From Teaching about Diversity to Learning in Diversity in the Romanian Educational System

Diversity is in human nature. It is our way to face the challenges from a continuously changing world, originated from work and study mobility, international migration and globalization. Biodiversity and societal diversity have created a suitable environment for education, leading to the concept of multicultural education, so necessary in the development of the current generations of students. This metamorphosis faced by European societies refined the education providers and policy-makers, coming to a paradigm shift, from "Teaching about diversity" to "Managing diversity, teaching for diversity, learning on diversity!". The lack of knowledge base on the preparation of teacher educators, of coherence concerning teachers' training to approach classroom diversity in secondary education, lack of systemic policy approaches towards inclusion and diversity and diverse student teachers, established the framework of this study. Can we answer these questions: Do educators understand the learners' need for integration in a multicultural environment, within a school context? Are teachers prepared for diversity in the classroom? What does it mean to teach for diversity and in diversity? Are there functional methodologies for teacher trainers? How do we address these challenges? The answers to these questions should provide an overview of a classroom diversity management in the Romanian public secondary education, regarding formal and non-formal activities and, like an added value, it would be helpful for other European Union member states. Raising awareness on the importance of well-prepared teacher trainers for diversity in Europe and harmonizing teacher intercultural competences within a European framework integrated into the curricula will point to societal diversity as an asset that applies to school-related diversity. EU states should prepare teachers for diversity and in diversity, not regarding diversity, by promoting multicultural education as a normal teaching-learning environment. Furthermore, insights on how the Romanian educational system not only should monitor how diversity is viewed through internationalization and non-formal educational activities, as these are specified in the methodologies, but also a real image of how it is perceived by teachers through the documents, are shown.

Keywords: multicultural education, paradigm shift, educational system, secondary education, internationalization

Introduction

This paper is addressed to the actors involved in the public secondary education, with the purpose to show the documents that enhance diversity and its cohesion between students and teachers. Romanian educational system not only should monitor how diversity is viewed through internationalization and non-formal educational activities, as they are specified in the methodologies, but also give a real image of how it is perceived by teachers through the documents.
How do methodologies and legislation regarding diversity approach this topic and how do students and teachers see this? A strong diversity and inclusion strategy can help organizations to integrate diverse groups of students and teachers, and can generate innovative results. Most of the educational institutions try to change the way they deliver the educational activities, through another type of approach, so they try to enhance diversity and inclusion initiatives.

This poses challenges for many educational institutions, where the gap between educational legislation or methodologies and practical approach increases and intercultural diversity management is poorly understood at an organizational level, despite the presence of numerous international projects of good practice throughout European teaching or exchange programmes.

In the last years, work and study mobility and international migration and globalization led to the reshaping of European directives, rules and legislative measures. Societal diversity creates a suitable environment for education, be it a formal, non-formal or informal one.

The lack of a knowledge base for the preparation of teacher educators, of coherence in relation to teachers training to approach classroom diversity in secondary education (i.e. paradigm of inclusive education predominantly), lack of systemic policy approaches towards inclusion and diversity and diverse student teachers, established the framework of these observations.

Literature Review

Diversity is our way to face any challenges from a continuously changing world, originated from work and study mobility, international migration and globalization. It can be seen at the individual level, moving to the population one and then to global level, thus from a microsystem to a macrosystem, with a different impact-range. Europe can be described as diverse in multiple ways: diversity in geography, culture, language, national identity, political views, values, and demographics, in social and economic areas. Societal diversity creates the premises of education, leading to the concept of multicultural education, so much required in the development of the current generations of students. The ability to work with people from different cultures and countries has become a key factor for educational developments to succeed. This is driving both the internationalization and multicultural strands in curriculum developments (Johnstone, 2010). Regarding cultural diversity, types and the concept of a multicultural society are used to designate a society in which one
or more types of cultural diversity are present. Multiculturalism identifies with “the promotion of minority cultures (ethnic, religious), especially at an institutional level, like schools, local communities, nations” (Parekh, 1998).

Education plays a major role in multicultural and intercultural European societies. Multicultural education aims to improve interpersonal relations between students coming from different countries, which will help them to acquire knowledge, attitudes and skills needed to participate in cross-cultural interactions, personal, social and civic actions. Some of the authors who dealt with multicultural education or cross-cultural learning in their studies were: Banks (2001) and Irvine (2003), Harris, Moran et al. (2004). When defining the concept of multicultural education, in Banks's vision, there are more dimensions: content integration, the knowledge of construction process, an equity in pedagogy, an empowering school culture and social structure (Banks and Banks, 2001).

