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Introduction

Contemporary nations and societies are facing rapidly growing challenges that impact the functioning of social groups, individuals, and institutions in diverse ways. Armed conflicts, humanitarian, migration, refugee, climate, health, and geopolitical crises are becoming not only the subject of public debate but also a real everyday experience for many people. In the face of growing social tensions, rising xenophobia, radicalization, and deepening socioeconomic inequalities, education – especially intercultural education – is gaining importance as a space for critical reflection, dialogue, and action.

Traditional educational models are increasingly proving insufficient given the complexity of these phenomena. Therefore, the need for a new approach – culturally sensitive, inclusive, and open to diversity – is becoming indispensable. Intercultural education not only responds to these needs but also offers tools for building communities based on respect, cooperation, and social justice. Nevertheless, educational endeavors usually do not yield immediate results. Education is a difficult and arduous process. It is a kind of heroic struggle to make people and their world a better place. This mission also, and perhaps especially, falls to intercultural education. This education inspires optimism and promotes a vision of a world in which people live with dignity. Whenever possible, it can and should play creative and constructive roles in shaping the vision and reality of such a world. “Perhaps, however – as Ryszard Kapuściński noted over two decades ago in his lecture “Meeting the Other as a Challenge of the 21st Century” – we are heading towards a world so completely new and different that the historical experiences we have so far will prove insufficient to understand it and be able to navigate it. [...] This is a world that potentially offers much, but also demands much, in which trying to take easy shortcuts is often a road to nowhere. In it, we will constantly encounter a new Other, who will slowly begin to emerge from the chaos and confusion of modernity. It is possible that this Other will be born from the encounters of two opposing trends that create the culture of the contempo-

rary world – one that globalizes our reality and the other that preserves our differences, our differences, our uniqueness. That it will be their fruit and heir. We should seek dialogue and understanding with it. [...] Only kindness towards another being is the attitude that can strike a chord within humanity” (Kapuściński, 2004, p. 17).

The thirty-first volume of “Intercultural Education” – a quarterly edited since 2012 by the staff from the Faculty of Arts and Science of Education in Cieszyn and the Institute of Pedagogy (at the University of Silesia in Katowice) – contains, like the previous volumes, theoretical articles and dissertations, texts on intercultural education in Poland and worldwide, research reports, and descriptions of practical initiatives undertaken in this area.

For over thirteen years, our journal has been a virtual space for the exchange of ideas, practical experiences, and proposals for concrete solutions that, when applied, can strengthen respect for diversity and teach attitudes of tolerance and acceptance of others. This is particularly important in the context of current sociocultural and civilizational changes, ensuring that intercultural education is not only perceived as a curricular element implemented in specific school subjects or university curricula, but becomes an integral component of all educational processes and stages – from early childhood education to adult education. Moreover, it requires the involvement of the entire school, non-school and social community – teachers, students, parents, and local institutions – as well as a remodelling of the approach to education itself (from a transmissive transfer of knowledge towards a constructive one based on collaboration and critical reflection). This approach is presented by all the authors of this volume, who have prepared – individually or as co-authors – 16 interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary texts.

The section *Articles and Treatises* opens with an introductory article by Ewa Ogrodzka-Mazur. In the context of analyzing and interpreting selected contemporary issues, the author proposes an understanding of intercultural education as a formative process, constituting a holistic and long-term approach to teaching and education, implemented at all stages of education. Applying such an approach should encompass four fundamental components – the social, cultural, cognitive, and, ultimately, the fourth, axiological one – implemented in various family, school, and non-school situations. Intercultural education as a formative process is and should be moving away from the assimilation model in favour of a shift in the educational paradigm – from transmission-based to dialogic and participatory one – and to the creation of new forms of educational spaces based on relationships, col-

laboration, and community. The next article was edited by Beata Mydłowska, who introduces readers to the specifics of polyphonic education. Referring to Jerzy Nikitorowicz's (2020) concept of intercultural education based on the paradigm of cultural coexistence, she emphasizes that effective polyphonic education requires the development of appropriate educational strategies that shape open and creative cultural attitudes. Furthermore, her analyses do not ignore the difficulties resulting from the clash of different norms and expectations, which can lead to conflicts related to the interaction of cultures in the school space, including the emergence of negative phenomena.

The section *Intercultural Education in Poland and Worldwide* presents Dutch, Polish, Turkish, Nigerian, and Cuban experiences in implementing multicultural and intercultural education. From a constructivist and discursive perspective, Dobrochna Hildebrandt-Wypych outlines the diverse ways in which citizenship is defined in the social and educational context of the contemporary Netherlands, as expressed by young students at various institutions of higher education. They describe good citizenship primarily in moral and relational terms – as caring for others, a willingness to help, attentiveness, and social responsibility – rather than through the lens of civic duty or political engagement. At the heart of these statements is an ethical sensitivity to the needs of others and taking into consideration the perspective of the Other. The next study draws on comparative research conducted in Poland and Turkey. Anita Karyń and Ülkü Ülker compare models of support for seniors, with particular emphasis on the role of education and intergenerational integration implemented in day care centres. A comparative perspective from Poland and Turkey demonstrates that diverse approaches can lead to similar outcomes when adapted to local social and cultural realities. The author of the next article, Patrycja Kozieł, focuses on the role of the Afro-Brazilian community in cultural heritage preservation and intercultural education in Lagos, Nigeria. Presenting the architectural and aesthetic achievements of Afro-Brazilians, as well as the activities of community members and two cultural institutions, the Brazilian Descendants Association and the Afro-Brazilian Cultural Centre, she emphasizes the importance of educating the multiethnic, multinational, and multireligious community of Lagos about history, origins, and cultural memory. The section concludes with a text by Oskar S. Lubiński, addressing the challenges facing the contemporary Cuban educational system. The author – on the basis of the results of his ethnographic field research conducted in 2018–2023 – outlined the effectiveness of educational community projects in marginalized areas

of Havana, which are a response to the changes taking place in the country related to tourism and mass emigration.

The section *Research Reports* features three cognitively interesting articles. The first, prepared by Ewa Dąbrowa, presents the involvement of primary and secondary schools in Poland in supporting migrant students experiencing trauma. The analyses revealed a lack of systemic solutions focused on the needs of these students and limited teacher knowledge of the situation and needs of migrant children, as well as of trauma itself. In turn, the article by Ewa Skrzetuska, Małgorzata Majkowska, and Piotr Swacha, using Jakob Moreno's classic sociometric technique, assessed the nature of peer interactions and the sociometric position of fourth-grade students in multicultural primary classes in public schools in Warsaw. The authors note that most immigrant children occupy average positions in their classes, and that students also tend to make positive choices towards peers of their own nationality, especially with each other, which may indicate difficulties in establishing intercultural relationships. Arleta Hrehorowicz, Marta Makowska, Katarzyna Sacharczuk, and Yuriy Plyska prepared a study comprising their analysis – in the context of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital – of the educational aspirations of young Ukrainian women from Generation Z who emigrated and began their education in Poland. The research findings and analysis indicate that the decision to pursue education in Poland stems primarily from the need to find stability after the difficult experiences of war, as well as from the desire to develop professional competences. Despite the challenges they encountered, such as cultural and linguistic differences, and differences in the educational systems, the perseverance and commitment of the examined women enabled them to successfully adapt to their new environment. Education in Poland is becoming a crucial element in building a better future for them, both professionally and personally.

The section *Forum of Intercultural Educators* consists of three texts. The authors of the first, Natalia Woźniak, Iwona Janicka, and Mariusz Cieślak, addressed the issue of mixed – binational – marriages and highlighted the importance of trust and support received by individuals in intercultural and monocultural relationships, which appears crucial for the integration of close relationships. The results of the study, which included 226 Polish individuals aged 19 to 69, in intercultural (n=69) and monocultural (n=157) relationships, showed that trust and support are equally important for individuals from both groups. No significant differences were found. In the next text, Jan Kajfosz and Łukasz Grzesiczak attempt to answer the question: How do

language and media shape the cognitive and emotional frameworks through which Polish public opinion perceives its “foreign” compatriots in the Czech border regions? Data analysis indicates that the term “Zaolzie [Trans-Olza]” is either unfamiliar to the average Polish reader or is associated with the turbulent past of border conflicts between Poland and Czechoslovakia. These historical connotations tend to obscure the reality of the contemporary Polish minority in the Czech Republic, rendering it either invisible or ideologically charged. According to the authors, replacing the term “Zaolzie” with the term “Czech part of Cieszyn Silesia” in Polish public debate has several advantages. Primarily, it reaffirms the awareness that this region extends beyond Poland’s borders, strengthens the shared historical and cultural identity of Poles on both sides of the border, and separates the image of the minority from associations with loss or shame. The final text in this section was prepared by Joanna Sacharczuk, Urszula Namiotko, and Szymon Czupryński. The authors aimed to analyze the relationship between coping styles in stressful situations and social distance towards LGBT+ people among students of social sciences (psychology and pedagogy). The study was made with the use of the CISS questionnaire developed by Endler and Parker to assess stress coping styles, as well as the Bogardus Social Distance Scale. The obtained research findings indicate the importance of emotional and intercultural competencies in psychological and pedagogical education.

Educational Practice is the next section that opens with a paper by Anna Leszczyński-Rejchert and Kinga Lisowska, in which the authors propose a pilot concept for intercultural intergenerational education in grades 1–3. They assumed that intergenerational education naturally fosters intercultural learning, and that learning in groups of people of different ages, identifying with different backgrounds, strengthens the cultural identity of generations and fosters learning from the experiences of other cultural generational groups. This method aims to support students’ emotional, social, and moral development. In their article “Anthropology in the classroom: toward global competence in geography and history education,” Natalia Maksymowicz Mróz and Anna Szymoszyn aimed to analyze the possibilities of using an anthropological approach in the process of developing intercultural competences among students. The article contains the hypothesis that anthropology and an anthropological approach to teaching geography and history in secondary school are an effective method for achieving these goals. This allows for the recognition of interdependence between environment and culture in geography education. In history teaching, this allows for the recognition of multiple

narratives and the need for a critical approach to sources. The International Baccalaureate (IB) program is an example of the effective implementation of these principles by combining a global and interdisciplinary perspective with the development of research competencies. The section concludes with a text by Magdalena Szalbot, whose aim is to present the results of research on the effectiveness of methods for understanding traditional games and of familiarity with examples of them, as well as to explore the scope of their use in the work of physical education teachers in selected primary schools in the Polish-Czech borderland (in the Cieszyn Silesia region). The research findings formed the basis for formulating proposals for actions that could enable physical education teachers to actively participate in restoring knowledge about once-popular games and accustoming the region's youngest residents to participate in activities that stem from local cultural traditions.

The volume is complemented by a review article by Natalia M. Tyborczyk. The author assessed the monograph by Fred Mishan and Tamas Kiss: *Intercultural competence in language education*, published in 2024 by Routledge and Taylor & Francis Group. The authors examine the state of intercultural education and contemporary language textbooks, noting various shortcomings of these materials, such as their superficial presentation of a given country's culture. In response, they propose a set of fourteen principles for language teachers who wish to develop their own materials aimed at developing students' intercultural competence. These guidelines combine theoretical foundations with practical guidelines, offering specific strategies and exercises that can be adapted to various teaching contexts and age groups.

* * *

On behalf of the Editors and the Scientific Council of the journal "Intercultural Education", we would like to thank all the Authors of the prepared texts for their creative contribution to the development of the articles, and thus the development of multicultural and intercultural education. The publication of this issue of the journal was possible thanks to the constant support and help of the academic authorities of the University of Silesia in Katowice, its Institute of Pedagogy and the Adam Marszałek Publishing House.

Scientific Editors

Ewa Ogrodzka-Mazur and Anna Szafrńska

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Articles and Treatises



Intercultural education in the face of contemporary problems: from adaptive strategy to formative process

Abstract: In the context of ongoing socio-cultural and civilizational changes, this study highlights selected contemporary issues: globalization and cultural homogenization, the migration and refugee crisis, the rise of xenophobic attitudes, nationalism and radicalization, the development of new communication technologies, and disinformation as sources of cultural tensions. The characterization of selected conceptual categories was based on desk research, which involves collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data and information from existing sources, and then drawing conclusions regarding the researched issue. The data collection process involved categorizing the sources, searching for available data/documents within each source category, and reviewing and assessing the collected data for relevance and quality.

The author puts forward a thesis that defining the direction in which modern societies should move lacks a reference to the axionormative layer. Cultural openness and the need for intercultural education are becoming essential values, providing an opportunity to create democratic education based on different axiology and social policy, stemming from the perception of the needs and expectations of individuals and groups. In this perspective, contemporary intercultural education, understood as a process and attitude, should constitute a holistic approach to education, implemented at all stages of education. It cannot merely supplement traditional education as an adaptive strategy – it should be/become a formative process, shaping attitudes, values, and competencies that enable individuals and groups to function in an increasingly complex and culturally diverse reality.

Keywords: intercultural education as a formative process, globalization and cultural homogenization, migration and refugee crisis, new communication technologies and disinformation, the Other/Alien

Introduction

Contemporary societies are characterized by unprecedented dynamics of social, cultural, and civilizational changes. Globalization and cultural homogenization, the migration and refugee crisis, the rise of xenophobic attitudes, racism, and radicalization, the development of modern information technologies combined with disinformation, and the growing importance of cultural diversity pose new challenges for the educational systems both in Poland and worldwide. These processes have accelerated and highlighted the need for new educational paradigms that not only embrace diversity but actively make use of it as a significant educational value.

The concept of intercultural education, suggested by Jerzy Nikitorowicz (2020), based on the paradigm of cultural coexistence, implies education that should not only embrace cultural diversity but, above all, promote equal coexistence and dialogue between cultures, recognizing each as valuable and essential for building an open, pluralistic, and tolerant society. Traditional approaches to multicultural and intercultural education often involve asymmetric models – one culture is dominant (the majority), while the different ones (usually minorities) are treated as Others or Aliens. The paradigm of cultural coexistence rejects this hierarchy in favour of a model in which different cultures function on equal terms and create a real space for dialogue, mutual respect, and mutual learning. In this context, intercultural education cannot be viewed solely as a curricular element implemented in specific school subjects or study programs. It must become an integral component of all educational processes and stages, from early childhood education to adult learning. Furthermore, it requires the involvement of the entire school, non-school, and social community – teachers, students, parents, and local institutions – as well as a remodelling of the approach to education itself – from a transmissive transfer of knowledge to a constructive one based on collaboration and critical reflection.

In the undertaken discussion, an attempt is made to (1) analyze contemporary socio-cultural and civilizational challenges that intercultural education has to meet, (2) approach it as a formative process that means changes in the way of thinking, experiencing and acting, which are necessary for conscious and responsible functioning in culturally diverse environments, as well as (3) identify barriers and limitations that currently prevent its effective implementation.

Due to the limited space available in this text, my discussion is based on selected issues and conceptual categories that I found interesting, and whose interpretative scope is much broader than it could be presented in the article. To this end, I used desk research, which involves collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data and information from the existing sources, and then drawing conclusions regarding the investigated problem. The data collection process involved categorizing data sources, searching for available data/documents within each source category, and reviewing and assessing the collected data for relevance and quality. A meta-analysis was conducted of the concepts and categories constituting the research problem from the perspective of interdisciplinary sources, such as: legal and strategic documents, reports, statistical data, results of other studies, scientific publications and studies, as well as press and internet articles (Babbie, 2003, pp. 341–342; Bednarowska, 2015, pp. 18–25).

1. Social, cultural, and educational contexts of selected contemporary problems

Globalization and cultural homogenization vs. protection of local identities: from national identity to global identity

Current, dynamic global transformations pose new and complex challenges for educational systems. Marian Kempny, a sociologist, emphasizes that two main currents of thought dominate thinking about the contemporary world and the effects of globalization. The first – economism – refers to global capitalism and economic transformations, while the second – culturalism – focuses on cultural transformations. The aforementioned current related to capitalism is a natural and inevitable process resulting from modernization, i.e., the strengthening of the foundations of the capitalist system (Kempny, 2001, pp. 79–101; 2006, pp. 13–39). Globalization processes, understood in this way, lead to the emergence of a global society, i.e., to the so-called homogenization of nation states. The boundaries of nation states are becoming blurred or even dissolved, ultimately contributing to the emergence of supranational organizational structures. The opposing trend is the domain of proponents of hybridization. “For them, the replication of certain patterns present in Western culture signifies not so much the subordination of local particularities to universal processes, but the domination of one particular form of social life over others” (Gilarek, 2003, p. 62). In this perspective, the unification of societies is and will continue to take place in the context of cul-

ture. For representatives of this trend, the factors determining the dynamics of the new world order are cultural aspects, which are autonomous from the economy and politics.

There are also approaches that combine elements of economism and culturalism, pointing to integration and fragmentation as two complementary processes. Globalization is not simply about the integration of societies towards a kind of superpower, nor about the revival of particularisms as a local response to global processes. The dynamics of the contemporary world are the result of the mutual influence of both processes, operating selectively both in terms of the spheres of life they affect within individual societies and in terms of the regions in which they are present (Gilarek, 2003, p. 62). An example of such an approach is the still valid concept of glocalization by Ronald Robertson (1992, pp. 61–84), also continued by Zygmunt Bauman (1997, pp. 53–69). Its essence concerns the restructuring of the social world based on principles different than before – the transformation of social structures and a self-reproducing hierarchy with a global reach.

Globalization leads to reflection on the formation of a new identity, defined after the name of the process as global identity. The positions presented in the social sciences regarding the formation of a global identity span two different ends of a continuum. The views of authors commenting on reality and forecasting possible changes vary, stemming from their different assumptions. However, the very act of addressing the issue of the development of a new type of identity or the construction of a global society indicates that, despite differences in the perspective, researchers share a common belief: that globalization processes are not without impact on contemporary societies.

Contrary to the approaches outlined above, Lech W. Zacher, a futurologist, notes that the so-called global society does not exist because it lacks referents. In his opinion, networks such as telecommunications, banking, politics, or culture can be described as global. Facing this fact, he points to the need to become aware of global challenges, problems, opportunities, and hopes. He sees the foundations of a hypothetical, global community of people not so much in the scope and scale of market mechanisms, but in political action. This does not mean, however, that the concept of citizenship of the nation state and its designations have disappeared. “So what does a citizen of the world (a cosmopolitan connotation) or an inhabitant of the planet (an ecological connotation) mean in the context of other types of citizenship? In any case, not everyone is a global citizen, and if they are, then not only

them. Belongings and identities overlap” (2020, pp. 181–191). The presented position, therefore, refers more to the concept of participation in a global network than to the existence of a global society.

In the distinctive sociological and culture-oriented approaches analyzing the ongoing “transition” from national identity to global identity, the fact is emphasized that the former is a relatively stable structure. The connection to the national group is built on values accepted by the individual and on the traits that shape the individual’s self-concept. Thus, the sense of this connection to the national group seems to be quite strong. Nowadays, in opposition to a stable sense of national identity, so-called identity politics is gaining ground. It is expressed in the manifestation of distinctiveness, distinguishing between ourselves and strangers, friends and enemies, which often leads to nationalism. In this way, access to global resources of information, technology, and lifestyles enables individuals to construct a more individualized, flexible, and reflective identity, while on the other hand, this same exposure to global patterns leads to the unification of values, which results or may result in the disappearance of cultural diversity (Zajda, 2020, pp. 107–124; Korporowicz, 2022, pp. 53–74; Nikitorowicz, 2022, pp. 93–107).

The processes and phenomena outlined above point to the need to design activities that protect the “world of being rooted” while simultaneously undertaking activities that shape national-state and continental-global awareness. In the contemporary reality, a special role is played by intercultural education, which takes as its starting point the reconciliation of “homelands”, the responsible and creative building of personal and social identity, perceived as a condition for protecting the individual from objectification and being lost in the world, because no culture can function and defend itself by denying the right to exist of other cultures. Less than two decades ago, Z. Bauman (2007) rightly emphasized that “if education and learning are to be useful in the conditions of liquid modernity, they must be continuous and truly lifelong. It is difficult to imagine any other model of education or learning. The “formation” of one’s “self” or one’s identity must take the form of a continuous, always unfinished reformation. [...] One needs lifelong education to give oneself the opportunity to choose. One needs it even more to preserve the conditions that make this choice possible and real” (p. 229) – and these words have lost none of their relevance.

Migration and refugee crisis

Migration is a permanent element of human existence, a derivative of human relationship with the natural environment and interpersonal relationships – social, political, and cultural ones. This duality has been evident since the beginning of the known human history (Sakson, 2008, pp. 11–29; Pasamonik and Markowska-Manista, 2017, pp. 7–13; Jędrzejczyk-Kuliniak, 2017, pp. 13–27; Cudowska, 2023, pp. 64–77).

Contemporarily, migration is defined as the process of spatial movements of people, a change of residence (stay) of people who move from their place of origin to their destination (Wielka Encyklopedia PWN/ *The Great PWN Encyclopedia*, 2003, pp. 407–410). This phenomenon is currently taking on new significance and is increasing significantly, triggering numerous changes in social, cultural, political, and economic structures. Massive global migrations resulting from armed conflicts, ethnic, religious, and political persecution, climate change, and economic inequality are leading to increased ethnic and cultural diversity in many countries and are triggering various crises. These crises are defined as situations in which the number of migrants or asylum seekers exceeds the capacity of states or international organizations to accommodate and integrate them.

The European migration crisis, also referred to in the expert literature as the refugee crisis or humanitarian crisis, is considered to have begun in 2015, when the European Union registered the highest number of refugees (1,333,779) and asylum seekers (1,322,850) since World War II. A key event related to the refugee crisis, which primarily affected Poland, was the large-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, which began on February 24, 2022. The consequence of military operations beyond Poland's eastern border was a mass exodus of people. Between February 24 and December 31, 2022, the Border Guard cleared 8.8 million people through border crossings from Ukraine to Poland, and over 7 million from Poland to Ukraine. Comparing these data with the number of asylum applications from the peak of the migration crisis in the European Union in 2015–2016, it can be concluded that the scale of this phenomenon, which is related to the war in Ukraine, is unprecedented in post-war European history (Staniszewski, 2023, pp. 10–12, Boćkowski, 2025, pp. 213–227).

The migration and refugee crisis is not solely a social, political, humanitarian, or economic problem. It is, above all, a challenge and task for the educational systems of individual states and nations, which must respond to the needs of children and young people with migration and refugee experience.

Education can, on the one hand, play a key role in social integration, but on the other, it can also expose and reproduce social inequalities. According to the UNHCR report¹, 49% of refugee children worldwide (approximately 7.2 million) do not attend school (Refugee Education Report, 2024, p. 10). Despite the adoption of international strategies in this area (e.g., “2030 Refugee Education Strategy”), this problem remains serious, and migrant children experience multidimensional forms of exclusion (including racial, social, cultural, and linguistic exclusion).

