologies

The subject of ***Technological Education*** reflects the unity of the material and spiritual world by teaching students to develop skills in creating simple and useful objects for daily life. It highlights imagination and critical thinking, offers students multiple opportunities for integration into various socio-cultural environments, and helps shape individuals as promoters of national tradition and culture [15].

The teaching and learning process in *Technological Education* is organized according to the discipline's specific principles, which include:

• Preserving, conserving, and promoting national traditions through the research and mastery of folk artistic crafts by students, who will become future promoters of national culture.

• Fostering a positive attitude toward fundamental human activities - learning, work, and creation - seen in relation to their social functions: didactic, productive, and innovative.

• Ensuring the interaction of the educational process with external social, economic, and cultural factors.

However, after an in-depth analysis of the curricular content of *Technological Education*, it is evident that it has a strongly national focus, which may limit students' exposure to international technological perspectives and practices.

The curriculum emphasizes national traditions and innovations, but does not sufficiently include examples or case studies from diverse global cultural and economic contexts. This limitation can reduce students' understanding of the discipline as a globally interconnected field, potentially affecting the development of essential 21st-century intercultural competencies such as adaptability, critical thinking, and international collaboration.

Curricular Area Counseling and Personal Development

The subject of ***Personal Development*** is designed to include activities and experiences aimed at supporting students in the process of self-awareness, fostering healthy relationships with family, peers, and their environment. It focuses on developing effective communication skills and emotional management, all geared toward improving the quality of life by embracing contemporary societal values, helping students achieve personal aspirations and dreams in a healthy and safe living environment [10].

Upon a preliminary review of the curriculum for *Personal Development*, it becomes evident that the subject deeply incorporates the intercultural dimension.

This is reflected primarily through the discipline's objectives, especially *the specific competencies* it aims to develop (such as expressing personal identity in constructive relationships with family and others, exploring the self and social resources), *the priorities of the subject* (nurturing the student's tendency to express their identity; leveraging the student's inclination to learn from peers and act in groups) also emphasize this aspect, *the content units* (personal identity and harmonious relationships, focusing on self-awareness and acceptance, exploration, and self-evaluation of personal resources, family as a value: responsibilities, gender roles, stereotypes, assertive, non-confrontational, and non-violent communication, self-education, volunteering, etc.) reflect these values as well.

Teachers are encouraged to use a variety of *teaching methods and procedures*, such as experiential learning, reflective learning, as well as social and communicational learning. These methods promote learning through observing others, structured conversations, collaboration, and cooperation, using diverse communication approaches, thus also addressing interculturality.

In conclusion, the subject of Personal Development is designed to facilitate the understanding and acceptance of cultural diversity. It is a subject that fosters intercultural dialogue, empathy, mutual respect, and collaboration between individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Thus, the curriculum not only includes intercultural references but is also fundamentally structured around them, promoting universal values such as tolerance, social responsibility, and awareness of one's own cultural identity within the context of a multicultural society.

Curricular Area Sports

The subject of ***Physical Education*** contributes to the development of physical skills, the improvement of general health, and the formation of positive attitudes toward long-term physical activity, facilitating social integration and active participation in the community [16].

However, after analyzing the *Physical Education* curriculum, it is evident that there is a lack of explicit connections to intercultural education. This is reflected at both the level of curricular objectives and the content and teaching strategies employed. The curricular goals do not include objectives related to promoting cultural diversity or fostering the understanding and respect of other cultures through physical activities.

Additionally, the curriculum does not explore the intercultural potential of various sports activities or physical traditions from other cultures, which could enrich students' perspectives on global diversity. The absence of an intercultural approach in teaching and assessment strategies limits opportunities for students to learn through games and sports activities from different parts of the world, and to develop skills in cooperation, respect, and intercultural tolerance.

Conclusions

While interculturalism is not a quick solution that, once implemented, automatically transforms any attitude, school environment, or curriculum into a pluralistic one, the effort to build a school of diversity becomes a serious responsibility for practitioners. With an open and patient attitude, educators have the ability to effectively transform the school into an intercultural environment, acting as a filter that facilitates and supports all necessary changes.

In other words, it is not the differences between people, cultures, values, or lifestyles that create problems, but the wrong ways of approaching and addressing them pedagogically.

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Data About Authors:
Olga DICUSARĂ, assistant professor, Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, Sociology and Social Work, Moldova State University.
E-mail: olga.dicusara@usm.md
ORCID: 0000-0002-9387-465X

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