To designate the appropriate cultural diversity management activities, it is used the concept of intercultural education, explored from the descriptive and methodological perspective by: Nieto (1992), Ćuçoș (2000), Banks and Banks (2001), Ciolan (2010). Research has shown (Phillips et colab., 2004) that institutions with more diverse teams outperform those with a more homogeneous workforce.

According to Bennett (2014), the intercultural learning can be defined as “acquiring increased awareness of subjective cultural context (worldview), including one’s own, and developing greater transferable ability to interact sensitively and competently across cultural contexts as both an immediate and long-term effect of exchange” and the concept of intercultural education is “The intentional and systematic effort to foster intercultural learning through curriculum design, including pre-departure, on-site, and re-entry activities, and/or course content emphasizing subjective culture and intercultural interaction.”

There are several available studies that show the effectiveness of learner-centred teaching, or good practices building in teaching, but, according to 2017 European Commission Report and the Annexes 3-6 to the Final Report there were conducted only a limited empirical research in Europe that studied the various interconnections between competences that teachers should have to address the needs of all students and the challenges raised by an increasingly diverse Europe. Their observations were made based on different studies of


2Preparing Teachers for Diversity: the Role of Initial Teacher Education. Annexes 3-6 to the Final Report to DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture of the European Commission.
This paper is intended for the members of academic institutions and administration within the Romanian educational institutions, but not limited to them, in order to give a different view on the methods of diversity management, in terms of methodologies regarding internationalization and non-formal activities. Methodologies on internationalization and non-formal activities are the means to sustain diversity, to develop and produce secondary tools for future public educational diversity policies.

Knight (2004) gives a definition of “internationalization”, referring to it as a “a process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education”.

**Methodology**

This case study is an introduction to the use of a document checklist as part of a qualitative research method of document review. Details are provided on the types of documents that can be utilized in the document review. The methodology is based on European and Romanian document review as a research data collection method.

For the discussion of internationalization and the analysis of the evolution of multicultural integration at institutional level, the supporting documents where one can observe the encouragement of diversity and internationalization in public high schools in Romania are shown in Table 1.

Therefore, an attempt is made to ensure internationalization at the curricular level, which can be seen from the investigation of the evolution of these institutional documents, which include all references to intra-curricular and extra-curricular activities, as well as teacher training in multicultural and intercultural environments.

**Table 1. Official Educational and Curricular Documents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nr. crt.</th>
<th>Official Documents</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Where they can be found</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The Courses within the Psychopedagogical module for the Initial Training of Teachers in early childhood and pre-university education</td>
<td>Ministry of Education, Department for Teacher Training (D.P.P.D.) within each university</td>
<td>Starting 2008</td>
<td>OMECT no. 4316/2008, University courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Tenure Program - the movement of teaching staff in pre-university education</td>
<td>Romanian Ministry of Education, Institute for Educational</td>
<td>Starting 2016</td>
<td>OMECTS 3590/ 05.04.2016, available online at: <a href="http://programe.ise.ro/Portals/1/Curriculum/Pl_cadruactuale/">http://programe.ise.ro/Portals/1/Curriculum/Pl_cadruactuale/</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Results and Discussions

The metamorphose faced by the European societies refined the education providers, such as public institutions or private organizations, and shaped the landscape that can generate opportunities and challenges in the system.

Lack of knowledge base on the preparation of teacher educators, of coherence concerning teachers' training to approach classroom diversity in secondary education, lack of systemic policy approaches towards inclusion and diversity and diverse student teachers, established the framework of this study.

Can we answer these questions: Do educators understand the learners' need for integration in a multicultural environment, within a school context? Are teachers prepared for diversity in the classroom? What does it mean to teach for diversity and in diversity? Are there functional methodologies for teacher trainers? How do we address these challenges? The answers to these questions should provide an overview of a classroom diversity management in the Romanian public secondary education, regarding formal and nonformal
activities, and like an added value it would be of much help for other European
Union state members. From the Romanian curriculum documents released by
the Romanian Ministry of Education in the last years we intend to see how
educational institutions approach to ascertain and increase the level of
internationalization in the curriculum.