A similar situation exists in Poland. According to UNICEF data from 2023, more than half of Ukrainian refugee children residing in Poland were not enrolled into state schools. Although the education system accepted a significant number of students, many continue their studies remotely within the Ukrainian system, and some do not participate in any form of education (UNICEF, 2023). Following legislative changes in 2024², the number of refugee children subjected to compulsory education exceeded 200,000 in the 2024–2025 school year, while a significant educational gap still exists among the remaining 109,000 Ukrainian school-age children registered in the PESEL database³. Previous Polish research on the relationship between

¹ UNHCR – The UN Refugee Agency is a global organization committed to saving lives, protecting rights, and building a better future for those forced to flee their homes due to conflict and persecution. The organization leads international efforts to protect refugees, forcibly displaced communities, and stateless persons. UNHCR’s 2024 Refugee Education Report draws on data from over 65 countries worldwide to provide a detailed picture of the state of refugee education and enrolment. The report examines the Refugee Education Strategy 2030 (published in 2019) and identifies areas where significant progress has been made, as well as areas where more investment and enhanced cooperation are needed to achieve its strategic goals.

² Compulsory school attendance was introduced through an amendment to the Act of May 15, 2024, changing the Act on assistance to citizens of Ukraine due to the armed conflict. This amendment linked compulsory school attendance to the right to family benefits (800+ and Good Start). From September 1, 2024, all children and young people with refugee status from Ukraine (PESEL-UKR) who arrived in Poland after February 24, 2022, will be required to complete one year of preschool preparation, attend school, or study in the Polish educational system, on an equal basis with children of Polish citizens. Regulation of the Minister of Education and Science of August 26, 2024 (Journal of Laws of 2024, item 1302).

³ PESEL (Pol. *Powszechny Elektroniczny System Ewidencji Ludności*) is a unique 11-digit personal identification number for all citizens and residents, encoding date of birth, gender, and a check digit.

education and the integration of refugees and migrants indicates both positive outcomes and numerous barriers and obstacles. On the one hand, education acts as a tool for adaptation, enabling children and young people to participate more actively in socio-cultural life and thus reducing marginalization. Mastering the language of the host country allows for effective learning and communication, establishing social contacts, acquiring knowledge about cultural differences and understanding them, while minimizing stereotypes and prejudices. An inclusive school environment fosters a sense of security and belonging, especially after experiencing the trauma of war, forced migration, and the loss of home. Yet, very often the demands of early childhood education (or the upper grades of primary school) exceed the capabilities of many children who previously attended schools operating in educational systems other than the Polish one. For some, encountering a Polish school and its demands, including teachers' expectations for rapid progression in learning the Polish language, has been a source of stress and even school phobia. Teachers still believe that the better the knowledge of Polish among students who previously did not speak the language, the faster and more efficient the teaching process. From the teachers' perspective, any reference to a student's previous educational experiences is not perceived as a pedagogical achievement (Kamińska, 2019, pp. 25–26; Baranowska, 2020, pp. 215–236; Ciupińska, 2022, pp. 155–169; Rogalska-Marasińska, 2024, pp. 40–50). Nevertheless, it is emphasized that the education of migrant students in Polish schools has undergone a transformation in recent years – from a situation of complete helplessness in working with children arriving from abroad to the use of quite advanced instruments to support their adaptation. Research conducted among the staff of educational system indicates a multifaceted approach to searching for solutions and recommendations, as well as the introduction of further instruments into Polish law to support schools and foreign children in their education (Gulińska, 2021, p. 53; Biernat, 2024, pp. 149–162).

The selected issues outlined in the relationship between education and the integration of refugees and migrants require an approach from a broader perspective of domestic and international social discourses, including political ones that analyze the evolution of the concept of cultural capital, the theory of intersectionality, and critical pedagogy towards a more diverse and inclusive understanding of the social experiences of people in a migration or refugee crisis.

Rising xenophobic attitudes, nationalism, and radicalization

A reaction to the growing cultural diversity observed in many societies and communities, including our own, is the rise of xenophobic, nationalist, and radical attitudes. These phenomena are often fueled by disinformation, media manipulation, and political narratives that construct an image of the Other/Foreigner as a threat. Children and young people, searching for their own identity and place in society, are particularly susceptible to such messages. Attitudes of aversion, fear, or hostility, especially towards representatives of other cultures, nations, or religions, are most often based on stereotypes, prejudice, and disinformation.

From the perspective of the influx of culturally alien people, it is crucial to assess the attitudes (and their determinants) of Poles towards these individuals. The current migration and refugee crisis is evoking intense emotions, primarily negative ones. The social sentiment thus aroused was reflected both in public activities (demonstrations, protests, online publications, etc.) and in the results of scientific research and surveys. As Marzena Kutt points out, the results of research conducted systematically by the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS) between 2017 and 2023 illustrate a clear reluctance among Poles to accept refugees. When searching for general categories describing the concerns expressed about them, the most common ones are: (1) realistic threats (economic consequences); (2) symbolic threats (religious and cultural differences and the threat of domination of the own group by the alien group in this respect); (3) intergroup anxiety (anxiety about interactions with the others) (Kutt, 2023, p. 122).

It is also worth emphasizing that anxiety was expressed both by respondents who had never had contact with refugees or people culturally different from them, as well as by those who had such contacts and assessed them positively. The patterns presented by respondents included: (1) the willingness to confront newcomers in the name of patriotism and defence of the homeland; (2) a rational, unemotional assessment of potential threats; (3) fear triggered mainly by media reports; (4) a negative attitude toward Poland as a country not ready to accept refugees; (5) confusion and caution combined with distancing oneself from inconsistent media reports; (6) a clear aversion to refugees; (7) empathy and compassion for people fleeing armed conflict. Among the described attitudes, the dominant one was fear (or at least apprehension) of refugees, perceived as potential terrorists, villains, and rapists (Hall and Mikulska-Jolles, 2016, pp. 10–13).

According to the recent research, the dominant narratives surrounding refugees in Poland – largely promoted by the political party Law and Justice (PiS) and conservative media – tend to distinguish between “good” and “bad” refugees. The interviewees explained that “good” refugees (often overlapping with “good” migrants) are described as “deserving” of Poland’s support. This applies largely to refugees from Eastern European countries perceived as culturally or ethnically similar to Poles, or to the situations where Poland’s support for refugees strengthens the government’s foreign policy position, for example, in the cases of Belarus and Ukraine. In turn, “bad” refugees include people from the Middle East and Africa, especially from countries predominantly of Muslim origin and arriving spontaneously (Hargrave, Homel and Dražanová, 2023, p. 32).

The intensification of xenophobic attitudes, especially reinforced by polarizing nationalism that fuels conflicts between “us” (citizens) and “them” (migrants), and the radicalism of individuals or groups adopting extreme political, religious or ideological views, significantly weakens both social cohesion and the sense of security, as well as democratic processes. Some examples include: the events in France, where after the terrorist attacks in 2015–2020 support for extreme parties increased and anti-Islamic rhetoric became much more severe; the United States of America, where the rhetoric of Donald Trump and his supporters continues to contribute to the increase in hate incidents against ethnic and religious minorities; or Poland in 2021–2025, where the crisis on the border with Belarus and the war in Ukraine led to an increase in anti-immigrant sentiments, especially towards people from the Middle East and Africa (Inglehart and Norris, 2016; Malendowicz, 2017, Latosińska, 2021, pp. 31–62).

The outlined phenomena are being reflected in the educational space, particularly in schools, where social tensions stemming from global migration crises, the rise of populism, xenophobia, and nationalism are emerging among students, teachers, and parents. On the basis of the research results in this area, it can be concluded that in many countries, there is a current tendency to emphasize a unified national identity, history, and culture in curricula – often in opposition to the Other/Alien. By reinforcing ethnocentrism and promoting a narrowly defined national identity, schools marginalize alternative narratives present outside of their social discourse. Learners from the majority group often perceive their migrant peers as a threat, they do not accept otherness, and their attitudes are guided not by knowledge but by stereotypes and prejudices reinforced in their home and media envi-

ronments (Stevens, Boer, Titzmann, Cosma, and Walsh, 2020; Dunaj, 2023; Tłuściak-Deliowska, 2024, pp. 47–58). In recent years in Poland, an emphasis on historical and patriotic narratives has emerged in curricula and school textbooks. These narratives focus primarily on events associated with national liberation, heroism, sacrifice, and building national pride. Although cultivating national identity and historical memory is an essential element of education, the dominance of a single, often one-dimensional narrative leads to the omission of the issues of cultural diversity and tolerance, significantly weakening young people's preparation for life in multicultural communities. An analysis of the general education core curriculum (MEN, 2024) shows that although issues such as human rights and tolerance are mentioned, they are marginalized in favour of events and figures related to patriotic narratives. Similarly, history textbooks (e.g., “*Historia. Podręcznik do klasy 8* [History. A Textbook for Grade 8],” WSiP) devote only a few pages to topics such as the Holocaust or Polish-Jewish relations, often presented in a simplified manner or without the European and global context (Nijakowski and Wawrzyniak, 2020; Zenderowski and Cebul, 2020, pp. 103–116; Pick, 2023, pp. 47–73). Responsible, depoliticized education should combine remembrance of the past with reflection on the present and future, teaching respect for diversity and social responsibility for the community – both national and global. In this context, systemic changes in curricula, teacher training and the approach to textbook content are necessary in order not to marginalize intercultural, anti-discrimination and civic education, but to promote it.

New communication technologies and disinformation as sources of cultural tension

Contemporary communication processes are shaped primarily by digital information platforms such as social media, content aggregation portals, and instant messaging apps. Digital media – thanks to their ubiquity, speed, and interactivity – significantly shape our perception of the surrounding reality, public opinion, and intergroup relations. The use of new technologies in everyday life has changed the model of interpersonal relationships, which was primarily focused on selectivity. Who one interacts with is currently determined not by spatial proximity, but by specific criteria, such as views, work, interests, travel, etc.

The internet allows for the building of new interpersonal relationships, the maintenance of the existing ones, and provides space for the creation of new patterns of interpersonal contact. According to Małgorzata Jagodzińska

and Marek Mucha (2019), new technologies are an integral part of the reality of contemporary youth, who spend most of their free time in this space, acquire new information there, seek entertainment, contact the loved ones, and make new friends. At the same time, these media are becoming a carrier of disinformation, fake news, deepfakes, hate speech, and polarizing content. In the context of multicultural, globalized societies, this process contributes to the generation or intensification of cultural tensions, the reinforcement of stereotypes, and the radicalization of attitudes (pp. 31–41). International research conducted in recent years indicates that false information accounts for over 70% of all messages replicated in social media (Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral, 2018, pp. 1146–1151; Miller, Menard, and Bourrie, 2024). In turn, the latest Polish research published in the report “*Dezinformacja oczami Polaków. Edycja 2024 [Disinformation through the eyes of Poles. 2024 Edition]*” highlights that the level of disinformation in our country remains high and even shows an upward trend compared to the 2021 survey. Poles are increasingly trusting false information. This is a very disturbing trend, especially in the context of growing awareness of the threat posed by hybrid activities following the Russian aggression against Ukraine.

Disinformation in the political sphere includes the belief that Poland has lost sovereignty to control by the European Union (38%), as well as the thesis that feminism and LGBT+ are ideologies imposing a different lifestyle on the majority of Poles (32%). One of the key findings from the cited study is that social media are treated as a source of current information by nearly half of respondents (46%) (Report, 2024). The seriousness of this current problem is evidenced by, among other things, the following: on February 13, 2025, the Commission and the European Digital Services Council approved the official inclusion of the voluntary Code of Conduct on Disinformation in the Digital Services Act (DSA), recognizing that disinformation has become a very serious threat that could significantly impact the global political and social landscape. The Code entered into force on July 1, 2025 (Code of Conduct on Disinformation, 2025).

As a sociologist of education Andrzej Radziewicz-Winnicki (2020) emphasized five years ago, “the impact of the press and other media agitation, as well as the expression of many opinions addressed to the less educated sector of the Polish society (~44%), evokes an emotional social sense of resentment in human consciousness. This is a process of social reception of many media messages in terms of campaign agitation (intervention strategies) on a continuum: personality – perception – emotions – susceptibility – tradition – political choice” (p. 69). In this context, the categories of the Own and the

Other have for years been – according to the author – among the most common concepts used to describe structural relations between individuals and social groups. Understanding behaviour in these terms allows one to understand the core of hatred, antagonisms, contradictions, as well as fascination, approval, and aspirations that accompany the learning and experiencing of all kinds of otherness. What seems of paramount importance is the strangeness stimulated by the creator and the social distance that accompanies emotions as a measure of disapproval (social distance), well known to contemporary sociology and cultural anthropology (p. 86). This is why many researchers refer to the current situation as the post-truth era – a reality in which truth and facts are no longer the basis for shaping public opinion, and theoretical and scientific foundations are undermined in order to prevent an individual from understanding an event, phenomenon, or experience.

The spread of disinformation in digital media leads to numerous negative sociocultural consequences, including a decline in social trust, an increase in cultural antagonism, a decline in the quality of democratic life, and a deterioration in the quality of civic education and cultural awareness, especially among young people. Today, youth is, on the one hand, the main recipient of digital content, and on the other, it is particularly vulnerable to the impact of disinformation due to lacking skills of critical source analysis. In the long term, this translates into a deficit in civic competences, a diminished sense of cultural identity, and susceptibility to various types of manipulation. Therefore, in countering the effects of disinformation, educational and popularization activities are crucial. These should continuously encompass all stages of education (adapting to students' cognitive abilities) and be present in the public sphere for all age groups, including adults (Musiał, 2022, p. 198; Kuś, 2024, pp. 57–80). Therefore, it is necessary to build social resilience to disinformation through, among other things, systematic media education.

2. Towards intercultural education as a formative process

The outlined social, cultural, and educational contexts of selected contemporary issues clearly indicate that cultural openness and the need for intercultural education are becoming essential values. They represent an opportunity to create democratic education based on distinct axiology and social policies, stemming from the perception of the needs and expectations of individuals and groups. In this perspective, contemporary intercultural education, understood as a process and attitude, should constitute a holistic approach to

education implemented at all educational stages. It cannot be a supplement to traditional education as a mere adaptive strategy – it should be/become a formative process, shaping attitudes, values, and competencies that enable individuals and groups to function in an increasingly complex and culturally diverse social reality.

According to a cultural sociologist Antonina Kłoskowska, the openness of cultures does not mean a lack of selection of influences. Only a favourable approach to other cultures, a truly personalistic view of other societies, and thus of the individuals who constitute these societies, can provide a basis for building a new intercultural space. However, this cannot mean uncritical acceptance of all cultural influences. The assimilation of the values of other cultures should be based on openness supported by favourable criticism, while simultaneously accepting and emphasizing the inalienable right of every human being to freedom (Kłoskowska, 2002, p. 159). Due to the impossibility of halting contemporary globalization processes, this issue is and will continue to be relevant. However, to prevent the consequences of these processes from their leading to a series of conflict-prone tensions, it is necessary to implement changes in the educational system and reinterpret fundamental values. Education—and above all, intercultural education – is intended to protect the identity of individuals, societies, and nations by invoking values such as truth, responsibility, freedom, tolerance, and human dignity against undesirable and illusory unification and its consequences. Implementing contemporary intercultural education as a (comprehensive and long-term) formative process can and should encompass four fundamental dimensions: social, cultural, cognitive, and, ultimately, the fourth, axiological – updated in various family, school, and extracurricular situations. These situations, as intentional actions, are/become a source of the emergence of various values (their possible “interpretations”) and the development of individual and group abilities to evaluate the acquired knowledge and experiences.

The first and second formative dimensions – *social and cultural* – are characterized by:

- *the relationship: student – culture – education*, linking the sphere of culture with values and personal self-development and emphasizing the individual’s freedom and self-determination (subjectivity);
- *building a sense of multidimensional cultural and intercultural identity* from an individual (subjective) perspective and a social (external) perspective in terms of: a) the condition of the Self, b) self-concept in the world, and c) action competence (possible contact with the world and

relationships with Others);

- *raising awareness of the Other and recognizing the dissimilarity of people from other cultures*, aimed, among other things, at “weakening” the consolidated negative stereotypes and prejudices and modifying them;
- *shaping attitudes* of tolerance, empathy, respect, and openness to otherness and the Other;
- *intercultural communication and dialogue* enabling systematic linguistic contacts with members of other communities and societies, and at the same time very often creating natural situations that foster simultaneous participation in two (or more) cultures and two (or more) language systems, as well as learning cooperation, mediation, and jointly solving social and cultural problems;
- *educating adults* (including teachers, educators, parents) to act as intercultural guides and translators, promoters of dialogue and role models of intercultural attitudes;
- *broadening the scope of socio-cultural integration* to include: a) integration of joint activities of educators and learners, b) integration of class groups, c) integration of the student’s living environment (family home, peer group, school), d) integration of educational and cultural offers (school and extracurricular activities) – school becomes not only a place of learning, but above all a space of social, personal coexistence.

The third of the distinguished formative components – the *cognitive* one – includes:

- *motives for exploring the world and learning*, characterized by an intense motivation to learn about the surrounding world of people, things, and phenomena, and to acquire social and intercultural competences in the learning process, which determine effective (active, responsible, and reflective) functioning in social situations at school and outside of school;
- *constructing knowledge at school: learning through dialogue and intercultural contact*, implying the need for a different approach to the process of acquiring knowledge by children, and therefore a transition from monologue-based education to dialogic education related to the creation of meaning;
- *promoting the paradigms of “education for development” and “coexistence of cultures”*, with a focus on basic and applied research in the sphere of so-called targeted development of students in culturally diverse environments;

- *linking educational research and intercultural studies* with the latest trends in philosophy, psychology, sociology, cultural studies, and other disciplines.

The *axiological* dimension of intercultural education, combining the outlined social, cultural, and cognitive components, is primarily situated in the formation of values such as social justice, solidarity, equality, human rights, and, above all, the value of responsibility. Becoming aware both of the phenomenon of a specific cultural continuity with the related responsibility for the Other and of contemporary cultural changes in the context of globalization processes, in terms of its progressive and regressive features and ambivalence as important and inherent characteristics of this category (Lewowicki, 2021, pp. 15–66) may consequently counteract the relativization of individual social identities and lead to the openness of cultures and the building of new intercultural (also educational) spaces.

Intercultural education as a formative process is and should be not only a response to the complex problems of today, but also a commitment and ongoing task of education to shape children, youth, and adults – able to live and thrive in a multicultural society. This formative process, built on the foundations of humanistic, personalistic, integral, and dialogue-based pedagogy, requires critical pedagogical reflection, conscious shaping of attitudes and values, a long-term and multidimensional approach, institutional and social support, and the depoliticization of education – its independence from changing political systems, interests of particular parties, and ideological pressure.

3. Barriers and limitations to the implementation of intercultural education as a formative process

Despite the increasing number of undertaken educational activities, the implementation and realization of intercultural education encounters many challenges in practice. These challenges are most often systemic, institutional, social, and individual in nature. Understanding these barriers is essential in order to fully harness the potential of intercultural education as a formative process.

The most important barriers and limitations include:

- *inconsistency and fragmentation of activities at the level of educational system*, resulting from the lack of a coherent educational policy and systemic support. Although in many countries, including Poland, the

core curricula and other applicable documents include references to the values of tolerance, equality, and dialogue, there is a lack of a national strategy for intercultural education, uniform curricular standards related to interculturality, and systemic support for schools and teachers in working with students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Intercultural activities are often conducted on an *ad hoc* basis, depending on the involvement of a specific teacher or non-governmental organization, which limits their sustainability and effectiveness;

- *insufficient preparation of teaching staff* – teachers often lack knowledge of intercultural education and communication, the ability to work with students with migration or refugee experience, or the awareness of their own stereotypes, prejudices, and thinking patterns. Furthermore, there is a lack of sufficient professional development in this area, and the topic of cultural diversity remains marginally present in the training programs of future teachers at most universities;
- *social resistance and entrenched stereotypes* – the implementation of intercultural education is often met with a lack of interest or strong resistance from parents, local communities, and learners themselves. This is due to various factors, including fear of the Other, often reinforced by digital media and politics, entrenched cultural and ethnic stereotypes, and a lack of personal experience with cultural diversity;
- *language and communication barriers* – working with students with migration or refugee experience often involves language difficulties, which hinder not only the acquisition of knowledge but also the development of relationships with peers and teachers. There are insufficient classes of Polish as a foreign language, teaching materials adapted to the linguistic level of foreign children, and interpreters and intercultural assistants to support learners and their families. The lack of language support results in lower educational achievements for children and young people, their marginalization, and social exclusion, thus hindering the effective implementation of intercultural education goals.
- *insufficient funding and lack of resources* – intercultural education, especially if it is intended to be practical, project-based, and participatory, requires financial investment in training, teaching materials and resources, event organization, and the hiring of additional staff (e.g., cultural mediators, counsellors, or intercultural psychologists). In many cases, schools lack funding for remedial and integration classes for foreign students, intercultural projects, institutional support in obtaining

- grants, or the time and organizational space to incorporate intercultural elements into daily educational practice;
- *formalization and superficiality of activities* – the activities within intercultural education are often implemented formally or symbolically, for example, they are limited to one-off events such as “Tolerance Day,” “Ukrainian Culture Day,” or cultural festivals. This approach, although apparently supporting cultural diversity, can lead to the aestheticization and commercialization of cultures, rather than their exploration, understanding, and appreciation. Intercultural education must be an ongoing process, embedded in the context of everyday social interactions, not merely a “decorative element” in the calendar of school or extracurricular events;
 - *insufficient evaluation of intercultural activities and monitoring of their effects* – these activities are often not part of mandatory school development strategies or systemic programs for improving the quality of education. Moreover, teachers lack the tools to assess learners’ intercultural competences, the cultural climate at school, or the actual level of integration and dialogue between cultural groups. They also lack the skills to conduct qualitative and participatory evaluations that take into account the perspectives of learners, parents, and minority communities. Without reliable diagnosis and a systematic reflective culture in which schools analyze their practices and their effects, it is difficult to introduce improvements and to build stable foundations of intercultural education.

The outlined barriers and limitations to intercultural education – despite numerous examples of good practices, specific actions, and strategies – require genuine cooperation between multiple entities (in order to overcome them): the state, educational institutions, non-governmental organizations, media, local governments, teachers, students, and their parents. Intercultural education as a formative process is and should be moving away from the assimilation model towards a shift in the educational paradigm – from a transmission-based one to a dialogic and participatory one, and the creation of new forms of educational spaces based on relationships, collaboration, and community. “The idea of intercultural education, education that breaks the isolation of various communities, stigmatization, and also self-stigmatization, seems to have many supporters. The modern world is multicultural, and a successful and socially beneficial life requires dialogue and cooperation with people of different nationalities, cultures, skin colours, etc. The wave of misunderstood patriotism, chauvinism, xenophobia, and even

neo-fascism that has been sweeping through various regions of the world (including some European countries) for several years does not portend positive changes. Therefore, efforts to maintain and develop intercultural education that fosters learning and understanding of others and their cultures, friendly cooperation, and peace are even more necessary. These messages encourage, and even necessitate, cooperation with institutions and individuals striving for international cooperation, compliance with international legal norms, and improved living conditions. [...] Education, in its positive program, serves a good cause because it serves to bring out the best sides of humanity in people.” (Lewowicki, 2025, pp. 47–48).

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Interaction of cultures in the school environment as a challenge for polyphonic education

Abstract: The article draws attention to the paradigm of coexistence and mutual understanding in the context of intercultural interaction within the school environment. It emphasizes that the school, as a microcosm of society, constitutes a crucial space for the implementation of educational processes that promote not only academic knowledge, but also personal development, intercultural sensitivity, and emotional maturity. Education in such a setting becomes an opportunity to develop the ability to remain in a meaningful relationship – with oneself, with one’s own cultural identity, and with others who may represent different world-views, values, and life experiences.

According to the author, the concept of polyphonic education goes beyond mere tolerance or superficial acceptance of otherness. It is grounded in a deep curiosity about what is different and unfamiliar, and it prioritizes authentic dialogue, empathetic listening, and open engagement with the Other. In this approach, the educational and formative processes are understood as moments of encounter that foster not only knowledge about the world, but also profound self-reflection and growth in self-awareness. Importantly, the article does not idealize intercultural coexistence. It acknowledges the various difficulties, tensions, and conflicts that may arise in culturally diverse school settings. Rather than avoiding these challenges, the text suggests that they must be openly addressed. The author advocates for the development of deliberate and thoughtful educational strategies that cultivate open-mindedness, creativity, and a sense of cultural agency among students. These strategies should foster subjectivity, responsibility, freedom, and a form of integration that empowers individuals to engage with others while also discovering deeper dimensions of themselves.

Keywords: polyphonic education, intercultural education, tolerance, understanding of cultures, interaction of cultures

Introduction

The third decade of the 21st century brings about a change from the formula of functioning as a monocultural environment to a culturally diverse one for the Polish society. On the one hand, this situation sharpens the senses of observing the world and fosters sensitivity to the problems of the other. On the other hand, it contributes to the growth of disturbing phenomena such as growing fanaticism, nationalism or xenophobia, which leads to various conflicts. Hence, an important challenge for our education is to shape students' attitudes conducive to interest in the values of other cultures on the basis of openness, acceptance, but also friendly criticism. This promotes the creation of a new model of intercultural education, the essence of which is polyphony, assuming the obvious diversity in various dimensions of functioning in the school space of people sometimes coming from extremely different cultural areas, a model serving the elimination of prejudices, fears, breaking barriers and stereotypes in the spirit of creative encounter.

The interaction of cultures in polyphonic education, growing on the basis of open intercultural communication, becomes an opportunity to exchange values in an atmosphere of mutual respect, understanding different lifestyles and treating differences not as a value in itself, but also as an opportunity for mutual development.

The essence of cultural interaction in a social group

The interaction of cultures is fundamentally related to the phenomenon of integration of cultures and the concept of ties. It is also treated as an important factor influencing adaptation understood as a process in which *gradual adaptation takes place in terms of the form and functions of material, social and mental cultural elements of given population groups, forming a specific community* (Świątkiewicz, 1987, p. 18). Therefore, we can conclude that the interaction of cultures has a great impact on the values professed, the way of behavior, the rapid development of the ability to assume a social role, the increase of self-awareness – simply on the formation of personality. It serves effective coexistence, mutual exchange of patterns, symbols and views, participation in one's own culture and the life of other cultures.

When analyzing the essence of interaction, we basically interpret it as a sequence of interpretative processes of subsequent phases of activities,

which are treated as verbal and non-verbal communication messages. Interaction is communication, the exchange of these messages between its participants, who take turns as senders and recipients (Kubiak, 1996, p. 115). According to the cited definition, it can be stated that by participating in the interaction, people shape their own hierarchies of values, intentions and attitudes by adapting to or opposing others. Social psychologists prove that emotional, cognitive and motivational processes occurring between people are often triggered automatically and shape themselves outside our consciousness (Skarżyńska, 2012, p. 9). In a multicultural environment, it is important to shape structures, but they are not based on the criterion of ethnic or racial affiliation, which are based on mutual interactions free of conflict and open to compromises that require tolerance enabling the acquisition of intercultural competences and fostering the integral development of the personality of each member of a given social group. The following elements are important here: mutual attention, getting to know each other, cooperation and cooperation aimed at developing a consensus between one's own and foreign culture, eliminating prejudices and fears of experiencing stigmatization or marginalization.

If the social group is a school environment, we are dealing with a very complex system of social interactions that take place between students, between students and teachers and between teachers. However, educational interactions do not apply to all situations – they are conditioned by interpersonal expectations, sympathy, intellectual abilities, interests, etc. (for example, it is claimed that students with high intelligence participate in more didactic interactions with the teacher) (Krasuska-Betiuk, 2015, p. 56). At the same time, the school creates many opportunities to compare one's own cultural heritage with the heritage of others, to conduct a dialogue shaping a new socio-cultural awareness, based on respect and openness to a better understanding of the other person and the world.

The interaction of cultures contributes to the formation of a human personality respecting, in addition to the potential of the inherited native culture, the cultures created as a result of experiencing participation in the active adaptation of others to a specific social group. Taking into account all differences, both ethnic and those related to gender, views, lifestyle, economic status, it sensitizes to the need to initiate activities aimed at interest in diversity, going beyond negative stereotypes and prejudices and develops intercultural competences.

Martyn Barrett, speaking about intercultural interactions, points out that in the first, key phase of establishing relationships, the parties involved *do not perceive themselves in a “purely individual” way, but above all – as members of a specific cultural group* (Barrett, 2021, p. 49). This takes on a special character in the school, which is a specific world of ritualized social interactions, implemented in the context of subjectively constructed meanings relating to the attitudes, values and beliefs of people who meet in it. Treating the school as a social organization conducive to defining the world, among other things, by conducting joint activities and taking co-responsibility for various interactions, it experiences the need to meet various challenges related to building common dimensions of identity. In a multicultural school, this requires enriching the educational offer and additional educational interactions for mutual understanding, taking into account not only the principles of coexistence, students’ needs and aspirations, but also their right to preserve their own cultural roots in an atmosphere of mutual respect and co-responsibility for the space of social life. Therefore, it is necessary to cultivate the basic determinants of intercultural sensitivity, involvement in interaction and development of intercultural communication competences.

The objectives of polyphonic education and the possibilities of their implementation in the context of cultural interaction

As already mentioned, multicultural education focuses on promoting the understanding, acceptance and tolerance towards different cultures. It focuses on learning about their traditions, values, languages and history. Students learn about differences and similarities between cultures in order to build intercultural dialogue. Polyphonic education, on the other hand, is based on the metaphor of polyphony and assumes that various voices, perspectives and experiences are equal and coexist in a harmonious way. The main goal is to create a space in which different narratives and ways of thinking can interact without imposing the domination of one of them. Thus, multicultural education is learning about differences, while polyphonic education is active co-creation based on these differences.

Starting from the assumption that its important task is to awaken curiosity and popularize knowledge about different cultures of the world, polyphonic education – thanks to appropriate stimulation of interaction – teaches openness and conversation skills as the foundation of life in new societies, as well

as encourages reflection on one's culture and deepens knowledge about it not only in order to look for similarities, but also to understand differences. In these aspects, one must be aware that multiculturalism has an absolutely positive dimension when it is possible to function in harmony, an atmosphere of dialogue and cooperation – the teacher is the initiator and coordinator of activities enriching the educational offer.

However, there is also a second dimension of multiculturalism, manifested in the dominance of specific cultures while degrading others, in intercultural contradictions, especially when in one school there are ethnically and religiously different groups that tend to close within the dogmas encoded in their minds. For the teacher, this is a challenge resulting from the need for constant reaction and interaction, the need to conduct skillful negotiations within such dilemmas as, for example, separation – openness, nationalism – patriotism and others. This is associated with such implementation of the idea of interaction, which effectively triggers motivation and introduces principles that teach behaviours of coexistence and lead to the formation of a multidimensional identity.

Being aware that the presence of culturally different individuals and sometimes even groups in the space of everyday interactions is a good assumption to get interested in cultural diversity, it becomes necessary to organize training in the methodology of working with a culturally diverse group. This is a chance to make it easier for educators to answer the questions: How to use the potential of diversity in a specific type of school? How to design educational programs and classes? What didactic methods should be used at different stages of education? Standard methods used in Polish schools that affect the intellect, emotions and behaviour of students will not always be adequate to the needs, especially since despite the presence of issues in the field of intercultural education in the core curriculum, they function in a marginal way in most schools. The implementation of tasks in this area usually boils down to *providing fragmentary information about other cultures, customs or religions. Too rarely, the attention of children and young people is drawn to the differences and similarities existing between people and cultures* (Młynarczuk-Sokołowska, 2012, p. 240–241).

Specialists in the field of implementing effective polyphonic education recommend expanding the contents (not only equipping students with knowledge) also with those that, strengthen and sensitize to indigenous values, stimulate the development of cooperation skills, involvement in matters conducive to stimulating awareness of one's own belonging to a specific

group and separateness from others. This is to be done in accordance with the principle of building a dialogue of cultures: *you need to know who you are, be able to distinguish the identification features of your group and accept them, in a word: to know and understand your culture, to know who and because of what differences is “different”* (Schmidt, 2004, p. 41). The challenge for educators is the need to increase educational interactions in the field of shaping civic attitudes in such a way as to build a sense of solidarity and prevent the processes of dehumanization spreading in some environments, building such negative phenomena as terrorism and extremism, or marginalization and separatism – as Jerzy Nikitorowicz notes in his book – it is necessary to counteract the loss of polyphony in the process of shaping the identity of nations (Nikitorowicz, 2020, p. 175).

Another problem is the high turnover of children and youth from Ukraine or other countries, caused by frequent relocation from one place to another, e.g. due to parents changing their place of work. As I noted in one of my publications, *many schools are struggling with the situation that during the school year new students appear in different months, which makes it difficult for teachers to implement the curriculum in a continuous and consistent way. Learners changing schools are at a different stage of the curriculum than the rest of the class and lose contact with peers with whom they have already begun to build ties* (Mydłowska, 2024, p. 139). In a situation where changes in migration trends have been observed since 2023 – seasonal migrations are slowly transforming into settlement migrations – it is especially important for the teacher to take care of the quality of mutual relations not only with students but also with their parents. Supporting parents of foreign students is not only an aid in achieving progress in learning, but also in functioning in the Polish reality in general. The activity of parents can help in adapting the content and methods of didactic and educational work to the needs of their children and in undertaking initiatives at school aimed at shaping an environment that nurtures such basic values as solidarity, dignity or justice, helping to create an atmosphere friendly to culturally different students. Both sides can learn from each other to interact effectively in terms of emotions, cognition and action, so that students can acquire the necessary knowledge and acquire critical thinking and deliberate decision-making skills. Polyphonic education emphasizes a dialogue in which each perspective brings its own value and differences are perceived as a resource, not a problem. The goal is not only to understand others, but to jointly create new solutions based on experience.

The foundation of such cooperation should be an atmosphere of understanding, care for the development of children, mutual acceptance and a sense of joint responsibility for the process of their education. Only such a relationship gives a chance to build an emotional and intellectual community in a school classroom, capable of creating such a culture in which the integration of didactic and educational interactions is based on kindness, endowment with mutual sensitivity and cordiality. This requires appropriate skills and effort put into such cooperation, which takes into account the individualization of educational and didactic interactions and provides everyone with a sense of usefulness and agency.

The latter aspect is also related to the appropriate attitude of the teaching staff and students in multicultural schools. Due attention is drawn to this in the article by providing the results of my own pilot studies, but also of other specialists, carried out in schools where there is a large group of students from Ukraine. The research emphasizes that *the quality of relations with students from Ukraine is, according to teachers, influenced by the lack of integration with Polish students, and above all by being only in one's own circle, "often there are also national conflicts between students from Ukraine and students from Russia or Belarus". Relationships of Ukrainian students with their peers may affect their general sense of acceptance at school. Teachers should support the integration process and prevent exclusion* (Mydłowska, 2024, p. 126).

In view of the above, the key challenge is the professional preparation of teachers for intercultural education. Lectures and exercises enabling the development of competences to provide professional assistance to students from other cultural circles, both in the process of cultural adaptation and social integration, should be introduced to the program of all types of pedagogical studies. First of all, attention should be paid to skills related to increasing students' psychosocial competences, breaking stereotypes, strengthening the attitude of respect, mutual acceptance, and some others aimed at counteracting social exclusion.

At the same time, it is important to educate future teachers so that (by creating intercultural interactions) they can translate theoretical knowledge and ideological assumptions of multicultural education into practical situations that have a real place at school. The teacher must be able to support students of a multicultural school in coping with such phenomena as: cultural shock, difficulties with language communication or integration with the peer environment. Seeking, together with their students, reliable knowledge about the *Others*, teachers must be able to explore common roots in an at-

mosphere of kindness and curiosity, using such means as the chronological method, circles, cultural routes, contact maps, etc. Looking for solutions, a teacher can organize joint meetings devoted to the analysis of interesting texts, films, translation of sources functioning in different cultures, of stereotypes (not only identifying them but also leading to their breaking) and ways of solving problems (using, for example, such methods as: decision table, debate, negotiations, conflict maps). When organizing such meetings, it is also worth using methods of building cooperation scenarios that will help the teacher not only to determine the expectations of students representing different cultures, but also to support them in the implementation of various tasks, to encourage them to learn different views while presenting their own in such a way that they testify to the ability to properly argue their own arguments with the application in practice of principles demonstrating high personal culture and sensitivity to cultural diversity. Such an approach often requires the teacher to take on different roles – of a mediator, advisor and even a manager with the ability to work with young people and parents of different beliefs, nationalities, races and religions. This means diversity management, which is to help everyone learn effectively in a group, in accordance with the principles of cooperation in order to include elements of learning to live together in all didactic activities (Szempruch, 2023, p. 319). An important role of school and the teacher is to prepare the class for the admission of a student from a different culture and to create appropriate conditions for multicultural education and support for foreign students. For this purpose, it is worth including all willing environments in the cooperation.

Jerzy Nikitorowicz emphasizes that the educational policy of multiculturalism should *lead to the acquisition of the ability to cross the boundaries of one's own ethnocentrism and sociocentrism, understanding the Other and understanding with the Other* (Nikitorowicz, 2019, p. 10). This belief is combined with the suggestion for raising awareness of the importance of polyphonic education, including: implementing the idea of heterology, preparing the modern human for the multidirectional transfer of the content of culture, getting to know and participating more actively in one's own culture and the life of other cultures, conducting dialogue and cultural exchange, enhancing the ability to be guided by the protection and defense of self-determination rights, and taking action in the context of a better understanding of others and of the world and with the peaceful exchange of ideas (pp. 11–18).

Polyphonic education, by creating appropriate interactions, should facilitate the formation of intercultural competences not only of students, but also

of their parents, which is one of the foundations of friendly functioning in a multicultural environment. It is worth taking into account Martyn Barrett's suggestion that *effectively implemented intercultural education develops people's intercultural competences by strengthening their cognitive and behavioral intercultural skills as well as their knowledge and understanding of people who have cultural connections other than themselves* (Barrett, 2013, p. 159). Martyn Barrett emphasizes that polyphonic education requires conscious interaction design that enables students to explore, negotiate and create new meanings together. Openness, dialogue and reflection on one's own prejudices play a key role here. Barrett's approach combines the development of intercultural competences with building practical relationship in a diverse school environment, which makes it particularly important for contemporary polyphonic education.

Polyphonic education in the context of cultural interaction brings many benefits, including: the development of intercultural competences such as empathy, tolerance and the ability to cooperate, building an inclusive community in which each person feels respected and appreciated, promoting creativity and innovation that result from combining different perspectives and experiences, and most importantly, preparing students to live in a globalized world where diversity is the norm.

Thanks to the skillful provision of knowledge about cultural diversity and its effects on communication open to differences, polyphonic education can serve positive intercultural engagement (making by individuals and groups equal interactions: emotional, intellectual and behavioural ones) to better understand the world and the principles of functioning in a multicultural society, which is why it cannot be reduced only to avoiding conflicts.

Conclusion

Polyphonic education has very important cultural tasks to fulfill. Its impact will become satisfactory if school inspires intercultural contacts from the lowest stage of education, shapes attitudes open to cultural diversity, but above all, prepare for participation in culture and co-creation of one's own culture. At the same time, one cannot forget about such teaching of tolerance which does not require giving up expressing one's own opinions or cultivating traditional norms of one's own culture, of course, while allowing others to present them in an atmosphere of respect for the diversity of views and interpretations.

Polyphonic education is to be a guarantee of the persistence of cultures and the maintenance of identities of minority groups functioning in school on the basis of open intercultural communication. Such communication leads to the expansion of knowledge about individual cultures, mobilizes to mutual comparison of their characteristics, to verification of stereotypes and breaking barriers. This is associated with numerous challenges presented above, among which special preparation on the part of teachers requires understanding the values of migrating individuals and groups, transformations, dilemmas of identification, disintegration of patterns, etc. Without a doubt, many difficulties are and will continue to be brought by negotiations on educational equality and the development of variants of multicultural educational models. This comes with creating opportunities to overcome isolation, cultivate different cultures and maintain a sense of national or ethnic identity of individual groups, prevent stigmatization and self-stigmatization and problems in social integration. What should be emphasized in the interest of nurturing the basic values of polyphonic education is their humanistic origin and messages performing creative and constructive functions in shaping the vision of coexistence of cultures in an atmosphere of understanding and tolerance.

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**Intercultural Education
in Poland and Worldwide**



Being a good citizen or being a good human? Perspectives on citizenship from Dutch students

Abstract: This article addresses the issue of how Dutch university students conceptualize “good citizenship,” offering a discursive, constructivist perspective grounded in postmodern ethics and critical discourse analysis (CDA). Drawing on McLaughlin’s (1992) typology of minimal and maximal citizenship, and the concept of citizenship regimes (Jenson, 1998), the study shows the research into how students define and negotiate civic identity in the Dutch context. It responds to the moralization of citizenship in Dutch policy since the 1990s, where citizenship has become increasingly framed in terms of behavioural norms, cultural conformity, and individual responsibility.

Based on 25 semi-structured interviews with students from various academic backgrounds, the study proves that students overwhelmingly describe good citizenship in moral and relational terms rather than legal, institutional, or political ones. Across the interviews, key values include respect, helpfulness, and caring for others. Rather than simply adhering to rules, students emphasize empathy and situational responsibility. Concepts like the Dutch *rekening houden* (being considerate of others) exemplify this relational ethic.

The findings suggest that students internalize and personalize civic norms, shifting from external obligations to context-sensitive, ethical engagement with others. While rarely referencing formal duties such as voting, students consistently frame good citizenship as grounded in everyday moral conduct and social fluency. This supports Biesta and Lawy’s (2006) argument for shifting from teaching citizenship to supporting students in learning democracy as an experienced, relational process. This has important implications for citizenship education: rather than focusing on formal knowledge or behavioural compliance, schools should create spaces for ethical reflection and relational learning that align with how young people actually engage in democratic life.

Keywords: university students, social responsibility, discourse analysis, citizenship, relational ethics, citizenship education, the Netherlands, everyday democracy

Introduction and theoretical framework

The concept of good citizenship is central to democratic societies, as it plays a decisive role in shaping civic education, strengthening social cohesion, and influencing political engagement patterns. Drawing on educational and political science models that offer typologies of citizenship, McLaughlin's (1992, pp. 235–250) distinction between minimal and maximal citizenship is central for this text. It offers a trajectory for analyzing the depth of understanding citizenship: from formal, legal status and basic civic duties to deeper critical engagement, democratic values, and social justice. Complementing this is the tripartite model of citizenship regimes (Jenson, 1998, pp. 215–239; Hildebrandt-Wypych, 2016, pp. 309–322), which distinguishes between legal status, emotional-cultural belonging (central in this text), and actual participatory access to democratic practices – each shaped by historical, political, and social conditions.

The notion of good citizenship has been interpreted in various ways across political theory, educational discourse, and public debate. In liberal traditions, citizenship is primarily conceived as a legal status granted by the state, guaranteeing rights and requiring basic civic duties such as law-abiding and tax compliance (Marshall, 2010, pp. 135–153; Kymlicka and Norman, 1994, pp. 352–381). In contrast, civic republican models emphasize active participation in public life, civic virtue, and engagement in democratic decision-making (Barber, 1984, pp. 20, 33–34; Honohan, 2002, p. 191). More recently, multicultural and post-national approaches have highlighted the need to recognize cultural pluralism, global interdependence, and the importance of citizenship inclusion beyond national boundaries (Banks, 2008, p. 134; Soysal, 1994, pp. 144–145; Isin and Nielsen, 2008, p. 6). These varying traditions illustrate that citizenship is not a fixed legal or moral category but a socially constructed and contested concept. The meanings ascribed to “good” citizenship are shaped by power relations, institutional discourses, and everyday social interactions. This study contains a hope to address a gap in the existing literature by examining how Dutch university students construct moral and relational meanings of citizenship, an area that has received less attention compared to studies focused on civic knowledge or political participation.

Following a constructivist and discourse-analytic perspective, citizenship is understood as a category that is discursively produced through language,

values, and symbolic practices (Van Dijk, 1997, pp. 2, 11; Fairclough, 1995, p. 2). Building on Bauman's (1993) postmodern ethics, it also challenges universalist, rule-based models of morality, such as utilitarianism, which frame ethical responsibility as externally imposed or purposefully justified. Instead, the study aligns with the view that moral obligation emerges relationally – through proximity, attentiveness, and care for the Other. As Bauman argues, authentic moral action does not originate from institutionalized duties or conscience-clearing routines but from an internalized desire to “be with the Other” without expectation of reciprocity. In this view, morality is situational, fragile, and intrinsically motivated – “mysteriously satisfying in itself” (Bauman, 1993, p. 184). This approach opens space for moving “good citizenship” beyond legal compliance or national belonging: towards ethical practice of everyday human encounters.

Dutch citizenship in historical and political contexts

While the roots of Dutch civic culture lie in early-modern traditions of pragmatic pluralism and religious tolerance (Korzewski, 2005, p. 114), these are the developments of the 20th and 21st centuries that have strongly shaped contemporary constructions of good citizenship. In the post-war period, the Netherlands embraced a multicultural model that acknowledged the presence of minority cultures within mainstream society. However, since the 1990s, this orientation has shifted toward policies of assimilation. Rising political polarization and the ascent of right-wing populist parties reframed citizenship around shared values, loyalty to national culture, and individual socio-economic participation (Oudenampsen, 2021; Penninx, 2020, p. 100).

The 1990s marked the emergence of “moralizing citizenship” as a political and societal discourse. As observed by Wim de Jong (2022, p. 1012), this concept encapsulated a drive to reassert behavioural norms and democratic values within the citizenry. This shift reflected a broader movement away from paternalistic welfare policies towards a more libertarian model that placed the burden of social order on the individual. The ideal was a self-regulating citizen who embodied civic virtues, contributed to collective well-being, and reinforced social cohesion. Yet, despite the prominence of this discourse, it was not until the 2000s that significant legislative efforts began to codify these ideas into formal education and integration policy.