Educational policies are the strategic directions for the development of the
educational system and include legislative norms applied in practice through
methodologies, controlled and monitored, and ultimately evaluated through
impact studies. Looking at some European Educational Policies and
programmes for Diversity and Integration it can be seen that somehow there is
a less coherent framework for educational diversity. These are some referrals:
“The EU needs new methods and tools to produce teachers for diversity; and to
lay the foundations for more inclusive societies through education”5 (Council
of the European Union and European Commission, 2015) and “Research
analyzing how teacher educators are prepared is scarce”6 (European
Commission, 2013).

The EU programmes dedicated to secondary education, to address
diversity and integration intra-European and international cooperation,
implemented by the Commission during 2007-2013 were: The Lifelong
Learning Programme (LLP), The Youth in Action Programme, The Erasmus
Mundus, Tempus, Alfa, Edulink, Programmes of cooperation with
industrialized countries in the field of higher education.

Within Erasmus+ 2007-2013, there were several targeted actions, and
those regarding teacher training and secondary educations were: Erasmus+:
Comenius, in relation to the activities of the Programme exclusively related to
the field of school education; Erasmus+: Leonardo da Vinci, in relation to the
activities of the Programme exclusively related to the field of vocational
education and training; Erasmus+: Grundtvig, in relation to the activities of the
Programme exclusively related to the field of adult learning; Erasmus+: Youth
in Action, in relation to the activities of the Programme exclusively related to
the field of youth non-formal and informal learning. Since 2020, Erasmus+
started in January 2014 as the single EU programme for education, training,
youth and, for the first time, sport7. Over the seven years, Erasmus+ 2014-2020
integrates the seven previous programmes into three Key Actions - Key Action
1 - Learning Mobility of individuals, Key Action 2 - Cooperation for
innovation and the exchange of good practices, Key Action 3 - Support for
policy reform. eTwinning is co-funded by the Erasmus+ and is the community

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5Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the strategic
framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) New priorities for
European cooperation in education and training (2015/C 417/04), 2015. Available online at:
6European Commission, Supporting Teacher Educators for better learning outcomes. DG
Available online at: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/policy/sch
7Erasmus+ Programme Annual Report 2014, available online at: file:///Users/macbook/Down
loads/erasmus-plus-annual-report-2014_en_0.pdf
for schools in Europe. All these subsequent versions of the European educational cooperation should continue efficiently to support EU collaborative activities, initiated by providers and educational institutions.

From the Romanian curriculum documents released by the Romanian Ministry of Education in the last years we intend to see how educational institutions approach to ascertain and increase the level of internationalization in the curriculum, respecting the European Educational Framework.

In Romania, the Government Ordinance (GO) 75 / 12.07.2005 and Law 87/2006 establish the principles of the national policy for Quality Assurance in Education for the entire national system. The quality assurance policy wants to provide a National Quality Assurance Framework (CNAC) for organizations providing education in Romania, a framework that meets European requirements and respects the best practices at European level.

*Intercultural Education within Initial Teacher Training and Training Institutions*

The Romanian Initial Teacher Training (ITE) national framework respects the European Teacher Competences Framework (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Teacher Competence Frameworks in Europe (2011/12)**

![Teacher Competence Frameworks in Europe (2011/12)](image)

*Source: European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2013*

However, the Romanian Initial Teacher Training (ITE) national framework focuses on mastering of professional skills and reaching the most important objectives of the teaching profession (see Figure 2). In the ITE there are two and modules offered within teacher training and on the second one, besides the mandatory subjects, there are optional subjects where the cultural approach can be noticed: *Intercultural Education* (Lucian Blaga University, Sibiu), *Multicultural Education* (University of Bucharest). Romanian national curriculum for initial teacher training within different universities, but under specific department for teacher training, functions according to OMECT no. 4316/2008.
Source: Preparing Teachers for Diversity: the Role of Initial Teacher Education. Final Report to DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture of the European Commission Written by Public Policy and Management Institute (PPMI), 2017, based on policy mapping data (2016)

Also regarding teacher training and teacher national exams programs in Romania, they address little to inclusion and diversity, in a continuous changing community, which includes concerns as study migration, labour migration or educating immigrant children, similar with those of Greece (Zervas, 2016). Unlike Greece, many European countries are already preparing teachers for a more technologically driven global community (Steiner, 1996). Countries like France, Germany, Great Britain and Italy have tied their teacher training programs to the labour market in order to assure that teachers find work after graduation (Zervas, 2016).