A series of integration laws and education reforms, such as the Integration Policy New Style (2003), the 2005 Integration Act, and the introduction

of formal citizenship education in 2006, sought to produce a shared sense of national identity by reinforcing knowledge of Dutch norms, language, and history (Veugelers et al., 2017, p. 116–117; De Groot and Veugelers, 2015, pp. 27–38). In this context, citizenship became increasingly *culturalized* – defined not only by legal status or participation, but also by one’s ability to integrate into a dominant cultural framework. More recent reforms – including the 2021 revision of the citizenship education law and the 2022 curricular update via Curriculum.nu – further codified these expectations by requiring schools to teach “shared democratic values” and foster “responsible citizenship” (de Groot et.al., p. 12). This evolving policy landscape illustrates how Dutch citizenship has been increasingly moralized through education, with schools serving not only as transmitters of knowledge but also as sites for shaping civic behaviour and moral conduct. Echoing Bauman’s (2000, pp. 29, 32) concerns about the moralization of individual responsibility in late modern societies (moral choices becoming “tasks” for which individuals are held responsible), the Dutch case reflects a broader trend in which moral expectations are internalized and enacted by citizens themselves, often without clear institutional guidance. Again, citizenship is no longer just a legal or political status but a moral project.

Methodology

This study is an examination of Dutch university students’ conceptualizations of good citizenship as situated within broader moral, cultural, and political discourses. It is done with the application of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the primary methodological framework, viewing discourse as a form of social practice that both reflects and shapes social structures (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997, pp. 258–284). In line with Fairclough’s (1995, p. 45) emphasis on making power relations visible, the analysis treats discourse as a site of ideological struggle and aligns with the emancipatory aims of critical theory. Drawing on Bourdieu’s (1991) concept of symbolic power, the study explores how language legitimizes authority and sustains social hierarchies. Power, often operating implicitly through discourse, becomes discernible through the ways speakers articulate norms and justify obligations.

The study, part of a broader research project, draws on 25 semi-structured interviews with university students of diverse disciplines (history, sociology, medicine, economics, art, and geography), conducted in Amsterdam and Groningen. While the sample allows for a range of perspectives, it is not

intended to be representative of all Dutch students. Its disciplinary variety enhances the exploration of different civic narratives but also introduces limitations in terms of comparability and generalizability, which are acknowledged in the interpretation of the findings. Each 40-minute interview was audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using CDA.

The analysis proceeded at multiple levels, focusing on lexical choices, metaphors, and rhetorical strategies to uncover how students position themselves and others in relation to “good citizenship”. The coding process was inductive and iterative, guided by recurring discursive patterns. For instance, the theme “moral attentiveness” emerged from repeated references to care, empathy, and responsibility toward others, grounded in initial codes such as “being helpful”, “respecting others”, and “thinking about what others need”. These patterns were interpreted in the light of wider institutional discourses and theoretical frameworks. This interpretive approach underscores how language serves as a site of ideological negotiation and social positioning, while remaining attentive to moments of ambiguity and internal contradiction in student accounts. Through this, the study seeks to balance analytical depth with reflexivity.

Results: “good citizenship” constructed as a moral and relational field

Across the interviews, a prominent discourse constructs good citizenship in moral and relational terms. The respondents frequently use normative language to describe ethical behaviour, solidarity, and personal responsibility. These qualities are expressed through moral judgments and deontic modality, e.g.: *A good citizen is to give. There’s no need to take* (Respondent 7); *To be a good citizen in my way is to respect each other at first* (Respondent 9); *Helpful[ness] is number one [...] being able to see what other people need and then providing that service if you can* (Respondent 10); *Caring about other people [...], that’s the first thing* (Respondent 14); *A good citizen is somebody who is interested in other people, who cares [...] if somebody needs some help, you could help* (Respondent 15); *It’s important that you behave well in the public sphere* (Respondent 18).

Most participants frame citizenship through interpersonal ethics rather than institutional compliance. Respondent 1 acknowledges that many define good citizenship as *just follow[ing] the rules*, but shifts to a relational interpretation: *I would say it’s thinking about your neighbours*. The ethical

imperative is further emphasized through the secularized biblical reference: *Love your neighbour as you love yourself*. Although the speaker identifies as non-religious, the moral force remains, recast as a universal human value. Similarly, Respondent 10 begins with *follow the rules* but later shifts to *Helpful[ness] is number one*, emphasizing readiness to act on others' needs: *providing that service if you can*. These accounts highlight how moral responsibility emerges as situational and relational, rather than rule-based. Respondents 2 and 4 echo this perspective: *Obey [...] rules of human nature, like don't hurt someone, try to help people* (Respondent 2); *Don't only come into action when it's in your own interest* (Respondent 4). This shift from external obligation to internalized moral judgement aligns with Bauman's notion of moral action as rooted in responsiveness rather than codified norms.

Deontic expressions such as "should," "must," and "have to" recur across interviews, reinforcing expectations of ethical engagement: *You have to be able to talk to people – I think that's [...] a very important part of being a good human* (Respondent 2); *Even if you disagree, you must get involved* (Respondent 3); *You have to be caring for what we have in the country and caring for other people* (Respondent 4); *You should sort of participate in society* (Respondent 12); *You have to do something for other people* (Respondent 16); *You have to deal with [diversity] if you want to live with each other in one city* (Respondent 21). These statements portray a good citizen as relationally sensitive person who actively interprets their obligations in the light of others' needs. An illustrative example is Respondent 5's use of the Dutch term *rekening houden*: *"That you appreciate that the other is there, and don't just do whatever you like*. This culturally embedded expression conveys the importance of being considerate and modifying one's behaviour out of respect for others. Though it lacks legal force, it represents a powerful social expectation.

The tension between formal compliance and moral attentiveness is also evident in Respondent 18's account: *It's important that you behave well in the public sphere. Besides obeying the laws, it's also important to be good to your surroundings [...], to not be asocial*. When asked to compare the importance of rule-following versus civic initiative, they state: *I think the second is more important because the first one is something that's normal to do*. This view places value on an ethic of presence and responsiveness in everyday contexts over obvious, "normal" legal compliance. A related view appears in Respondent 21's statement: *You're also a good citizen when you don't really need the law to behave*. Here, voluntary ethical behaviour is explicitly defined

as superior to externally imposed rules. Respondent 21 further expands the definition of civic participation: *Participation can be a lot of things [...] going to a bar [...]. having friendships*, suggesting that relational competence and informal engagement are core dimensions of citizenship. Their further statement *You have to deal with [diversity] if you want to live with each other in one city [Amsterdam]* frames citizenship as a pragmatic social responsibility grounded in everyday coexistence.

A particularly reflective moment comes from Respondent 20, who responds to the interviewer's opening question (*What does it mean to be a good citizen in the Netherlands?*) with *A good citizen? Something different than a good human being, right?* This reflexive response shows an instinctive alignment of citizenship with moral personhood. The Respondent speaks of *being a nice and valuable contribution to the society you live in and trying to be as nice to other people as you can be*. Although they affirm the need for rules (*you do have to follow some rules, otherwise it will be total chaos*), they also emphasize the importance of civic initiative and critical engagement: *People who [...] read the news, think about it, and try to do something with it*. This reflects a layered model of citizenship that connects basic compliance with a broader, ethically grounded and "bottom-up" commitment to social and political life.

Respondent 24 offers a pragmatic view of citizenship centred on everyday care: *Someone who is thinking socially in a normal way in the first place. Social to other people*. Legal transgressions are downplayed: *If someone sometimes breaks the law, it's not that bad*. Instead, trust and reliability are key: *If nobody would do anything for other people, then we wouldn't have a good society*. Again, citizenship is framed not in terms of formal activism or rights, but as grounded, habitual acts of care, cooperation, and contribution to society: *Every person has to do some job or study [...] and you don't let other people down in doing that*.

Taken together, these interviews suggest that in the Dutch context, good citizenship is widely constructed through a moral discourse of care, presence, and relational attentiveness. It is a vision in which civic virtue is expressed through ethical responsiveness to the needs of others rather than strict adherence to institutional norms. As Bauman puts it, "We have to learn to deal with these tensions, to muddle through, to be morally responsible for others, to care for others unselfishly in situations we might not understand and for which there are no knowable solutions" (Gray, 2010, p. 7). The moral subject that emerges from this discourse is not a rule-bound citizen, but a socially

embedded individual who enacts their citizenship through situated, context-sensitive acts of care.

While many accounts resonate with broader societal discourses on responsible citizenship, particularly those promoted through education and integration policy, student narratives also reveal moments of ambivalence and complexity. For instance, some respondents simultaneously uphold respect for legal norms while minimizing their significance, as seen in Respondent 24's remark: "*If someone sometimes breaks the law, it's not that bad*". This suggests a distinction between formal rule-following and relational trust as competing logics of civic virtue. Similarly, the recurring emphasis on care and interpersonal responsibility does not always translate into consistent or clearly articulated practices of political participation or systemic criticism. Respondents often invoke values such as tolerance, helpfulness, and empathy in general terms, yet offer limited engagement with structural issues or conflicting moral demands. This points to a layered, sometimes contradictory understanding of citizenship – where moral intuitions coexist with pragmatic considerations, and where individual responsibility is affirmed without always confronting the societal frameworks that shape or constrain it. These tensions highlight that students' discourse, while broadly aligned with dominant civic ideals, is not reducible to them. It reflects an ongoing negotiation between institutional expectations and personal ethical reasoning.

Discussion

This study shows that Dutch university students often articulate "good citizenship" not as institutional loyalty or legal compliance, but as a relational and moral orientation grounded in everyday encounters. Their accounts emphasize empathy, attentiveness, care for others, and the importance of interpersonal behaviour in shared social spaces. Such views reflect a broader cultural shift from procedural models of citizenship toward more personalized and ethical frameworks – a trend also identified in recent theoretical and educational debates.

Rather than treating citizenship as a fixed set of attributes to be transmitted through schooling, the findings support calls to reconceptualize civic education as a space for learning democracy (Biesta and Lawy, 2006, pp. 63–79). In this view, democratic engagement emerges through experience and social negotiation rather than formal instruction. Students' narratives suggest that moral awareness and civic responsibility develop not only through

knowledge of democratic values, but also through participation in diverse and often ambiguous social contexts. This is compliant with Bauman's (1993, p. 185) vision of postmodern ethics, where moral obligation is not rule-based but situational, internalized, and often fragile.

However, this moral discourse of citizenship – though rich in affective and ethical vocabulary – also raises critical questions. First, students' emphasis on being "nice", "helpful" or "socially normal" risks reducing citizenship to personal decency, potentially sidelining collective action, rights-based advocacy, or systemic criticism. The absence of clear references to political structures or civic institutions may reflect a broader depoliticization of citizenship, in which responsibility is internalized as an individual ethic rather than expressed through public contestation. This echoes Bauman's (2000, p. 6) critique of late-modern societies, where moral burdens are placed on individuals without clear structural support or institutional accountability.

Secondly, some respondents express ambivalence or contradictions – valuing rule-following, but also relativizing it; promoting responsibility, but remaining vague about its scope. These tensions suggest that while students resist narrow, state-defined models of citizenship, they also navigate uncertainties about what civic responsibility entails in practice. Such ambiguities should not be dismissed but taken as indicative of how young adults encounter and negotiate competing discourses – from policy, media, education, and everyday life. From this perspective, the role of education is not to transmit fixed norms of citizenship, but to create spaces where students can engage with and reflect on what it means to live democratically within diverse communities.

Lastly, the findings align with the criticism of the "moralization of citizenship" in Dutch policy discourse (De Jong, 2022, pp. 1099–1123). Students' reflections are compliant with, but are not reducible to, state-promoted ideals of responsible, self-managing citizens. Instead, they appropriate and reinterpret these norms in ways that foreground interpersonal ethics over cultural conformity or formal participation. This suggests a need for civic education not only to cultivate moral reflection, but also to encourage critical engagement with power, inequality, and the conditions under which democratic life unfolds.

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Education and intergenerational integration in Senior Citizens' Support Centres – a comparison of the systems in Poland and Turkey

Abstract: The article aims to compare senior support systems in Poland and Turkey, focusing on the role of education and intergenerational integration in daily senior care centres. The study was done with the use of a qualitative comparative approach based on desk research, drawing from government documents, statistical data, and scholarly sources. The analysis reveals substantial differences: Poland demonstrates a well-developed institutional support system with strong financial programs and intergenerational initiatives, while Turkey relies primarily on traditional family care, though recent trends indicate a shift towards community-based services and structured intergenerational activities. Despite distinct socio-cultural contexts, both countries share common objectives, such as promoting active aging and improving seniors' quality of life. The findings suggest that effective senior support policies require cultural sensitivity and local adaptation. The article recommends further research on the sustainability and long-term impact of intergenerational integration programs, especially in the light of evolving family structures and demographic changes. The comparative perspective of Poland and Turkey shows that diverse approaches can lead to similar outcomes when tailored to local social and cultural contexts.

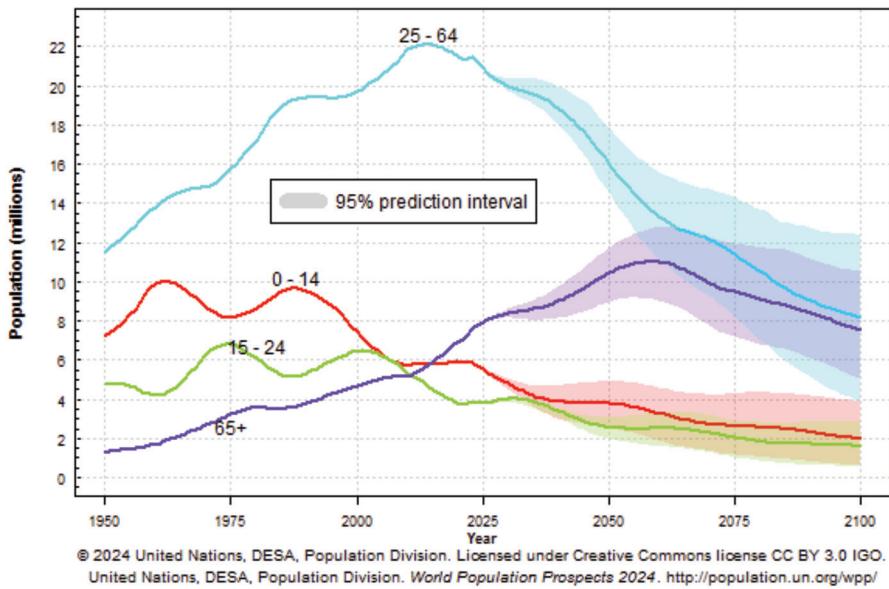
Keywords: aging, comparative analysis, institutional support, intergenerational integration, elderly care

Introduction

The demographic decline and aging of the population in most European countries bring a series of challenges that affect various aspects of social, economic, and political life. The World Population Prospects (UN DESA,

2022, p. 7) predict that the share of the global population aged 65 and over, which is around 10% in 2022, will reach about to 16% in 2050. According to UNFPA (2023), the human population in the world has exceeded 8 billion, and 10% of this population consists of individuals aged 65 and over. While Turkey contributes to the world population with its population of 85.8 million, the ratio of individuals over the age of 65 is 9% (UNFPA, 2023). When the data on Poland is examined, it is seen that the country contributes to the world population with its population of 41 million and 19% of the country’s population consists of individuals aged 65 and over (UNFPA, 2023). Figure 1 presents the population by broad age groups for Poland and Figure 2 represents Turkey.

Figure 1. Population by broad age groups for Poland

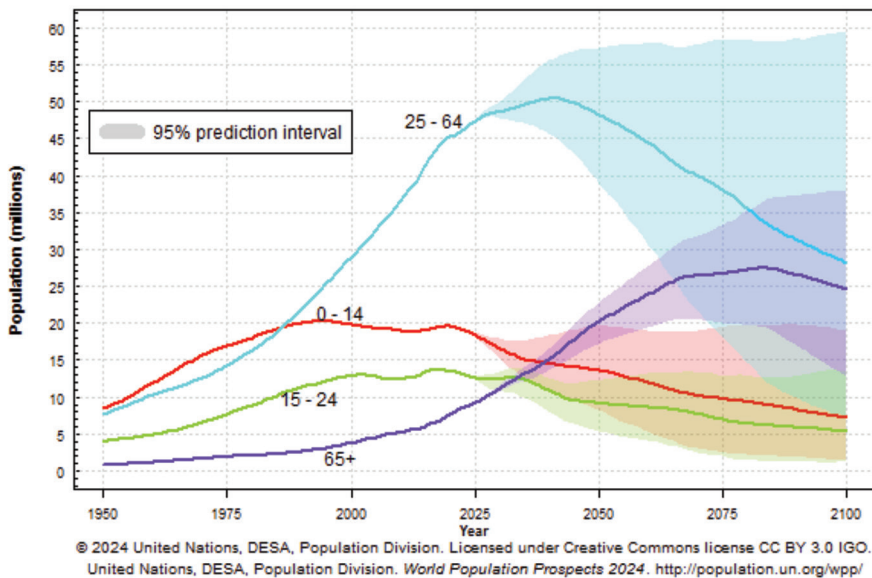


Source: UN DESA, <https://population.un.org/wpp/graphs?loc=616&type=Demographic%20Profiles&category=Line%20Charts> (18.08.2025).

Figure 1 projects a prediction graph of the distribution of age ranges in the population for Poland until 2100. The participation of elderly people in the population of Poland is steadily increasing. By the end of 2021, the number of people aged 60 and over reached 9.7 million, which is a 0.2% increase compared to the previous year. The percentage of elderly people in the Polish

population reached 25.7%. According to the Central Statistical Office (CSO) forecast, the number of people aged 60 and over in Poland is expected to rise to 10.8 million by 2030, and to 13.7 million by 2050. Elderly people will constitute about 40% of the total population of Poland. In 2021, the demographic dependency ratio for elderly increased to 28.9 (from 28.1 in 2020). The ratio of post-working age population to 100 working-age people was 38.1, while a year earlier it was 37.4. The aging of the population is observed with varying intensity across the provinces. In 2021, the highest percentage of people aged 60 and over was in the Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship (28.5%), while the lowest was in the Małopolskie Voivodeship (23.6%)” (CSO, 2022, p. 11).

Figure 2. Population by broad age groups for Turkey



Source: UN DESA, <https://population.un.org/wpp/graphs?loc=792&type=Demographic%20Profiles&category=Line%20Charts> (18.08.2025).

Figure 2 projects a prediction graph of the distribution of age ranges in the population for Turkey until 2100. The age structure of the population has changed in Turkey, in total, the proportion of elderly has risen from 8.5% in 2017 to 9.9% in 2022 and will be 25.6% in 2080 (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2023).

Statistics show that the elderly population rates are increasing over time in both Turkey and Poland. Many elderly people report sensory and mo-

tor problems, as well as limitations related to household management, self-service, and basic activities. It is also important to remember those with neurodegenerative diseases, who require particularly comprehensive and intensive care. It is worth adding that limited independence in old age is often accompanied by multimorbidity, which increases and complicates care needs (Bakalarczyk, 2021, p. 10).

In the face of these challenges, European countries are adopting a variety of strategies, including reforms of pension systems, investments in public health and long-term care, policies supporting families and fertility, adaptation of the labour market, as well as migration policies. One of the ten recommended key messages in summary results of World Population Prospects (UN DESA, 2022, p. ii) is that nations with ageing populations should modify to accommodate their public programs to the rising share of senior citizens by enhancing the sustainability of social security and pension systems and also by providing universal health care and long-term care systems. A very important aspect related to social changes is also education and intergenerational integration implemented in support centres for seniors. The study focuses on comparing daily support systems for seniors in Poland and Turkey. The activities of the centres in terms of education and intergenerational integration were also analyzed.

Intergenerational education and integration in Senior Citizen Support Centres in Poland and Turkey is a topic that covers a wide range of activities and initiatives aimed at supporting older people and promoting cooperation and knowledge exchange between different generations. The approach to this issue may differ in the two countries due to cultural, historical, social and economic differences. Analyzing and comparing the systems in Poland and Turkey requires taking into account many aspects, such as social policies, educational programs, availability of services for seniors, as well as local and community initiatives.

Poland and Turkey were selected for comparison due to their contrasting cultural backgrounds and stages of demographic transition. While both countries are facing aging populations, their responses and support systems differ significantly, providing a unique opportunity to explore how social and cultural factors influence senior policy.

Methodology and research design

Research objective:

The main goal of this paper is to compare the models of support for elderly people in Poland and Turkey, with particular emphasis on intergenerational education and integration within senior citizen support centres.

Research problem:

How do the models of support and intergenerational integration for seniors differ between Poland and Turkey, and what socio-cultural factors shape these systems?

Research questions:

1. What institutional solutions exist in both countries to support seniors?
2. What role does intergenerational integration play in these systems?
3. How do cultural and social conditions impact the development of senior support centres in Poland and Turkey?

Methodology: The study uses a qualitative comparative method based on desk research. It relies on:

- official statistical reports,
- government documents and policy guides,
- academic publications and institutional websites,
- grey literature from NGOs and development agencies.

The data is analyzed through a thematic content analysis framework, comparing Polish and Turkish models in terms of structure, policy context, intergenerational strategies, and outcomes.

The selection of documents was based on their relevance to national policy frameworks, breadth of intergenerational programming, and data comparability across the two countries. Thematic categories – structure, policy context, intergenerational strategies, and outcomes – were derived inductively from the initial document review and guided by the theoretical framework discussed above.

Limitations

The study relies solely on secondary data, which may introduce bias related to document availability, publication bias, or the political framing of official reports. In addition, the lack of access to ethnographic or participant-based insights limits the depth of interpretation regarding the experiences in both countries. Future research could benefit from mixed methods and primary data collection.

Theoretical framework

The research draws on two main theoretical approaches: the theory of active aging (WHO, 2002) and the theory of intergenerational solidarity (Bengtson and Roberts, 1991). Active aging refers to the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation, and security to enhance the quality of life as people age. It emphasizes autonomy, lifelong learning, and social engagement. The theory of intergenerational solidarity highlights the significance of sustained relationships, emotional closeness, and mutual support between age groups, often within the family but also at the societal level. Integrating these frameworks allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the role that education and support centres play in fostering productive ageing and societal cohesion.

Education and intergenerational integration and their importance in supporting senior activities

Education and intergenerational integration is an idea promoting cooperation, communication, and exchange between different age groups. It assumes the use of education as a tool to bring different generations closer, allowing the exchange of knowledge, experiences, as well as building bonds and understanding between people of different ages. This concept emphasizes the importance of cooperation and activity in various spheres of social, cultural, and educational life to create a more integrated society.

Anna Podemska-Kałuza defines intergenerational integration as “the pursuit of reducing and abolishing barriers between representatives of different generations and seeking assumptions for a holistic model of shaping the

principles of coexistence and cooperation of people belonging to different generations” (Podemska-Kałuża, 2010, pp. 253–254).

On the website of the Ministry of Education and Science, definitions of intergenerational education can be found, understood as “the exchange of knowledge, experiences, and skills between younger and older generations and building mutual understanding and intergenerational solidarity between the younger and older generation” (<https://www.gov.pl/web/education-and-science/intergenerational-educational-centers--support-for-intergenerational-integration>). Undoubtedly, today – when societies are aging, and technology and culture are rapidly evolving – dialogue and cooperation between generations become key in creating lasting communities and adapting to the changing world. It is worth emphasizing that “the social policy strategy towards old age and the elderly (affecting both the shape of society’s life and the life of individual units), is moving towards participation, and thus towards intergenerational integration, in line with the slogan “Towards intergenerational solidarity” (Leszczyńska-Rejchert, 2014, p. 77).

Intergenerational education serves social integration. “Intergenerational education is mutual learning of people belonging to different generations. This form of education includes, among other things, learning together, learning from each other, learning about each other, learning through contacts and intergenerational relationships. Intergenerational education can take various forms, formal and informal, cyclical, systematic, and spontaneous” (Leszczyńska-Rejchert, 2014, p. 79).

Education and intergenerational integration bring many benefits, from mutual exchange of knowledge and experience, through the development of empathy and understanding, to promoting active social participation and combating isolation. Striving to build bridges between generations can contribute to creating a more integrated and supportive community. The positive effects of such activity have both the individual and social dimension.

Education and intergenerational integration bring many benefits to both younger and older people and the community as a whole. Based on a series of internal working meetings, during which the authors analyzed policy documents, academic literature, and reports, a list of key observable benefits of intergenerational integration was formulated. These include:

- exchange of knowledge and experience;
- development of empathy and understanding;
- preventing social isolation;

- common goals and projects;
- passing on traditions and culture.

Senior policy in Poland exemplified by daily social assistance homes

In Poland, the support system for seniors is based on a combination of public and private benefits, with an increasing emphasis on activating seniors and promoting healthy ageing. In recent years, there has been a development of various forms of support, including third-age universities, day care centres, senior clubs, and intergenerational integration programs. These initiatives aim not only to provide care and support but also to enable seniors to actively participate in social and cultural life.

A key condition for the development of senior care in Poland is its strong cultural roots in family relationships. The research from a decade ago showed that Poles more often than representatives of other European nations expressed the expectation that in the face of loss of independence, they would receive care from their closest relatives, whether through cohabitation or regular visits. Although the tradition of the family care model is also strongly present in Central and Eastern Europe and Southern countries, Poland stood out even among the countries of these regions for its far-reaching familism. While family involvement in care characterizes practically all societies to a lesser or greater extent, for Poland, what is characteristic – in a comparative perspective – is the significant intensity of family care, expressed by regularity and a large time dimension of engagement on the part of caregivers. Such strong engagement on the part of the family, resulting from the cultural, economic, and institutional reasons mentioned above, has its social and economic consequences, discussed more broadly in the later part of the report devoted to diagnosing problems in the area of family and home care. However, it is necessary to be aware that long-term processes are taking place in society, which means that this strongly family-oriented care model is subject to erosion. There are already studies showing that younger generations are not necessarily willing to dedicate themselves to care and, therefore, for example, give up professional work (Bakalarczyk, 2021, p. 30).

In Poland, on the threshold of the third decade of the 21st century, long-term care for the elderly is taking shape in various forms that reflect the needs and capabilities of both seniors and the health and social care system.

Among the forms of long-term care, one can distinguish those provided by the social welfare sector, both in community and inpatient forms, as well as by the health sector, which also include community and inpatient care. What should not be forgotten as well is informal care, i.e. family care and private care facilities (Bakalarczyk, 2021).

Education and intergenerational integration in support centres for seniors in Poland focus on a wide spectrum of initiatives and programs aimed at supporting the elderly, promoting activity among seniors, and creating space for intergenerational relations. The Polish government allocates significant financial resources to improve the quality of life for seniors, providing financial support by the valorization of pension and disability benefits and by introducing initiatives such as the 13th and 14th pension. Additionally, programs like Senior+ and Active+ aim to support the creation of places where seniors can participate in various activities, meet others, and benefit from professional support. In 2023, about 70 billion PLN was allocated for senior-related activities, according to the Ministry of Family and Social Policy (MRiPS, 2023).

An interesting initiative aimed at seniors is the support provided by day centres known as Day Care Homes for Social Assistance. In Poland, according to 2018 data, there were 323 Day Care Homes for Seniors (MRiPS, 2019). Increasingly, these are not only managed by municipalities but also by non-governmental organizations. In centres run by non-governmental organizations, greater creativity can be observed at the management level and in implementation.

Senior policy in Turkey exemplified by daily social assistance homes

Considering the ageing data of Turkey, the General Directorate of Services for Persons with Disabilities and The Elderly (EYHGM) at the Ministry of Family and Social Services of the Republic of Turkey focuses on policies regarding seniors based on the concept of “active ageing” (EYHGM, 2023a). With the perspective of active and healthy ageing, in addition to institutional care services for seniors based on the increasing elderly population and population projection, emphasis is placed on community-based care service models that encourage ageing in place by increasing participation in social life, without separating seniors from their social environments (EYHGM, 2023b, p. 3). In Turkey, services for seniors are provided by different public

institutions at central and local levels, non-governmental organizations and the private sector (EYHGM, 2023c, p. 4).

The Turkey's Twelfth Development Plan (Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, Presidency of Strategy and Budget, 2023, p. 11) points out that in the process of demographic change in Turkey, traditional family ties are weakening, intergenerational interaction is decreasing, elderly loneliness is increasing, and therefore the need for elderly and palliative care services is increasing. While the number of extended families where different generations live together is decreasing in Turkey, small family structures are becoming more common, thus intergenerational transfer of experience, emotions, values and culture is being disrupted, kinship ties are weakening and people are becoming increasingly isolated (Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, Presidency of Strategy and Budget, 2023, p. 16). Focusing on the home care and day care services is a necessity arising from not only the limited capacity of institutional care, but also the results of the research indicating that elderly people are happier if they live in their social environment and they prefer to live in their homes provided they have such an opportunity (EYHGM, 2023a). Although the family structure seems to have weakened in the current situation in Turkey, when the social structure is examined in terms of the lifestyle of the society, it is seen that the family-centred lifestyle is dominant and there is a high sensitivity in the Turkish society to take care of the elderly (İstanbul Ticaret University, 2022).

Day care and active life centres provide services to seniors who are unable to continue living at home on their own despite other forms of support, such as neighbours, relatives, as well as to healthy seniors who continue living at home with their family, with relatives or on their own (EYHGM, 2023c, pp. 25–26). The two primary goals of day care services are to: 1) meet individual needs in a way that promotes human harmony, provide psychosocial guidance and support services for families; and 2) diversify daily activities so that seniors can interact with others and engage in a variety of social, cultural, educational, and sport activities to make sure their time is spent happily and effectively. Different units work in coordination at the day care centres and this involves: reception, consultation, information and guidance, social service, coordination and evaluation board, psychosocial support and rehabilitation, day care, education guidance and training, counselling, home care support, health (EYHGM, 2023b). Activities and workshops are conducted in day care centres, including those on geriatric physiotherapy, geriatric occupational therapy, a writing and literature workshop, a mind games workshop, a reading and writing workshop, a foreign language workshop, a sports work-

shop, a handicraft workshop, a music workshop, and an agriculture workshop (EYHGM, 2023b).

The National Action Plan on the Status of Seniors and Aging in Turkey defines some actions that can be taken to provide active benefit from all age groups and can encourage intergenerational sharing, encourage seniors to take on the roles of guide trainers, mediators and consultants, encourage elderly volunteers in the field of information technologies and can support the use of social, cultural and educational resources (General Directorate of Social Sectors and Coordination, 2007, pp. 49–51). Turkey's Elderly Rights National Action Plan 2023–2025 (EYHGM, 2023a, p. 25) states that one way to ensure the participation of elderly people in social life is to share the experiences they have gained during the ageing process through intergenerational solidarity. To achieve this goal, studies will be carried out to add a module on the importance of communication with the elderly, intergenerational solidarity and volunteering to the Family Education Program (EYHGM, 2023a, p. 36).

In Turkey, there are some activities for the active ageing of the elderly related to taking advantage of intergenerational education. Some examples of intergenerational educational activities are the following: higher education programs for seniors within the framework of the third-age universities (EYHGM, 2023c), Intergenerational Interaction Model Project for Active Life (AYNA) (Murakami, 2017, pp. 295–308), Intergenerational Education, Care, Communication (NEBİ) Project (Afyonkarahisar Health Sciences University, 2021), E-Shahrazad Project (E-Shahrazad Project, n.d.), Intergenerational Bridge: Connect to Create Project (Connect to Create, n.d.), national level festivals, trips, breakfasts, five o'clock tea, book fairs, etc. organizing events that bring together different generations, students visiting the elderly in nursing homes, senior citizens visiting schools, organizing symposiums, seminars and courses for informational and educational purposes, establishing centres where different generations can spend time together, Integration through Education, Toys of My Grandparents, New Educational Journeys for Adults, SMILE Project etc. (Murakami, 2017, pp. 295–308).

As a result, it seems that examples of practices in improving intergenerational relations have increased over time in Turkey, but these examples seem to be mostly one-day or short-term activities, so it can be said that more sustainable practices are needed in this regard (Murakami, 2017). It has been emphasized that education and schools have a major role to play in organizing intergenerational events that bring together young and old generations in Turkey (Yıldırım, 2015, pp. 275–296).

Comparative analysis

Table 1. Comparative overview of senior support systems in Poland and Turkey

Category	Poland	Turkey	Comments
Institutional structure	Public + NGO + private; decentralized	Public sector-driven, NGO, private, community-based	Different service models
Dominant care model	Transitioning from familial to mixed	Still family-centred	Cultural dimension significant
Intergenerational education	Formal and informal, supported by national programs (Senior+, Active+)	Formal and informal, supported by national programs (Third-age universities, YADES, AYNA, NEBİ etc.)	Both countries have institutional continuity
Public funding	Strong support, e.g. 70B PLN in 2023	6B 692 million TL in 2023 (ASHB, 2023), growing investment, still developing	Poland more advanced in financing

Source: own elaboration

The comparative overview presented in Table 1 highlights both structural and cultural differences between the Polish and Turkish systems of senior support. Poland's model is more institutionalized and supported by a wide range of public programs and financial instruments, particularly aimed at promoting intergenerational integration. In contrast, Turkey continues to rely heavily on family-based care, though recent policy documents and initiatives show a gradual shift toward community-based services and formal intergenerational programs.

While both countries aim to promote active ageing and social inclusion, the mechanisms and extent of implementation vary. Poland benefits from stronger financial investment and a more diversified network of support centres, while Turkey emphasizes cultural values and the role of family, with emerging initiatives seeking to formalize intergenerational collaboration. This comparison suggests that both countries face the challenge of ensuring sustainability, inclusivity, and the long-term impact of their respective support models.

What distinguishes this comparative analysis is its focus on intergenerational education as the lens through which senior care policies can be assessed, rather than only evaluation of structural or demographic indicators can be done. The synthesis of cultural, financial, and institutional variables in two contrasting countries offers actionable insights for policy transfer and adaptive innovation.

Summary

Comparing the systems in Poland and Turkey reveals differences in approaches and methods of providing support for seniors, but also indicates common goals, such as promoting active aging, intergenerational integration, and improving the quality of life for the elderly. An important aspect in both countries is the development of local and community initiatives, which can be tailored to specific needs and conditions. When comparing this data with the support systems for seniors in Turkey, attention should be paid to cultural and social differences that may affect the shape and scope of available programs and initiatives. The Polish approach is distinguished by active financial support and intergenerational integration programs, while in Turkey strong family ties may play a more significant role in caring for seniors. To obtain a more detailed comparison, it is worth consulting current studies and reports on the situation of seniors in Turkey.

- In Poland, senior support policy should continue strengthening intergenerational programs and evaluate their long-term effects.
- In Turkey, more sustainable, institutionalized intergenerational projects are needed to complement traditional family support.
- Both countries should increase training for caregivers and professionals working in senior centres, with a focus on intergenerational communication skills.

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The role of the Afro-Brazilian community in protecting cultural heritage and intercultural education in Lagos, Nigeria¹

Abstract: This article is an attempt to analyze the modern cultural meanings of the Afro-Brazilian community in Lagos, Nigeria, with a particular emphasis on the categories of cultural heritage and intercultural education. Following the abolition of slavery in the nineteenth century, descendants of slaves and returnees from Brazil migrated to Nigeria, West Africa. Most returnees, highly skilled and representing social elites, settled in the central-western area of Lagos Island known as Popo-Aguda. My goal is to identify the architectural and aesthetic manifestations, as well as the activities of the community members and two cultural institutions, such as the Brazilian Descendants Association and the Afro-Brazilian Cultural Centre. Their members desire to actively build their cultural legacy, express identity through festivals or celebrations, and establish a platform for mutual education and integration within Lagos' multi-ethnic, multi-national, and multi-religious agglomeration. Cultural associations aim to form integrated discourse by inspiring aesthetic bonds, unifying communities, and preserving cultural continuity and heritage in Nigeria. Hence, the central research problem addressed in this study is the exploration of how Afro-Brazilian descendants in Lagos express and sustain their cultural heritage amid the contemporary, multicultural landscape and how they contribute to educating society on the role of history, origin and cultural memory.

¹ The paper is the result of the research conducted under the project titled "Pamięć kulturowa a dziedzictwo afro-brazylijskie w Nigerii – w poszukiwaniu tożsamości" [Cultural memory and the Afro-Brazilian heritage in Nigeria – in search of identity]. The research was funded in whole by National Science Centre, Poland [Grant number: 2023/07/X/HS3/01648]. For the purpose of Open Access, the author has applied a CC-BY public copyright licence to any Author Accepted Manuscript (AAM) version arising from this submission.

Keywords: Nigeria, identity, cultural heritage, architecture, intercultural education, cultural institutions, Lagos, Afro-Brazilians

Introduction

The Afro-Brazilian culture in the southern part of Nigeria, West Africa, remains an underexplored subject across various scientific disciplines. This article is aimed at addressing this gap by examining contemporary cultural meanings associated with the Afro-Brazilian community in Lagos. Particularly, its focus is on the themes of intercultural education, heritage, and integration. My objective is to determine the manifestations, activities and strategies employed by the community members and their associations that exemplify the commitment to actively (re)create their cultural heritage. This includes the exchange of information, the expression of identity, and the establishment of a common ground for integration within the diverse multi-ethnic, multi-national, and multi-religious landscape of Lagos. Additionally, the article will explore various aspects of urban architecture and highlight specific cultural symbols that play a significant role in this context. To provide a clear framework for this article, the central research problem addressed in this study is the exploration of how Afro-Brazilian descendants in Lagos express and sustain their cultural heritage amid a contemporary, multicultural landscape. This involves understanding the specific narratives and cultural symbols that inform their identity, as well as the strategies they employ to promote intercultural education and integration in their society. These studies can constitute a basis for use in intercultural education based on the involvement of the local community, which is an active agent in creating a narrative about its own culture and history.

Methodology

The primary research material for this study is derived from extensive field research conducted in Nigeria, particularly in Lagos, in 2024. The repeated visits between 2020 and 2024 facilitated participant observation and the examination of research on explicit narratives present in public discourse, employing qualitative research methods (Atkinson and Hammersley, 2005, pp. 248–261). I conducted conversations with representatives of the Afro-Brazilian community and local experts affiliated with academic institutions

and museums in Lagos, Badagry, Ibadan, and Kano². Furthermore, I gathered valuable insights from historical and cultural materials, including publications, archives, and collections obtained through consultations at several national universities and libraries, notably the University of Lagos. Participant observation was integral to this research, as it provided firsthand insights into community interactions, cultural practices, and the emotional resonance of heritage, for instance narratives about architectural changes and members' meetings. I engaged with community members and observed events that showcased their cultural expressions, which helped to contextualize the narratives I encountered.

The historical background of Afro-Brazilians in Lagos

As a result of the tragic years of transatlantic trade and slavery from West Africa, dating back to the 16th century, millions of people were unlawfully transported across the Atlantic (Hawthorne, 2010, pp. 61–97; Eltis, 2001, pp. 17–46; Tymowski, 2017, pp. 203–210). It is estimated that the number of Africans in Brazil was about 4 million. Despite essential changes in law, including abolition acts adopted by many European countries and the United States, the slave trade was still flourishing in Lagos in the early 1840s (till 1860s). Some groups of Afro-Brazilians returned to Lagos and other parts of West Africa in 1830s and after slavery was abolished in the 19th century (in the British Empire with the Slave Trade Act of 1807 and in Brazil in 1888). Hence, the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century was significant for the history of Lagos city initiated by strong migratory movements (Mann, 2007, pp. 1–4; Krasnowolski, 1987, pp. 26–54).

Descendants of slaves and returnees from Brazil migrated to West Africa in large numbers, significantly to the coast of Sierra Leone, Ghana, Nigeria, Togo and Benin with major ports like Lagos, Badagry, Porto Novo (da Cunha, 1985b, pp. 109–216; Amos and Ayesu, 2005, pp. 35–65; Amos, 2001, p. 293; Essien, 2010, pp. 10–21; Araujo, 2010, p. 478). The future agglomeration of Lagos, like the entire former Gold Coast and the Gulf of Guinea, has become a melting pot of cultures, nations and languages (including ethnic groups

² I would like to thank the interviewees for their valuable ideas and contributions to this research on the community, inhabitants and members of Popo-Aguda, for example the Martins families, and for a chance to have a joint visit to the Brazilian Quarter in Lagos carried out thanks to representatives of the Brazilian Descendants Association.

such as Yoruba, Egba, Ijebu, Egun, Hausa or Bini), which determined the creation of a specific, fluid and procedural identity. Importantly, as I mentioned earlier, different Yoruba migrant groups, called 'Emancipados' (liberated), 'Aguda' (which translates from Yoruba language as 'Catholic'), 'liberated Africans', 'Afro-Brazilians', 'Amaro', originated from all Latin America and the Caribbean, started to form one of the most important communities, which undoubtedly brought hybrid components of socio-political, cultural and artistic change in Lagos (da Cunha, 1985a, p. 45; Vlach, 1984, pp. 3–23).

The majority of the returnee slaves (approximately 3,000–8,000 people) settled in the western area of Lagos Island known as Popo-Aguda. Some of migrants came in search of their ancestors' homeland during the reign of Kosoko, who sent a local chief Oshodi Tapa to Brazil in order to organize the return of a group of ex-inhabitants of Lagos. According to Robert S. Smith, in 1852, the district Oke Faji, where the Church Missionary Society obtained its Akitoye lands, was already known under different names: Brazilian Town, Portuguese Street, or Popo-Aguda (Popô Agudá). Currently, as explained in the interviews with Aguda members, the name Brazilian Quarter is used the most. In 1880 the number of the community members was estimated at 3 300 individuals, mostly of Yoruba and Hausa ethnicity, which represented about 10 percent of the total inhabitants of Lagos (comparing to 130 Afro-Brazilian families counted in 1853) (Omanka, 2004, pp. 27–30). An important aspect that determined the urban space, its aesthetics and architecture of the district, was religion. Almost all Afro-Brazilians, who symbolically 'returned' from Brazil and left indelible marks on the city's landscape, had adopted Roman Catholicism (few were Muslims or members of indigenous Yoruba spiritual worship). While many Africans forced into journey never made it back, there were a number who no longer come back as slaves but liberated returnees. They brought back aspects of their culture: the cuisine, the Catholic religion, the craft skills and knowledge acquired in Brazil crafts, as well as familiar Portuguese names.

Afro-Brazilian urban cultural heritage and aesthetics

Nowadays, the agglomeration of Lagos, with the population of 14 million people, is one of the largest and most populous in Sub-Saharan Africa. Looking at the architecture inscribed in the history of this metropolis, profound pluralism can be noticed (Adandé and Arinze, 2002, p. 151). In the beginning of the 20th century, the population of the port-city of Lagos rose steadily

as an effect of migrations to the city resulting from the significant growth of the maritime, overseas trade and continuing slavery's liberation movements (Olokaju, 2000, pp. 126–143; Coquery-Vidrovitch, 2005, pp. 205–317; Castillo, 2016, pp. 34–35). The rapid and dramatic urbanization has been an important socio-economic, political and cultural phenomenon, as settlements were originally linked by numerous transport routes, the exchange of multicultural features and the influx of highly-skilled migrants, who brought their own cultural values, settlement styles and urban mores.

In the 19th and at the start of the 20th century, the Afro-Brazilian population started to concentrate in the area of Lagos Island, setting up businesses, workshops and housing properties. Significantly, the enclave of Brazilian Quarter has no officially defined size, but it has commonly been considered to occupy the fragmental eastern-central part of Lagos Island. The boundaries of the Brazilian Quarter are marked by several streets such as Catholic Mission Street, Campbell Street, Igbosere Road, Campos Square and more specifically: to the north – Bámbósé Street; to the south – Broad Street; to the west – Tinubu and to the east – Obáléndé. It is the location of the most outstanding architectural constructions: the Brazilian Salvador Mosque, Mohammed Shitta Bey Mosque, Holly Cross Cathedral, Cuban Lodge, JFD Blanco House, or Water House. Currently, Campos Square is a popular meeting point and space for festivals and communal celebrations.

The engagement in participant observation, that involves immersing oneself in the community being studied, allowed for a deeper understanding of the social dynamics, cultural practices, and daily lives of the Afro-Brazilian descendants. I was particularly interested in gathering photographic documentation of the former Brazilian district of Popo-Aguda in Lagos. In the course of the work, over 400 photographs were obtained illustrating, among other things, the district, artifacts related to the research topic, museum exhibitions and new source materials. As noticed, there are two main communities building Brazilian Quarters: Campos and Lafiaji. Still, some families in the neighborhoods of Campos, Olowogbowo, Sandgrosse, Tokunbo and Igboere, have kept their traditions alive, not only through native architecture, but also passing on properties and customs to the next generations. Perceived as urban elites and new social class, they maintained closed contacts with rural-urban economy and contributed deeply to the agricultural and urban industry (such as bakeries), basing on their experience in the production of tobacco and coffee in Brazilian plantations. Exemplifying a new sign of wealth, they also participated successfully in commerce, housing investment,

long-distance trade, development of religious and medical infrastructure. Migrants brought also interesting and sophisticated designs, which in the context of postmodern focus on ethnicity, hybridity and multiple identities, are explored willingly with reference to new debates. Many of them became influential people, especially such families as Da Rocha, Martins, Marinho, Martinez, De Souza, Da Silva, Fernandes (Martins, 2010; Dapo, 2016). Certain images from the past about genealogies are still in circulation in Popo-Aguda, marking the solidarity and memory of common origin, as well as encoding meanings. By employing qualitative research techniques, which are focused on understanding the meaning and context behind social phenomena rather than quantifying data, I had the opportunity to meet members of families such as Martins, Salvador and Gomez.