One of the skills reached by young teachers after the initial teacher training is cultural awareness, as it is written in the curricula for national teacher’s exams, regardless of their background (e.g. English Language and Literature, Social Education).

School Curricula for Secondary Education

According to Pickering (2004), who refers to Durkheim theory, national and local educational public systems have two main goals: 1. to ensure that children are prepared to fill a wide array of social roles needed for a complex modern society; 2. to ensure that children acquire the skills needed to function and contribute to their society.

Romanian School Curricula for Secondary and Highschool Education have two components – Common Curriculum (from Romanian: T.C.) and School

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8Approved by O.M.Ed.C. nr.5287/ 15.11.2004.
Based Curriculum (from Romanian - CDS). The national education system is most of the times associated with the initial preparation of teachers for teaching and evaluating at the primary or secondary school levels. The focus on diversity and intercultural education can be noticed at the methodological level, such as courses linked also to the school curriculum.

In addition, on the secondary school, there are several optional courses linked to different cultures and civilizations, such as: Modern Greek Language and Ancient Greek Civilization, Latin Roots in Culture and Romanian Civilization, Greek-Roman Myths and Legends, Macedo-Romanian Culture and Traditions, Spanish Culture and Civilization, Latin Dictions⁹.

In the National Education Law (1/2011)¹⁰, article 10 refers to national teaching languages and minorities or foreign languages: in Romania, education is a service of public interest and takes place in Romanian language, as well as in the languages of national minorities and in languages of international circulation.

In 2014, at EU level, 59.7% of all students enrolled in secondary education were learning two or more languages, a higher number compared to 46.7% in 2005. This reflects a change in educational policies in many European countries, which have aimed to increase the number of students learning a second language, as well as to reduce the age at which they start studying it. In 11 countries, over 90% of high school students learn two or more foreign languages (Estonia, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Romania, Finland, Iceland, Liechtenstein and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia). In contrast, in five countries, the rate is below 20% (Hungary, Belgium - French side, Austria).

At present, in the Romanian public schools there are studied two mandatory foreign international languages studied, and the most frequent are: English, French, Italian, Spanish, German, Russian.

Regarding diversity and inclusion, interculturality and intercultural education, among the principles of Article 3 of the National Education Law (1/2011) that govern pre-university education, as well as lifelong learning in Romania are: a) the principle of equality - under which access to learning is accomplished without discrimination; b) principle of quality-based education activities which relate to the reference standards and the national and international best practices; g) the principle of guaranteeing the cultural identity of all Romanian citizens and intercultural dialogue.

Therefore, there are the same courses from initial teacher training programs that can also serve as subjects studied in the secondary public

⁹OMECTS 3590/ 05.04.2016 - Ordin privind aprobarea planurilor cadru de invatamant pentru invatamantul preuniversitar, available online at: http://programe.is.ro/Portals/1/Curriculum/Pl_cadruactuale/Gimnaziu/OMENCS%203590_5%20april%202016_Plan-cadru%20de%20%C3%AEnvatamant%20pentru%20gimnaziu.pdf

¹⁰Romanian original article - Art.10. (1) În România, învățământul este serviciu de interes public și se desfășoară, în condițiile prezentei legi, în limba română, precum și în limbile minorităților naționale și în limbi de circulație internațională. Available online at: https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/_fi%C8%99iere/Lege/2020/LEN_actualizata_octombrie_2020.pdf
schools, namely *Intercultural Education* or *Multicultural Education*. These courses were included in the curricula from 2009 as optional courses\textsuperscript{11} within the secondary national curricula.

*Intercultural education through non-formal education, international projects and extracurricular activities*

By analyzing the Institutional development plan, the teacher’s job description and the Teacher’s Self-assessment Form, it can be seen that participation in international projects in intercultural exchanges is a criterion of school performance.

In the institutional development plan, in the chapter “Community and partnership relations - Educational projects and community programs - Specific objective V.2. refers to the development of educational projects by promoting formal and non-formal educational activities aimed at developing intercultural, entrepreneurial, civic, health education and promoting desegregation and equal opportunities. This objective is correlated with the objective of the Annual Internal Evaluation of Quality Reports (from Romanian – *Raport Anual de Evaluare Internă - RAEI*).

According to these specific objectives, there should be different departments and institutional commissions in a school, for the non-formal activities, cultural projects and international cooperation, but most of the times they overlap. Until 2020, there were different departments in each public secondary school, but since September 2020, the Romanian Ministry of Education changed the Framework Regulation for the organization and functioning of pre-university education units - ROFUIP and comprised all the intercultural events, regardless their level (local, national and international) into one official commission / department, namely School Committee for intercultural promotion and violence, corruption and discrimination prevention and obliteration in the school environment.