Only few of the buildings constructed by Afro-Brazilians remained within the Brazilian Quarter, demonstrating the city's rich, albeit hidden, multicultural architectural history. These historic buildings are known for their architectural style based on the Brazilian and Portuguese Baroque or French Gothic (Hallen, 1988, pp. 16–23). Their components, which convey the influence and creativity of Afro-Brazilian and Portuguese aesthetics, outside of British colonial style, include: a central corridor in the middle of a building (constructed of brick), flanked by rooms on both sides, wooden window shutters, several floors with a facade decorated with neoclassical designs and decorative plaster. The structures are characterized by monumental simplicity, perfect proportions, ornamentation limited to open balconies and the loggia. Fundamentally, recently a lot of iconic Afro-Brazilian structures have simply vanished from the rapidly developing urban landscape, due to the lack of renovation and maintenance funds, or inconsistencies in the conservation policy. More specifically, in 2016, the Ilojo Bar, a 161 year-old building declared a national monument in 1956 by the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, was pulled down (Tubosun, 2016). It was built in 1855 and was also known as Olâiyá House Olaiya House or Casa do Fernandez, being constructed originally as a restaurant and bar in 1855 by the Fernandez family. Even though many buildings have been replaced as the quarter transformed into a more commercial centre, those changes have not gone unnoticed by the local communities, Nigerian or international media, and activist or conservation groups, such as Legacy Nigeria Group. As noted by Omofolabo Ajayi-Soyinka: “The past reaches into the future to enrich and ennoble it. These people have just destroyed a large chunk of our future. This is madness. How can people exist without any sense of historical worth?” (Tubosun, 2016).

In recent years, there has been an increase in interest in the need to protect the remaining monuments, as well as to maintain identification with the past. The community's activities clearly resonate with the goals of education for intercultural understanding. As stated by Lixinski, "interculturality and heritage share a similar mission, grounded in dialogue [...] The complexity, on its surface, goes against our urge to make sense of the world, because both interculturality and heritage show the world has no one sense. But we still choose certain narratives through which to make sense of the world and of identity" (Lixinski, 2023, p. 2). Given the importance of cultural variety and diversity, as well as history to the survival of cultures and knowledge, intercultural education policy plays a critical role in guaranteeing Afro-Brazilian continuous vitality.

Afro-Brazilian community and associations

The cultural heritage of Afro-Brazilians in Nigeria is complex and multifaceted, as it encompasses the history, traditions, language, music, dance, and cuisine that have been passed down through generations. The 'Brazilian imprint in Nigeria' – as described by Nigerian academic Toyin Falola, in chapter *Africa, the Homeland: Diasporic Cultures*, in the book *The Power of African Cultures*, is being reproduced significantly by cultural institutions (Falola, 2003, p. 281). There are new initiatives held by Afro-Brazilian descendants in Lagos, shaping a new discourse and strengthening knowledge about their self-identification, heritage, attachment to a specific territory and the existence of distinct socio-cultural customs regulating their status. Two of them, the Brazilian Descendants Association in Nigeria and Afro-Brazilian Cultural Centre, play a crucial role in multicultural education as they provide resources, opportunities, and platforms for members to learn about and actively engage with different cultures in Lagos. The idea that guides the functioning of that creative and committed organization – Brazilian Descendants Association Lagos – is the phrase written in Portuguese on the logo: *Para hoje não mas geração futuro* ('Not for today, but for a future generation'). The Association was created to promote events to accelerate the growth and development of local neighborhood, as well as bring together active members who act as spokespeople and representatives of the community's interests. As noted in the interview with Mr. Graciano Martins, the President of the Association, its members (currently 170) organize monthly gatherings, celebrate cultural events or days of remembrance, which are designed with the aim of

promoting diversity and inclusion. They showcase the cultural richness, helping to foster a sense of understanding, respect, and appreciation for diverse individuals and communities. Moreover, they emphasize the fact that Afro-Brazilians have made significant contributions to the country's cultural landscape, particularly in the fields of architecture and local social development. Among the determinants of culture, its members also mention attachment to genealogy, memory of history and roots, pride in their origins, as well as the importance of upbringing according to specific rules passed down from generation to generation. A good upbringing plays a crucial role in shaping an individual's personality, behavior, and values. It also helps instill important qualities such as empathy, respect, responsibility, and self-discipline. What seems interesting is that there is a noticeable usage of phrases transformed from the Portuguese language during conversation or discussions, such as honorary titles and greetings (*senhor* – Mister, *bom dia* – good morning) or names of culinary dishes.

The sense of belonging, as an integral part of the Afro-Brazilian cultural discourse, survived and remained visibly influential in the newly open Afro-Brazilian Cultural Centre, which willingly (re)produces Afro-Brazilian ethos, affirms cultural sensitivity, communicative practices and identity. The Centre, located at Catholic Mission Street 13, is aimed at reconfiguring identities in the public sphere and teaching about silenced aspects of the Nigerian history. When analyzing cultural practices, it is impossible not to pay attention to the convergence with Brazilian symbolism, images and motifs that penetrated the foundations of the African-Brazilian identity. The place is full of visual representations of Brazil, the journey or current life of Brazilian descendants in Lagos, such as paintings, murals, logotypes, or boards with archival photographs. Family members of both institutions try to reach for elements of the cultural heritage of the older generations, treating the transmission of tradition as an attitude of group integration, recognition and respect for the group's own value, including reconstructing murals with the image of slaves in Brazil and ships involved in the trans-Atlantic trade, references to the history of families, archives and material memorabilia. Obviously, they provide access to diverse perspectives by housing collections and resources that represent a wide range of cultural perspectives and traditions, giving individuals the opportunity to learn from and connect with different experiences. One of the Marcelino Domingo Martins family members, who admitted that the storytelling is one of the most effective ways of teaching younger generations about the significance of cultural roots and bonds, presented *oriki*, a praising

song, in Yoruba: *Omo Aguda to nje Signor, Gbambga lode Eko, Gbambga lode Okun Seme, Arin gangan wolu, Ale bi osu ma fara sin* ('The great descendant of Brazilian origin. The gentle man who we affectionately call Signor. Who landed in the heart of Lagos. And on the beautiful beach of Seme (Cotonou). The one who enters a city with so much confidence'). As explained by several interviewees, through storytelling, the community can reclaim its narratives, challenge stereotypes, and assert more valued place in the broader historical record. Through the networks, Afro-Brazilians can facilitate community-building efforts that promote inclusivity and resilience. Their experiences of navigating cultural identities can provide valuable insights into the challenges faced by multicultural societies, contributing to dialogues on social cohesion and integration.

By offering programs, exhibits, and events that focus on multiculturalism, the associations facilitate cross-cultural dialogue and create space for individuals to engage in meaningful conversations about cultural differences and similarities, new discourses about the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the role of Brazilian returnees in Lagos development and its impact on the Lagosian society. There are many practices that encourage cultural exchange. The community hosts events, performances, and festivals that celebrate and showcase the arts, music, dance, food, and traditions of various cultural groups, promoting cross-cultural exchange and collaboration. Afro-Brazilian family members participate in joint celebrations, including birthdays, family holidays, as well as the mass in Holy Cross Cathedral (for patron saints' celebrations or weekly masses) and public events open for all inhabitants of Lagos, such as Fanti carnival, Festival Bumba Meu Boi or Food Fair Festival. This rich Brazilian heritage is kept alive by the descendants of returnees (Simpson, 2007, pp. 10–14). The Fanti festival, depicting a hybrid public event with costumes, music, performances and dance, is closely linked to the Catholic celebration of the start of the Christian fasting period, which culminates in the Easter season (in 2024 it is planned to be organized on 25th of December). The second mentioned Festival Bumba Meu Boi ('Get up, my ox!') is a dance show celebrated in the Brazilian Quarter from the 20th century, however, known in Brazil since the 18th century. The street performance begins with the entrance of all the actors (a harlequin, an ox, a dancer from Rio de Janeiro, a cowboy) introducing themselves with special dialogues, dancing and singing. The show takes place in the evening between December 25th and January 6th and its Brazilian variant was included on UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List in 2019. Additionally, in case of Afro-Brazilians, the

intercultural communication exceeds traditional approaches of frameworks. The groups are active in social media and information websites, as the digital format ensures accessibility without borders.

The cultural and visual character of a city is again expressed in a layer of rituals, symbols and non-linguistic, non-architectural aspects *per se*, such as dress code (usually white for women spiritual gatherings) and music. Commonly held frameworks such as Afro-Brazilian dance is used for shaping reality and interacting with collective expressions intended to last for generations. The last component is food and cuisine, which is part of the heritage in Brazilian-Nigerian context. Bahian dishes such as *frejon* (delicacy made with savoury black beans and coconut milk, flavoured with cloves and sweetened with sugar) or *feijoada* (Brazilian black bean stew), are being prepared by the local community during religious celebrations, weddings or the carnival (Alves Filho and Di Giovanni, 2000, pp. 1–112). In general, to the Catholic population of Lagos Island's Brazilian district, Good Friday and Easter are commemorated by a fusion of dishes with a rich history dating back to the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Conclusions

Overall, the cultural heritage of Afro-Brazilians in Nigeria is a testament to the resilience and creativity, showcasing the rich tapestry of influences that have shaped their identity over the centuries. Brazilian descendants in the city of Lagos express not a static structure, but a constantly evolving social, cultural and spatial dynamics and agency. The role of associations is to shape integrated, full attitudes towards the achievements of ancestors, evoking emotional and aesthetic bond, integrating groups, maintaining their cultural continuity and heritage. As expressed in interviews, the group members aim to protect a specific value system in order to ensure a sense of security, duration and integration with the next generations. All these examples show various manifestations of finding or expressing the cultural heritage, memory, searching for ways of visual and multicultural communication. As noted earlier in my analysis, modern descendants of Afro-Brazilians promote their culture and identity in the same way as strategies of minority populations do. In the modern times, Lagos is a space for reproduction of different cultural and visual manifestations. Thanks to the activity of Afro-Brazilian associations and the community, there is still a hope that those urban components will survive and keep the memory of the rich heritage. I argue that the contemporary expressions of Afro-Brazilian culture in Lagos are not merely historical

remnants but are actively reinterpreted and reshaped by the community and can be used in the future as educative tools. Future research should consider comparative analyses with other cultural groups to further enrich the discourse on intercultural education and preservation of the heritage.

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Community projects in Havana – towards a grassroots educational model?

Abstract: This article addresses the challenges that the Cuban educational system is facing nowadays and the way in which grassroots solutions developed by the community projects respond to these challenges. The prolonged economic crisis led not only to the touristification and dollarization of the economy, but also to the disenchantment with the opportunities offered by finishing education. This disproportionately affects the communities inhabiting peripheral areas of Havana which feel neglected and express their discontent over the decline in the quality of education. Community projects, thanks to their flexibility, are able to offer alternative solutions to the ongoing educational crisis. They navigate between different institutional actors to maximize community engagement. Such projects occupy the space between local governments and the citizens, while also facilitating the contact between volunteering-oriented tourists that tend to become the primary source of income for the project. The study opens with a broader overview of the changing educational landscape of Cuba and the general perceptions of the crisis it is undergoing. In the second part of the article, the focus is on the educational activities organized by community projects. I consider how they insert themselves into the existing educational systems and respond to the changing context with the rise of the tourist industry, migrations and many people envisioning their future abroad. This article is based on 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2018 and 2023 centred around community projects in the marginalized areas of Havana.

Keywords: development, community, Cuba, socialism, grassroots education, community projects

A stranger appears in a busy informal settlement. He walks down the staircase, approaches a boy playing on the street and hands him a big book. The child examines the gift with fascination and starts running to show it to oth-

ers. Time passes and, once again, a young man arrives in the neighbourhood with the same book and hands it to a child. This is the hero from the beginning of the story, now all grown up and coming back to the community to pass on the knowledge and inspiration to others.

This description summarises a promotional video of Proyecto Akokán los Pocitos¹, a community project operating in the western part of Havana. It represents the common goal of Cuban grassroots initiatives – inspiring and passing on knowledge as a strategy of overcoming marginality. Community projects in Cuba have been growing in popularity in recent years and have become important actors within Cuba’s institutional landscape. Their leaders navigate between tourist economies and businesses, engagement with the local community and government institutions to propose new models of community development. Their activities centre on education across all age groups and one that is supposed to respond to modern-day challenges related to climate change, the expansion of informal economies and tourism.

As an emigration society and a popular tourist destination, Cuba faces many educational challenges, mainly the constant shortage of teachers and the growing dropout rates due to vast differences in wages between educated professionals and those working in the tourism sector. Although systemic solutions have been slowly adapted grassroots initiatives in the form of community projects coming into being across the country, started to develop their solutions to the educational challenges. This article provides an ethnographic case study of how community projects in Havana develop an alternative model of education and how they situate themselves within the institutional framework. Their offer is usually complementary to institutionalized school education and responds to the changing situation in Cuba. The study opens with a broader overview of the changing educational landscape of Cuba and a short description of the history and activities of the community projects. Finally, the focus is on the variety of educational activities of the community projects and on the way in which they respond to the challenges Cuban society is facing nowadays.

This article is based on 12 months of individual ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2018 and 2023 centred around community projects in the marginalized areas of Havana. The research project concentrated on

¹ With the intention of providing better coverage for these projects that seek international help and with the consent of their leaders I do not anonymize the names of the projects or their leaders. The rest of the names are changed to provide anonymity for my research partners.

grassroots strategies for overcoming marginality in the context of late socialism in Cuba. The data collected was based on long-term participant observation of the daily life in Havana's informal settlements and of the activities implemented by the community projects. As part of my research, I collaborated with the projects, supported different initiatives, provided different workshops and English classes, and helped in everyday physical work related to preparing the community spaces etc. Moreover, I conducted semi-structured interviews with leaders of different community projects and inhabitants of the informal settlements living in the areas covered by project activities.

The material for this article comes from two main case studies: Proyecto Comunitario Akokán los Pocitos in the Marianao district and Proyecto Comunitario Familiar Vida in the Los Pinos district and interviews with leaders of other community projects in the city. My position as a foreigner was also seen as an opportunity to further promote the projects among tourists and consult certain ideas so as to ensure that the coming visitors would respond well to them. I could experience the ways in which projects functioned both from the position of an outsider and as a person involved in them.

Cuban educational model and its contemporary struggles

The victory of the Cuban revolution in 1959 put universal education at the forefront of its ideological goals. Over the years the country has made many educational advances owing to the popular mobilization seen especially in the successful literacy campaign of 1961. Thanks to this campaign, Cuba has become a leading Latin American country in terms of its population's literacy. The success of such campaigns relied primarily on the ideological promise that self-sacrifice for the greater good would lead to a better future for everyone (Fernández, 2000). Universal education was not only supposed to improve the life quality of its citizens, granting access to better work and social mobility, but was also an important instrument in forming *Hombre Nuevo* – the New Human who would embody the socialist ideals of a classless and raceless society. Schools, thus, became primary outlets for developing new citizens and played a pivotal role in the ideological reproduction of the socialist ideals. Through *matutinos* and classes on martyrs, the youth are educated to become model citizens (see Blum, 2011).

Cuba's revolutionary educational system was based on the work-study principle which combined the ideas of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Vladimir Lenin, as well as Jose Marti (Blum, 2011, pp. 8–11). It was interwoven

with scholarly education and productive labour. Depending on the schooling level, learners would spend a part of the year engaging in physical work in the countryside. Both elements, learning and work were essential in the process of the formation of dedicated citizens. Physical work and education are believed to produce citizens better suited to adult life and motivated to work for the collective good rather than individual gain. The ideological formation was just as important as physical and academic work and remained emphasized throughout subsequent reforms introduced over the years by the Cuban government (see: Kapcia, 2005, pp. 399–412).

For a long time, Cuba has been seen as an example of a successfully implemented educational system despite the staff shortages and lack of funding. Even today, Cuba's indicators in education are favourable in comparison with other Latin American countries (UNESCO, 2024). However, as Breidlid (2007, pp. 617–634) points out, these indicators do not reflect the actual situation in Cuba with teacher shortages, and the devaluation of the profession seen as main indicators of the ongoing educational crisis, related in part to the lowered requirements for becoming teachers. Teachers themselves express dissatisfaction with the low salaries and the inability to reconcile their educational vocation and personal goals (Crumdy, 2024, pp. 237–256).

Multiple factors contributed to this educational crisis. The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, Cuba's main trade partner, led to a profound economic crisis, the so-called Special Period from which, according to many people Cuba has not recovered. The growing food shortages and lack of economic opportunities led to massive emigration out of the country and internal migration to Havana which remained Cuba's economic hub. Many of the newcomers to the capital settled in the informal settlements in the peripheries of Havana. The solution to the ongoing crisis was the reintroduction of tourism and limited liberalization of the centrally planned economy, with foreign investments and small entrepreneurship becoming its key elements (Ana and Lubiński, 2019, pp. 467–477). Those employed within the tourist sector with access to hard currency earned considerably more than qualified employees of the state sector (Phillips, 2006, pp. 107–123), which led to an internal "brain drain" as many people abandoned their employment in favour of working in the tourist industry. Others took to the informal market and complemented their low state salaries with black market transactions. This also contributed to the growing dropout rates, especially in higher education, as many people did not see education as the key to a better future. Only 59% of students finish their pre-university education in Cuba (UNICEF, 2021)

partially because at this time they are already working, mostly in the informal sector. At this time, the earlier promises of advancement in exchange for self-sacrifice no longer worked and workplace pilfering and disillusionment with the socialist ideology became common.

Despite the declared universal and free access to education, many of my interlocutors expressed general dissatisfaction with the decline in its quality and differentiation between various schools. The main criticism came from the overemphasis on repetition and promoting conformity instead of critical thinking. Another important factor was the perceived lack of interest of many teachers in actually teaching the children, a fact especially visible in the peripheral neighbourhoods of Havana. Their inhabitants complained about uninterested and unprepared personnel and the quality of education. One of my research partners told me she moved her grandson from one school to another after his teacher's prolonged illness. Due to the lack of a substitute teacher, the child got behind on many courses. At the time of our conversation, her grandson was attending private classes just to catch up on the school curriculum and catch up with the group. Although all schools seemingly followed similar educational curricula, the convictions about the preparation of teachers and the composition of students implied that schooling quality could differ from school to school.

Community projects and education

The changes introduced as a result of the Special Period included a gradual recognition of grassroots initiatives as part of the broader movement towards promoting local governance. *Talleres de Transformación Integral de Barrio* (Workshops for the Integral Transformation of the District – TTIB) formed in 1987 consisted of multidisciplinary groups of architects, social workers and sociologists. They worked with different communities to improve the quality of life in Havana's neighbourhoods. Although formally under the state administration, TTIB served as a space for expressing and implementing more grassroots initiatives with various effects. In some cases, such as in the district Pogolotti they have become model initiatives (Caner Román, Reyes Herrera and Guevara Romero, 2007), while in other cases they were abandoned after some time, due to emerging difficulties (Colantonio and Potter, 2006).

TTIB opened space for grassroots initiatives in the form of community projects which especially rose in popularity in the past 15 years. The projects

had different origins – some came from within the community or were formulated by prominent artists or local entrepreneurs, while others formed part of the university outreach projects. What unified them was a common goal of promoting the integration of local communities and through that improving the quality of life of the community members (see also Anguelovski, 2014; Spencer, 2010). At the time of my research, many community projects operated thanks to their leaders running a successful business that financed project activities as until 2022 they were not allowed to have their own finances.

The two projects I worked most closely with – Proyecto Akokán and Proyecto Vida were both located in the peripheral areas of Havana: the first in Marianao, the other in Vieja Linda. In both neighbourhoods there were considerably large informal settlements most of whose inhabitants lived thanks to informal work. Proyecto Akokán formed in 2018 had considerable success over the years – its leaders (first Michael and later Deborah) managed to combine community-centred activities with tours around the neighbourhood and a small café. Their income allowed them to finance the activities of the project. Moreover, Michael, who used to work as a university professor used his connections with foreign students to bring them to the neighbourhood and engage with the project – these students worked as volunteers and in one case even applied for a grant to support the project. These exchange students worked with the community, provided workshops and brought gifts, especially books to learn and practice English. During my research, the project gained recognition in the local and international media, as well as in the eyes of the local government, which culminated in 2023 in giving the newly renovated community spaces to the project management to coordinate its activities from there. Proyecto Vida had a longer history, reaching 2009 when Natalia decided to organize something for the local community as it faced multiple problems related to economic and transport exclusion. At the time of my research, Natalia and her daughter Vida, who led the project, were actively seeking ways through which they could open a business to gain additional income and finance the project. The project itself focused primarily on promoting permaculture in the area. It created a network of households interested in urban agriculture and cooperated with *Asociación Cubana de Producción Animal*, an NGO-like² institution that supported local efforts of

² Most of Cuba's NGOs have ties to the government, so they do not represent a typical NGO model. Nonetheless, they remain an important resource in supporting community development, promoting environmental protection etc.

animal husbandry. Moreover, Natalia and her friend taught environmental education at interest circles in local schools.

Education for the community

In their educational endeavours, community projects focused primarily on providing community members – both children and adults – with the means to adapt to the contemporary situation in Cuba. Community leaders believed that, apart from school, young people needed to be encouraged to follow through with their education and see value in it, principally by showing how it can allow them to face the future. The knowledge of foreign languages and the ability to communicate and cooperate with groups from different backgrounds stood at the forefront of different community project activities. The activities on offer varied from English lessons, environmental science, workshops on medicinal plants, arts and crafts, and confectionery, to theatre workshops. Michael explained to me that the skills the children gained were in his opinion less important than showing them how to cooperate with each other and be able to find common ground with other people for the benefit of everyone.

An important element of this was providing a community space for people to learn. While pupils were required to do homework, small and cramped spaces of the houses in the informal settlements rarely could fit a desk or even allow for a small space to focus on the homework without noise or distractions. The activities of the community projects consist of efforts aimed at addressing these gaps. Apart from the planned activities, the *aula comunitaria* of Proyecto Akokán offered a space for children to do their homework, draw, and play during their free time. Its calendar, on the other hand, was filled with different workshops offered to children delivered by volunteers and teachers who received payment for each class they conducted. In order to incentivize the regular participation of children, their attendance was meticulously registered and those with the highest attendance rate would be put on the priority list for trips and excursions funded by the project. Many of the workshops focused on creative exercises, mostly using recycled materials.