In the teacher’s job description (e.g. documentary teacher), the teacher initiates and participates in cultural activities in order to promote Romanian and international culture, to recognize European values, to identify models and to accept and value cultural plurality\textsuperscript{12}.

While the literature and documents reviewed describe how individual educational institutions are approaching the issue of enhancing internationalization, it provided little information on how they deal with the process. Although the student acquires intercultural competences of social and cultural awareness, basically, the difficulty falls on the teachers’ shoulders, who have the duty to choose the approach of the respective subject or to sensitize the students regarding the respect of diversity, tolerance and solidarity, regardless of the type of culture, language, nationality and gender. Most of the time, this transposition of interculturality and multiculturalism is


\textsuperscript{12}Job description for Documentarist teacher, available online at: https://www.edu.ro.
seen from the participation in international programs and projects, so a transversal approach of culture is tried, by promoting it through the existing cooperation frameworks, such as the Erasmus + program.

Looking at the numbers from the European Commission, in 2017\textsuperscript{13}, 27877 participants in 568 Romanian projects benefited from mobility in higher education, vocational education and training, school education, adult learning and youth for a total grant amount of 51.89 million Euro (see diagram in Figure 3). In the year 2018\textsuperscript{14}, 29735 participants in 575 Romanian projects benefited from mobility in higher education, vocational education and training, school education, adult learning and youth for a total grant amount of 58.88 million Euro (see diagram in Figure 4). In the year 2019\textsuperscript{15}, 33313 participants in 634 Romanian projects benefited from mobility in higher education, vocational education and training, school education, adult learning and youth for a total grant amount of 68.57 million Euro (see diagram in Figure 5), meaning 5436 more participants in 2019 than in 2017, and it is visible that the numbers are growing every year.

It is noted that teachers organize and participate together with students in intercultural activities, international projects, involving cultural diversity, exchanging good practices, that will enhance cultural awareness and shift the paradigm from "Teaching about diversity” to ”Managing diversity, teaching for diversity, learning on diversity!"

\textsuperscript{14}Erasmus+ Factsheet, 2018 - available online at: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmusplus/sites/default/files/erasmusplus-factsheet-ro_en.pdf
**Figure 3.** Erasmus+ 2017 in numbers – Romania


**Figure 4.** Erasmus+ 2018 in numbers - Romania

In the Romanian school system, intercultural education is found mainly at the ideological level, as a philosophy of cultural pluralism (Plugaru and Pavalache, 2007), but also as a result of political visions for integration into the European community. Often, it turns into a discourse of acceptance of diversity, an aspect that transpires from school methodologies and documents, but also from the principles of educational reform. However, they lack adequate and sustained methodological support. Why is this happening? The hardship of the approach and the marginalization of intercultural education is also reflected in the fact that it is transposed into optional or voluntary subjects, in pre-university and university education.

Conclusions

By examining the EU diversity management on education, for formal, non-formal or informal education, viewed by different actors in the field, some recommendations about the harmonization of educational policies and measures could be given. Based on the documents that were analyzed, it can be seen that the emphasis was on assimilating international students into the Romanian public educational system, rather than developing intercultural approaches.
We can see internationalization from different points of view, such as: conducted surveys, workshops, cultural site visits, intercultural activities, conferences, multicultural collaborations, Erasmus+ projects, institutional collaboration.

The school socializes children to adopt cultural norms and to adapt to a multicultural environment, in order to enhance inclusion and diversity awareness.

Beyond normative issues (legislation, rules, regulations and internal procedures), it is imperative to have a high level of awareness of the importance and benefits of adopting a culture of diversity.

All these small changes reflect a shift of the educational curricular policies, towards an open society to European citizenship and multicultrality. There is more a vertical approach of diversity and multicultrality and less one transversal, which is required in order to ascertain and increase the level of internationalization in the curriculum.

Raising awareness on the importance of well-prepared teacher trainers for diversity in Europe and harmonizing Romanian teachers intercultural competences within the European framework and integrating competences into the curricula will point to a societal diversity as an asset that applies to school-related diversity.

All EU states should prepare teachers for diversity and in diversity, not regarding diversity, by promoting multicultural education as a normal teaching-learning environment.

References