Part of the efforts made by the community projects were carried out through seeking support from bigger organizations, mostly NGOs, embassies and certain governmental institutions. Among the most important ones were Fundación Antonio Núñez Jiménez de Naturaleza y el Hombre, responsible for the dissemination of the permaculture in Cuba, and Centro Felix Varela

which promoted the *Mapa Verde* – Green Map methodology. Green Map was conceived in 1992 in New York City and has since expanded around the globe. It is based on simple community mapping methods where its members identify dangerous or polluted areas, places of cultural value etc. In Cuba, it has become widely popular especially among school children through teachers and community projects as well. *Mapa verde* was for my interlocutors a symbol of hope, a necessary step for facilitating development in the area. A publicly available map represented both the developmental potential of the area and the difficulties that the community faced. Identifying green areas and places where people gathered could help in planning a small park there, while mapping out polluted areas led to cleaning them up. In some cases, waste dumps were transformed into urban gardens led by community projects. Thus, mapping was part of the broader goal of participatory education and changing the culture as it promoted a more caring approach towards local surroundings. Sometimes, certain religious organizations provide support as well – the Catholic Church lent its spaces for the promotion of small entrepreneurship, while the Baptist Centro Memorial Martin Luther King located in the Marianao district of Havana worked with different communities through the promotion of the Paolo Freire's Popular Education model which emphasized participatory educational methods (see Friedman, 2012, pp. 36–52).

One of the biggest challenges for Natalia and finally one of her biggest successes was starting the Third Age University in 2018. The University courses were supposed to help local seniors get out of the house as many of them complained about feeling depressed due to their feeling of a lack of purpose. Moreover, with no leisure infrastructure in the area, the Third Age University could serve as a solution to encourage older adults to go out and do something together. However, upon asking for support from the local government, the official attending Natalia laughed in her face saying that nobody cared to do such a thing in the neighbourhood. She persisted and contacted the University of Havana directly. The University was open to providing institutional support for the project, offering preparatory courses for the professors who came from the area and even a graduation ceremony in the Aula Magna of the University. The University has been active ever since with elder adult groups attending classes each year. When talking to the graduates, many of them emphasized their gratitude for being able to attend the course and find a new pastime.

A common narrative among the people who participated in the activities of the community projects was one of change. They emphasized the feeling

of being taken care of that contrasted with the earlier perception of neglect. Parents would show me the works prepared by their children during creative workshops, keeping them as a sign of their children being taken care of. If there was any criticism, it was not directed at the projects themselves – rather it concentrated on the limited scope of changes. The activities carried out by the projects while providing a certain feeling of care for the community, did not affect the more structural issues related to the dollarization of the economy and constant scarcity of products. After all, community projects had a more limited scope of activity but thanks to their ability to navigate between different institutions and to enter the tourism industry, they offered more flexibility and adaptability in identifying problems their respective communities were facing and adapting to.

Conclusions

The crisis of Cuba's socialist model heavily affected the needs of its population, impacting education and the inability to fulfil the socialist promise of a better future thanks to education and hard work. The narratives of self-sacrifice no longer suffice as an incentive for dedication. As much as institutionalized education struggles with the lack of staff, uneven programs and other issues, community projects offer a mostly grassroots complementary system to school education. Similar to the promotional movie described in the introduction of the article, the idea behind such initiatives is to share knowledge and encourage younger generations from marginalized communities to pursue knowledge on their own. Part of it involves adapting to the changing situation, the rising presence of tourism in the country, the shifting institutional landscape and the opportunities that occur with increased international contact. Although the community projects managed to insert themselves within Cuba's institutional landscape, they retain a high degree of autonomy. This allows them to navigate between different social actors and respond to community problems in a more flexible manner.

However, their activities also have limits. Such grassroots initiatives are helpful and can inform a more systemic response to the problems the Cuban educational system is facing, but they cannot resolve the systemic problems related to economic scarcity and staff shortages. The study, while limited in scope to the activities of the community projects opens up further questions for investigation of the educational systems in Cuba in the wake of demographic challenges related to migration and economic crisis.

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Research Reports



(In)visibility of migrant children with trauma experience in the Polish education system

Abstract: The aim of the article is to present the involvement of schools in Poland in supporting migrant students with trauma experiences. Considering institutional functions, schools can and should play a pivotal role in delivering initial support — conceptualized as a form of ‘first aid’ — to migrant students affected by highly stressful experiences.

The article presents the results of a diagnostic survey conducted in the mixed paradigm. The respondents were primary and secondary school teachers from all over the country. The analyses revealed a lack of systemic solutions oriented towards the needs of migrant students with trauma experiences. Schools are seeking solutions due to limited teacher knowledge about the situation and needs of migrant students, as well as about trauma itself. All actions stem from the individual experiences of teachers in working with migrant students, the awareness of the teaching staff, and the school culture.

The research findings can contribute to shaping teachers’ awareness of the situation of students with trauma experiences. They are also important for teacher and student training, as well as for the development of proper solutions within the school environment.

Keyword: mental health, migration, children, education, professional support, schools, trauma

The situational background

Supporting migrant children with trauma experiences in the school environment is crucial in the context of escalating crises of varying nature and the ongoing high dynamics of population movements in different regions of the world. While it is impossible to fully estimate the scale of the migration, it is

important to emphasize that a significant part consists of children. In 2020 the number of migrants reached 281 million, of which 13% were individuals under the age of eighteen. The proportion is slightly different in the refugee group. By the end of 2022, approximately 41% of the 35.3 million refugee population were children (McAuliffe and Oucho, 2024, p. 42).

Migrant children are confronted with traumatic experiences not only before and during migration, but also after arriving at the new destination. Due to their developmental characteristics and limited life experience, they need support from adults. The family can play a key role in providing it. However, this support is not always possible due to the lack of proper knowledge and skills among parents or guardians and due to focusing on their own problems. In such a situation, the school becomes the space where support for the child can be ensured. Education is one of the fundamental rights of the child (Convention on the Rights of the Child, Art. 28; Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, Art. 22). The involvement of schools in providing first-line support to migrant students — promoted by various international organizations (UNHCR, IOM, UNICEF) and embedded in international legal frameworks — remains outside systemic solutions in many countries.

Educational solutions for migrant children in Poland – assumptions

In recent years, support for migrant students in Poland has taken on a distinctive character. Following the outbreak of the full-scale war in Ukraine, Poland – as the largest frontline state – faced numerous challenges typical of such crises, including the need to guarantee the right to education for refugee children under the age of eighteen. Over the course of two school years, the number of students with a migration background increased nearly fivefold – from 48,449 in the 2020/2021 school year to 222,523 in 2022/2023. The vast majority were enrolled in primary schools, comprising approximately 79% of migrant students in the 2022/2023 school year (NIK, 2024).

The statistical data are incomplete. The underestimation is influenced by the high mobility of students (particularly those from Ukraine). Some stay in Poland for only a brief period (after returning to Ukraine or deciding to further migrate), while others change their place of residence within Poland multiple times. Additionally, a “pendulum movement” has been observed, where individuals split their lives between their country of origin and Poland.

For Ukrainian students, it was available to continue their education within the Ukrainian system, which meant that some school-age children remained outside the Polish educational system – or even outside any formal educational system altogether. For others, it involved combining studies in two systems. The requirement for this group to take part in the Polish education system came into effect in the 2024/2025 school year. Polish regulations – including the Constitution (1997) and the Education Law Act of December 14, 2016 – provide a framework for the education of migrant students and the provision of professional support for students with diverse needs, including those stemming from traumatic experiences.

According to the provisions of Polish education law, it is possible to establish preparatory classes for students with limited or no knowledge of the Polish language. Schools have the possibility to employ (inter)cultural assistants, whose role is to support all participants in the educational process: students, parents/guardians, and teachers. Moreover, schools may offer extra Polish language lessons and professional support. For students with special needs requiring in-depth diagnosis and systematic professional aid, support can also be provided by other institutions, including psychological and pedagogical counselling centres (Education Law Act of December 14, 2016).

In fact, migrant students are frequently placed in regular classes without prior language preparation or training, and specialized support is provided only when learning or behavioural difficulties emerge. According to the research by the Supreme Audit Office (NIK), most teachers (84%) independently adjusted their syllabuses to meet the needs of students. In most schools (62%), students are provided with psychological and pedagogical support in different forms: advice and consultations (28%), remedial classes (17%), workshops (10%), talent development classes (9%), special training (9%), and learning skills development activities (8%) (NIK, 2024). The findings of other studies confirm the identified issues (Januszewska and Markowska-Manista, 2017, pp. 394–403; Pamuła-Behrens and Szymańska, 2018, pp. 43–46; Pyżalski et al., 2022, pp. 41–46). Moreover, the support provided to students varies depending on the type of migration, the time of arrival in Poland, and the country of origin, which may legitimize and perpetuate social inequalities.

Trauma experience in life of migrant children

Migrant children encounter situations that are recognized under DSM-5 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) as triggers for the

development of PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). PTSD can arise from directly or indirectly experiencing an event involving threats to life, health, safety, or physical or psychological integrity. Numerous studies confirm the prominent level of trauma exposure among children prior to migration (Eisenman et al., 2003, pp. 627–634; Keller et al., 2017; Perreira and Ornelas, 2013, pp. 976–1005), although it is not only related to children from conflict-affected areas.

Depressive disorders and PTSD constitute the most significant mental health disparities between non-immigrant and refugees' children (Ellis et al., 2014, pp. 165–187; Müller et al., 2019; Kauhanen et al., 2023, pp. 995–1013). The mental health indicators among refugee and migrant children vary depending on their exposure to violence, immigration status, length of legalization of their stay, isolation, and the support systems.

Over half of migrant and refugee women and children from Central America report anxiety and depression, and nearly half – symptoms of PTSD (MacLean et al., 2019). The majority (78–80%) unaccompanied children had experienced life-threatening situations, physical violence, or the loss of a close relative. Almost one-third (31%) suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Jakobsen et al., 2014); 37–47% exhibit “severe or very severe” symptoms of anxiety, depression, and PTSD (Derluyn et al., 2007, pp. 291–297). The symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder include: the persistent re-experiencing of the traumatic event, avoidance of conversations and associations related to the distressing experience, a depressed mood accompanied by negative emotions, and the behavioural disorders, which can sometimes hinder daily functioning.

An additional issue is the generational transmission of trauma, described in relation to experiences such as the Holocaust and the atomic bomb explosion in Hiroshima (Yehuda and Lehrner, 2018, pp. 243–257; Kahn and Denov, 2022, pp. 727–739). The concept of intergenerational trauma assumes that exposure to extremely adverse events can affect individuals so profoundly that the traumatic state of parents may affect their children and even grandchildren. Therefore, implementing supportive measures can mitigate the development of negative effects and serve as a foundation for building individual and collective resilience.

In Poland, research on the experience of trauma by migrant children is marginal. Although it mainly concerns forced migrants from Ukraine, it provides insights into the fundamental issues related to mental and physical health and social functioning. In the study by Centrone et al. (2023), most

young respondents pointed to stress, longing, and loneliness; they also noted that they have felt less happy since leaving their homeland (57%).

Children over the age of sixteen more often report experiencing difficulties with sleep and/or concentration, a loss of self-confidence or of a sense of helplessness. These findings are like those presented by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA, 2023). Among Ukrainian children aged 12–15, 25% report chronic illness or ongoing health problems, while this figure rises to nearly one in three (30%) among those aged 16–17.

Other studies conducted in Polish schools among teachers reveal that more than one-third (34.3%) do not notice symptoms of post-traumatic stress or psychological crises. Conversely, over one-quarter (26.9%) see such behaviours in only a few children from Ukraine. Nearly 20% report seeing symptoms in half or more of their students. Almost one-fifth (19.7%) of teachers are unable to estimate the percentage of children affected by difficult experiences. A similar distribution of results concerns irritability and inadequate reactions in children. Of the respondents, 26.9% stated that this issue affects only a small part of students, while 17.9% observed it in half or more of the children and adolescents (Pyżalski et al., 2023, pp. 20–28).

Moreover, the recent study by Markowska-Manista and Ovcharenko (2024, pp. 113–137) offer valuable insights into the challenges faced by youth from Ukraine and suggest possible approaches for providing effective support.

However, it should be noted that these studies do not account for all groups of migrant students residing in Poland. Research focusing on crisis experiences in this sense remains underdeveloped. It can be assumed that this situation stems from a lack of awareness of the possibility of trauma among various migrant groups, as well as the fundamental importance of migrants' mental health for the integration process and their sustainable functioning within the host society. Providing support to migrant students with experiences of intense stress and psychological crises poses a significant challenge. It requires consideration of cultural and linguistic contexts, individual differences, systemic differences between the country of origin and the host country, diverse experiences, and special needs.

Taking proper supportive activities within the school environment creates conditions for ensuring the child's comprehensive development. What seems particularly important is psychosocial support integrated with interventions in social and emotional learning; aid in building self-confidence, resilience, and emotional regulation skills; as well as teaching the creation of trust-based

relationships (Betancourt et al., 2013, pp.70–91). It is important to create a safe environment based on respect, diversity, and participation.

Research field

The aim of the study was to assess the state of support provided in the school environment to migrant children with trauma experiences. The analysis was guided by the research question: *What support is provided to migrant students who have experienced traumatic events in Polish school?* The study was addressed to teachers and specialized staff from all types of primary and secondary schools, including schools with integrated classes that provide specialized support for students with special educational needs, as well as preparatory classes dedicated to students with low or no Polish language skills.

The research adopted a mixed-methods approach. It used the survey (CAWI) and content analysis due to the presence of open-ended questions (11 out of 25 questions). This approach allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the researched issue. The quantitative analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS. The analyses covered several problems: the school's engagement in providing support (or its lack), types of undertaken actions, collaboration with other institutions in offering support, evaluation of the effectiveness of these actions, the school's needs in the explored area, and demographic factors influencing the support for migrant students with trauma experiences.

Results and findings

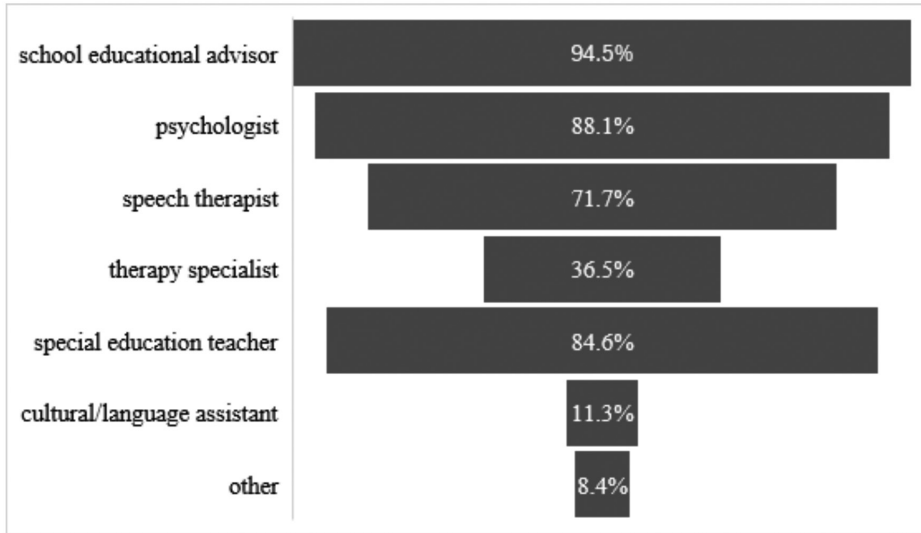
The study involved 812 respondents, of whom 86.1% were women and 13.9% were men. The most represented group was school head teachers at 44.9% and subject teachers at 32.7%. Most school staff had between 26–35 years (38.7%) or 16–25 years (28.4%) of professional experience.

The study involved teachers from cities with populations ranging from 50,000 to 250,000 (28.2%, N=229), from towns with populations between 5,000 and 49,999 (25%, N=203), and from rural areas (26.2%, N=213). They stood for diverse types of schools – regular common schools, schools with integrated classes, and special education schools – at primary and secondary level.

The study was most strongly represented by schools with 100–399 students (43.6%, N=354) and schools with 400–699 students (30.8%, N=250). The study revealed that only a few schools have preparatory classes. First

classes were set up in Poland starting on September 1, 2017, and their number increased significantly after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine.

Figure 1. Specialists in schools

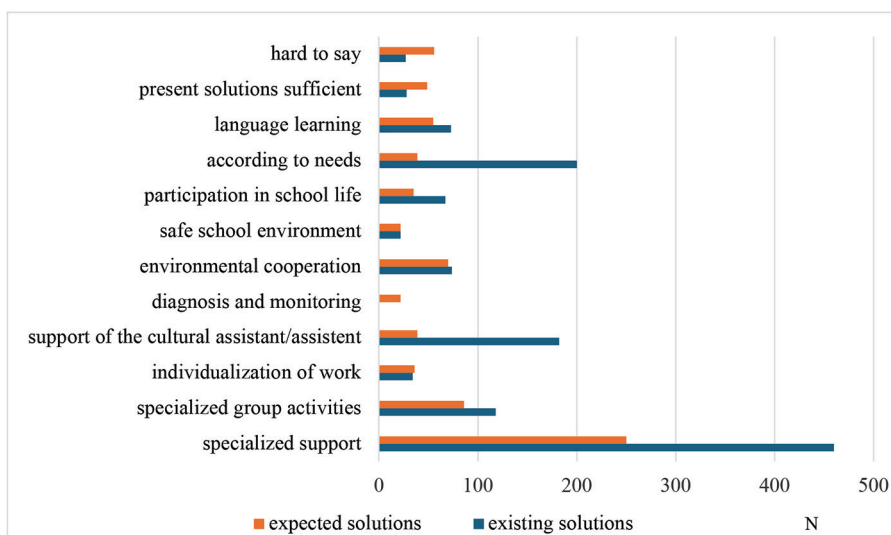


Source: own research

According to the respondents, schools most commonly provide support from school educational advisors (94.5%). Almost 9 out of 10 institutions represented in the study offer support from a psychologist, and slightly fewer help from a special education teacher. Specialists are more often available in urban schools than in rural areas. Larger schools offer a broader range of specialists, while access is most limited in small schools — i.e., those with fewer than 100 students. (Figure 1)

The presence of specialists in schools can be crucial for providing support to migrant students with trauma and for recognizing the problems that cooccur with them. 66.9% of the surveyed teachers (N=543) show that such support is available in their school, while 15.9% give a negative answer – most often in small schools (50.6%) and in rural areas (30%). A substantial number of teachers (17%; N=138) are unable to answer the question. A detailed analysis revealed that the difficulty in responding is most observed among subject teachers (31.2%), teachers with 1–5 years of experience (28.1%), and teachers employed in schools with preparatory classes (38.5%).

Figure 2. Support for migrant students with trauma experience – existing and expected solutions.



Source: own research

Schools most often offer specialized support in the form of care provided by a psychologist or educational advisor. They strive to consider the individual needs of the student. What seems important in support is the help of an intercultural assistant from the same or a similar cultural group as the student and who serves as a ‘bridge’ between the student, parents/guardians, and teachers. Teachers also point out that their schools offer special activities of a compensatory, remedial, and integration nature.

Among the desired solutions, specialized support is indicated as fundamental. Teachers also mentioned the need for diagnosis and monitoring of students’ situations (Figure 2). The support is illustrated in more detail by respondents’ statements:

“Children are supported by the school psychologist and advisor, mainly in the form of conversations to calm negative emotions” (25).

“Classes with the school educational advisor focus on building self-confidence and adapting to a new environment. On engaging students in extracurricular activities to develop their passions and talents so that adaptation to the new environment proceeds as naturally and quickly as possible” (107).

Some responses deviate from the topic of supporting students with trauma experience and concern other issues:

“Intercultural education activities were conducted, and a tolerant educational environment was fostered. Changes were made to the school’s educational and preventive program. Intercultural assistants were employed, and community meetings with students and parents were organized” (206).

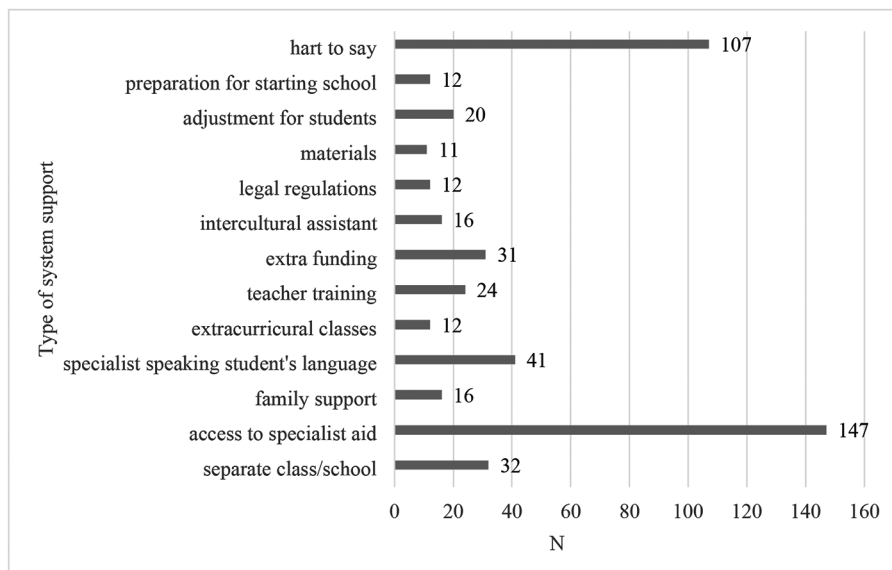
Almost half (48.6%; N=395) of the respondents rate the support for migrant students with trauma in the school environment as satisfactory. A significant part assesses the existing solutions as ‘low’ and ‘very low’ (a total of 39.3%; N=319). ‘High’ and ‘very high’ ratings were given by only about 12% of teachers (N=97).

The average rating indicated by teachers was 2.66 (on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 meant exceptionally low, and 5 – extremely high; M=3). The existing solutions in support for migrant students with trauma experience were rated highest by specialist teachers (M=2.77) and subject teachers (M=2.74). The support received the most criticism from head teachers (M=2.54). Work experience was also significant for the evaluation. Teachers with 1–5 years of experience assessed the support more positively (M=2.93) than others. The lowest average ratings were in the group with over 36 years of experience (M=2.53) and the group with 16–25 years of experience (M=2.61). The type of school is also significant for the evaluation. The lowest evaluation scores were adopted in regular common schools.

The presence of a preparatory class in the school does not affect the evaluation of the support provided to migrant students. The average scores in both cases are similar (M in schools with preparatory classes =2.66; M in schools without preparatory classes =2.65).

As essential solutions at the systemic level, teachers most frequently point to access to specialist support both in school and outside it, including the support in psychological-pedagogical counselling centres and mental health clinics (N=147); employing specialists speaking the language of the migrant student (N=41), creating separate classes or schools (N=32), increasing financial expenses (N=31), and diversifying adjustments that would take into account the experience of trauma and other needs of migrant students (N=20). It should also be noted that a large group of teachers (107) were unable to provide an answer to this question, and about one in three did not provide any response (32.6%; N=265).

Figure 3. Systemic support for migrant students with trauma experience



Source: own research

The following response presents the school support:

“High effectiveness results, among other things, from extensive individualization of communication, social, educational, and support processes. Expanding and improving the cultural competencies of the staff and students. Support and care for the psychological, physical, and social well-being of students and their families. Adjustments to school support activities, the scope of cooperation with supporting entities, programs, and assessments. Employing bilingual and bicultural staff, teacher assistants” (174).

Apart from the holistic view as a *sine qua non* condition for supporting the student, there are also voices calling for the isolation of students in separate schools or classes, which not only can hinder the building of effective support, but also contradict the idea of integration:

“There should be a separate school/track/class so that students with similar problems could share their experiences. Integration with the group would also be easier” (194).

Discussion

The analyses indicate that teachers experience difficulties in identifying students affected by trauma. Polish schools currently provide two main forms of support for migrant students: language support and specialist assistance. The latter focuses on addressing immediate educational challenges and on diagnosing special educational needs, rather than on trauma-related issues.

Teachers often do not recognize symptoms of stress or signs of crisis in students. They remain unaware of both the short – and long-term consequences of post-traumatic stress, and they fail to acknowledge the impact of parent's or guardian's traumatic experiences on a child's development and social functioning. Those teachers who do refer to trauma tend to associate it exclusively with students from Ukraine who arrived in Poland following the outbreak of the full-scale war. Crisis experiences among other groups of migrant students –including those from Belarus, who have been arriving in significant numbers in recent months – are rarely, if ever, mentioned.

There is a general lack of knowledge among teachers regarding effective methods of supporting students with trauma. Moreover, they demonstrate limited awareness of the systemic needs related to trauma-informed practices, whether at the national and local government level as well as within the school context itself.

In the Polish educational setting, there is a strong emphasis on language acquisition. Teachers most often identify linguistic difficulties as the primary challenge for migrant students. In contrast, mental health concerns are addressed only when behavioural issues, difficulties in fulfilling school tasks, or other visible problems arise.

When asked about supporting migrant students with trauma experiences, teachers emphasize the need for increased employment of specialists — particularly speaking the students' native languages. Some of them highlight the lack of contact with migrant students in their schools, resulting in limited knowledge and experience. At the same time, teachers do not identify trauma-related issues among Polish students, which suggests that the problem is not acknowledged within the school community. This points to the absence of trauma-informed approaches in Polish schools and the significant gap in awareness and pedagogical reflection.

The actions undertaken by schools in this regard depend on the initiative of school leadership and the engagement of individual staff members.

Cooperation with local authorities also plays a key role in shaping available support resolves.

Conclusions

Due to the marginal nature of the issue presented in the article within school practices and teacher preparation, and above all, the potential consequences such as the deterioration of the mental health of the young migrant generation, it is necessary to introduce this issue into the educational debate and to initiate systemic changes.

A fragmented approach to the issue of trauma experienced by migrant students (refugees and immigrants), could lead to social exclusion, lack of socio-cultural integration, and the loss of human capital.

Systemic solutions seem necessary here, including addressing the issue of trauma and traumatic experiences among migrant students in the education of future teachers and the training of current ones. This also includes creating programs and other initiatives involving schools focused on the mental health of migrant students and their families, ensuring access to specialists who deal with trauma and are familiar with the specifics of migrant situations, strengthening cooperation with parents, and various entities, including NGO's experiences in this area.

It is also essential to conduct more comprehensive research on the trauma among migrant students and their families. This issue is new in Poland. Knowledge in this area could be crucial for the greater effectiveness of interventions.

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Peer interactions and the sociometric position of students in multicultural classrooms

Abstract: This article addresses the social situation in multicultural classrooms. Using Moreno's sociometric technique, the evaluation is conducted of the social position of fourth-grade primary school learners in Warsaw. This stage of education is characterized by the formation of strong peer connections, the emergence of liking and disliking, and the creation of friendship groups. The findings indicate that most immigrant children occupy average positions in classes. One foreign student held a dominant position, while another was rejected by the group. Students tended to make positive choices towards peers of their own nationality, especially in reciprocal choices. Such a picture of relationships in multicultural classrooms is slightly concerning and may hinder the effective integration of foreign students within the group.

Keywords: multicultural classroom, sociometric research, social position, immigrant children

Introduction

Establishing interpersonal relationships and being able to function harmoniously within a group constitute crucial aspects of human development that shape our decisions and behaviours. The liking and disliking that emerge within a classroom setting influence the group's character and atmosphere, making activities involving peer interaction particularly important. For students aged 10–12, peer relationships hold special significance, as boys typically seek 'mates' while girls look for 'close friends'. Peer groups help fulfil various needs; a lack of or difficulties in social interactions can negatively affect their sense of security (Debesse, 1996, p. 69).

There are concerns that school classes comprising significant groups of immigrant children from diverse cultural backgrounds may lose cohesion, potentially leading to isolation or rejection of students who are difficult to communicate with. Poland does not have a strong tradition of multiculturalism – this has been largely limited to borderlands. In cities like Warsaw, this trend is relatively new; it has intensified since 2022 due to the mass influx of refugees from Ukraine. The aim of this study is to examine the social situation in fourth-grade classes at one of Poland's public schools in the context of a significantly altered cultural environment. Students in these classes exhibit varying levels of adaptation to Polish society and proficiency in the Polish language. Their parents also find themselves in diverse life situations – some have lived in Poland for a long time, others have arrived recently, and some are waiting to move to other European countries (Błęszyńska, 2010, pp. 7–9). Exploring the school situation of immigrant children, assessing their social position and understanding their relationships with peers in such classes offers particularly valuable insights. Before commencing the research, parental consent was obtained.

Research methodology

Determinants of a student's social position in the classroom

Peer acceptance is one of the indicators of healthy development. A child who is liked receives many positive emotions, which encourages them to embrace challenges and develop a positive self-image. Positive peer relationships influence a child's social position within the class, which can potentially have long-term effects (Deptuła, 1996, p. 129). Engaging in shared activities facilitates adaptation to the peer environment (Asher and Rose, 1999, p. 335). Informal peer relationships tend to form quickly in the classroom, as classmates and neighbourhood kids establish friendships (Łaciak, 1998, p. 94). A peer who is 'liked' is typically someone of the same gender, perceived as enjoyable to spend time with and engage in activities, while those who are 'disliked' often exhibit antisocial behaviour. Negative typifications are reinforced by peers, leading to the social isolation of those who are widely identified by the group as the most 'misbehaving' (Łaciak, 1998, p. 97). Being in the position of a rejected student contributes to failures and ultimately results in exclusion by peers (Jaskólska and Poleszak, 2015, p. 156). Children aged 11–12 are no longer guided by adult opinions; instead, peer influence becomes a more critical factor in shaping their behaviours and beliefs (Schaffer, 2013, p. 135).

Application of sociometric research to determine individual positions in a group

The sociometric method originates from sociology and is used to study power structures and patterns of communication among people. It examines relationships, communication and cooperation within a group while also identifying the positions of individuals within it. Popularity indicators are determined by the number of positive and negative nominations received during the selection process. Jacob Levy Moreno is credited with coining the term 'sociometry', a technique which makes it easier to understand intra-group relations by posing identical questions to all group members. Based on these, respondents select the person or people with whom they would most or least willingly engage in a specific interaction, as defined by sociometric criteria (Pilkiewicz, 1973, pp. 233–252; Jarosz, 2006, p. 88; Bielecka, 2003, pp. 295–300).

The sociometric position of a child, as an indicator of their status within a class, has been extensively examined by various authors (Basra, 2016, pp. 668–670; Bukowski, Castellanos and Persram, 2017, pp. 75–82; McMullen, Veermans and Laine, 2014, pp. 624–638; Meijs et al., 2010, pp. 62–72). A key determinant of high sociometric status within a peer group is the ability to function effectively on both interpersonal and intrapersonal levels during successive stages of development. This influences school and academic performance (Lease, Kennedy and Axelrod, 2002, pp. 87–109; Kiuru et al., 2020, pp. 1057–1072; Wentzel, Jablansky and Scalise, 2021, pp. 157–180).

H. Rudolf Schaffer has identified five types of sociometric status: “popular, rejected, neglected, controversial and average children, depending on the number of positive or negative evaluations they receive...” (2013, p. 140).

According to Anna Ussorowska, Monika Mieszkowska and Marek Graczyk (2023, p. 730), a sociometric test allows for the identification of:

- the ‘sociometric star’, or a person who is highly popular within the group and received the most votes;
- ‘rejected individuals’, or those who are not liked and are generally viewed unfavourably;
- ‘isolated individuals’, or those who are not chosen by peers and are the least visible;
- ‘pairs’, or individuals who provide mutual support to each other;
- ‘close-knit crews’, or children that form a closed circle.

This method of classification was used in the presented study.

Instruments and procedures

The aim of the presented study was to describe relationships among children and assess the popularity of students, including those from immigrant families, in fourth-grade classes at an urban public primary school located in Warsaw's Ochota district. This research site was intentionally selected due to the high cultural diversity among foreign students in this school, which has had ethnically diverse classes for over a decade. Before conducting the study, permissions were obtained from both the class teachers, the head teacher and parents. Three classes were examined: two general-education classes (4A and 4B) and one sports-focused class (4S).

The research sought to address the following questions:

What is the social structure of each class? Which students choose one another? What is the social situation of students from immigrant families?

The specific questions:

1. How can the informal structures within the studied classes be characterized?
2. What are the sociometric positions of students, including those of non-Polish nationalities?
 - Are foreign students among those who are isolated or rejected?
 - Are students of other nationalities among the most frequently selected peers?
3. Are the observed social phenomena consistent across all the studied classes?

The research hypotheses:

- Students form diverse informal structures within their classes. Both Polish and foreign children occupy various positions. Students who mutually select each other form groups and pairs. The latter most often consist of students of the same gender and ethnicity.
- Foreign students may occupy lower-status positions within their group or experience isolation, but they may also hold dominant positions.
- Mutual selections among students, network centrality, the absence of rejected or isolated students and low levels of conflict may indicate a high degree of group cohesion.

The study employed Moreno's sociometric technique in its classic form, with the use of a sociometric test comprising six questions: three focused on positive selections, two on negative selections, and there was one open-

ended question aimed at identifying and describing a particularly admired classmate. Participants were asked to make the following selections from among their classmates:

- Who is your best friend in the class?
- With whom do you most often communicate using social media?
- Who do you most enjoy spending breaks with?
- Who would you not invite to your birthday party?
- Who would you not lend a pen to?

The additional open-ended question:

- Who do you admire the most in your class? Why?

The adopted criteria were general, allowing the selections to be considered a relatively stable representation of the informal structure of the social relationship network.

Data analysis

Participants in the study were allowed to mention any number of students in response to each question, though the majority chose just one person.

The study was conducted in March 2024 during homeroom; one session lasted around 15 minutes in each class. A total of 68 students participated, including 29 immigrant students (49%). Each class had a slightly different ethnic composition (see Table 1).

Table 1. Characteristics of respondents by country of origin, gender and class

Class							4A	4B	4S
Gender	Girls		Boys		Total		N=22	N=24	N= 22
Country of origin	N	%	N	%	N	%	G + B	G + B	G + B
Afghanistan	1	3.7	0	0	1	1.7	-	1+0	-
Belarus	1	3.7	4	6.3	5	5.1	0 +2	1+1	0+1
Czech Republic	1	3.7	0	0	1	1.7	-	-	1+0
India	1	3.7	0	0	1	1.7	-	1+0	-
Poland	16	55.6	23	53.1	39	54.3	4 +7	3+7	9+9
Ukraine	3	11.1	7	21.9	10	16.9	1+3	0 + 4	2+0
Vietnam	5	18.5	6	18.7	11	18.6	1+4	4 + 2	-
Total	27	100	32	100	68	100	6+16	10+14	12+10
Total number of Polish and foreign students in classes									
Polish students + foreign students							11 + 11	10 + 14	18 + 4
Total number of the surveyed students							68 = 100%		

Source: own research

Table 2. Number of votes received by individual students in Class 4A

Country	U	P	V	P	Pn	P	U	V	V	V	V	V	V	V	V	Pn	U	U	P	P	P	Pn	Bn	Bn	P
Student's number	A1	A2	A4	A8	A9	A10	A11	A13	A15	A16	A17	A18	A19	A20	A21	A22	A23	A24	A25	A27	A28	A29			
Question 1	1	1	0	1	1	0	2	1	2	0	0	1	0	1	0	2	0	1	0	0	2	0			
Question 2	0	1	0	2	2	1	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	1	3	0	1	0	0			
Question 3	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	2	0	1	2	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	1			
Question 4	0	3	0	2	0	2	3	0	2	1	7	3	0	2	0	1	4	2	0	0	0	2			
Question 5	1	2	1	1	1	2	3	2	2	2	3	2	1	2	1	1	6	2	1	1	2	2			
Question 6	1	1	1	3	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0			

Source: own research. Country of origin is indicated by the first letters. Five students in class 4A were absent, as not all attended school regularly (n).

Table 3. Number of votes received by individual students in Class 4B

Country	A	B	P	P	P	P	I	U	U	U	V	V	V	V	V	V	V	U	P	P	Pn	P	P	W	P	B	P
Student's number	B1	B2	B3	B4	B5	B6	B7	B8	B9	B10	B12	B13	B14	B15	B16	B17	B18	B19	B20	B21	B22	B23	B24	B25			
Question 1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	2	1	0	2	0	2	0	1	0	1	2	1	0	3	2	1	2			
Question 2	0	1	1	3	0	2	0	1	2	0	1	0	1	1	4	1	0	2	0	1	1	0	0	0			
Question 3	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	2	0	1	0	1	1	3	0	1	1	0	0	3	5	1	0				
Question 4	0	1	2	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	6	1	1	3	1	0	4	0	0	0	0				
Question 5	0	2	2	2	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	2	0	1	1	3	0	4	0	0	1	0	0			
Question 6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	5	1	0	5	1	0	1	0	5	2	0			

Source: own research. One student was absent (n).

Table 4. Number of votes received by individual students in Class 4S

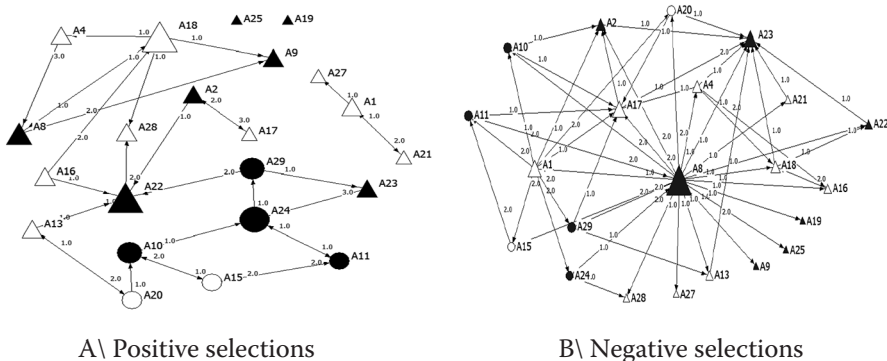
Country	P	U	Pn	P	B	Pn	Pn	Pn	Cz	P	S12	S13	S15	S16	S17	S19	S21	S22	S23	P	P	P	P	P	P	U
Student's number	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S9	S10	S12	S13	S15	S16	S17	S19	S21	S22	S23	S24	S27	S28	S29				
Question 1	1	0	1	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	3	0	2	2	1	0	1	0			
Question 2	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	2	0	2	1	0	0	2	0	2	1	0	1	2	1				
Question 3	2	0	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	0	1	2	1	1	0	2	1	2	2	2	1	0				
Question 4	2	6	2	5	2	0	2	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	0				
Question 5	2	5	2	6	2	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1				
Question 6	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	7	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	2	1	0				

Source: own research. Four students in class 4S were absent, as not all attended school regularly (n).

In the surveyed classes, apart from Polish students, the majority were of Vietnamese (11 students) and Ukrainian (10 students) origin. Other nationalities were represented by single persons. The highest proportion of foreign students was in Class 4B (58.3%), followed by Class 4A, where they constituted half of the class. Class 4S had significantly fewer foreign students (18.2%). The number of positive and negative selections made and received by students was similar across the surveyed classes (Tables 2, 3 and 4). However, the distribution of these selections varied slightly between the individual classes (Tables 5 and 6).

The class structures and network connections are illustrated using sociograms. The graphs and calculations were generated using the UCINET 6 for Windows software (Borgatti, Everett and Freeman, 2002, pp. 1–47).

Figure 1: Positive and negative selections in Class 4A



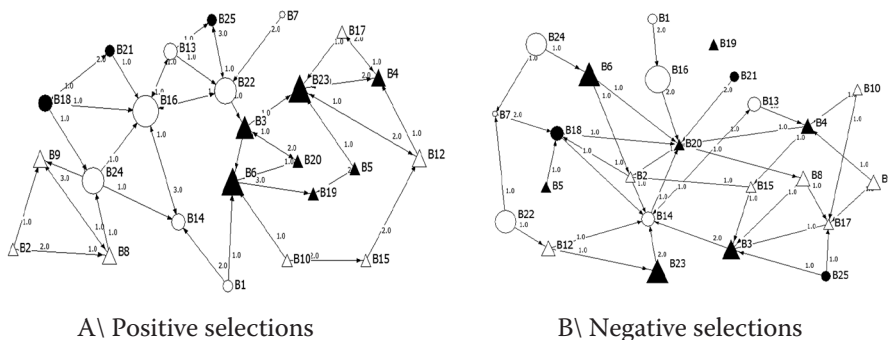
Girls are represented by circles, boys by triangles. Students of non-Polish nationalities are marked in white. The same designations were used consistently in all graphs. Source: own research.

- In Class 4A, positive selections are mostly made within gender-homogeneous groups: girls choose other girls while boys choose other boys. Negative selections are less consistent, with both girls and boys making varied choices. This class includes eight pairs (dyads) of students who mutually selected each other: A11-A15, A11-A24, A10-A15 (girls), A2-A17, A8-A18, A1-A21, A13-A22 (boys), A13-A20 (mixed, a Ukrainian girl and boy):
- The highest level of engagement in positive relationships was observed in two students: A22 (a Polish boy) and A24 (a Polish girl), each of whom received the most votes (5). The core/periphery fit (correlation) measure for the positive network is 0.3241, indicating a moderately defined core and

periphery structure. The average number of connections in the positive relationship network (1.531) exceeded that occurring in the negative network (1.345), suggesting that positive relationships are more intense than negative ones. The core/periphery fit (correlation) for the negative network is 0.5058, the highest among the three groups. Reciprocal negative choices point to some level of conflict among the boys. No close-knit crews were formed.

- A group of three boys stands out: two of Ukrainian nationality (A21 and A1) and one Belarusian (A27), all of whom selected friends only from within this group of three.
- Negative reciprocal choices include two cross-national dyads (a Polish and a Vietnamese boy: A17 with A23 and A18 with A22) and two homogenous dyads (A8 and A11, two Polish boys, and A8 and A24, a Polish boy and girl).
- Two boys, A17 (Vietnamese) and A23 (Polish), received the highest number of negative choices (10 each), yet they also received positive votes, making them controversial students.
- Two Polish boys (A19 and A25) did not receive any positive selections; therefore, they are considered either neglected or isolated (both were absent during the study).
- Vietnamese boys (A16 and A18) selected each other and were also chosen by Polish peers, though they received negative votes as well. One Vietnamese boy (A17) was mutually selected by a Polish boy (A2).
- This class has the highest number of selections across national groups.
- One boy (A8) selected everyone, likely due to a misunderstanding of question 5.

Figure 2: Positive and negative selections in Class 4B



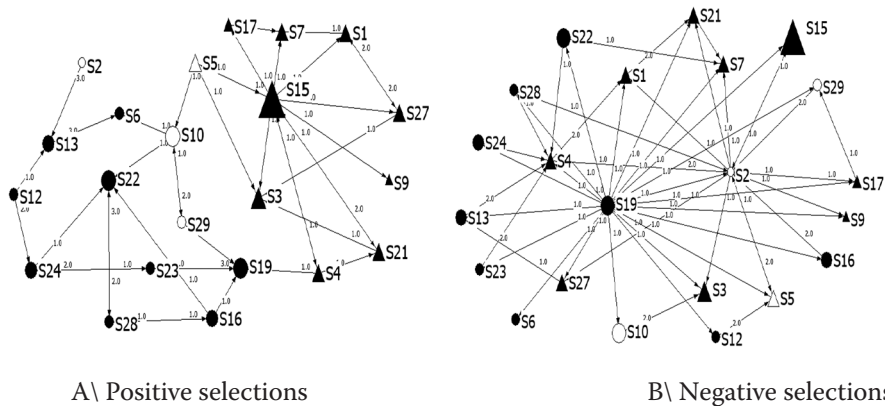
Source: own research.

In Class 4B, positive selections revealed a similar division into two groups: only two girls selected a boy and only one boy selected a girl. B16 and B22 (both Vietnamese girls) and B23 (a Polish boy) were the most engaged in positive relationships. The core/periphery fit (correlation) measure for negative selections is not high (0.3062), indicating a relatively low level of conflict. This measure is even lower for positive selections (0.2254), suggesting relatively balanced engagement in relationships.

- A Vietnamese girl (B16) received the highest number of positive selections with eight, followed by a Polish boy (B23) and a Vietnamese girl (B22), each earning 7 votes.
- Negative selections are usually dispersed. A Polish boy (B20) and a Vietnamese girl (B14) received the most negative votes (8 each). The girl also received positive votes, making her a controversial student. Mutual negative choices occurred between two Vietnamese girls (B13 and B14).
- One Polish boy (B5) did not receive any positive votes and may be considered either isolated or neglected.
- A group of three students — B2 (a Belarusian boy), B8 and B9 (two Ukrainian boys) — formed a distinct subgroup, which also interacted with a Belarusian girl (B24).
- Other boys formed four dyads that mutually selected each other: B23 and B4 (Polish), B20 and B3 (Polish), B23 and B12 (Polish and Vietnamese), and B4 and B17 (a Polish and Ukrainian boy), but they also selected other boys.
- Girls present a more complex pattern. Four Vietnamese girls (B13, B14, B22 and B16) selected each other but also chose Polish classmates and were selected by them. Two Polish girls (B21 and B18) formed a pair but also selected a Vietnamese girl (B16) and a Belarusian girl (B24).
- Two girls, one from India (B7) and one from Afghanistan (B1), did not receive any positive votes. Both of them selected Vietnamese girls (B22 and B14), while one of them (B7) also received two negative choices.

In Class 4S, there are only four foreign students — three girls and one boy. A clear division between girls and boys is also seen here, with only two boys giving positive choices to girls. The core/periphery fit (correlation) for positive selections is 0.2624, indicating minor differences in network centrality and similar levels of engagement in interactions. However, this indicator for negative selections is considerably higher at 0.4884, suggesting a more pronounced division in terms of negative relationships.

Figure 3: Positive and negative selections in Class 4S



Source: own research

- Reciprocal negative selections occurred among Polish boys (S2 and S15, S2 and S17) and between a Polish boy and a Belarusian boy (S2 and S5).
- Positive mutual selections involved four pairs of Polish girls (S28–S22, S23–S19, S28–S16 and S23–S24) who formed dyads rather than close-knit crews.
- Foreign girls formed one pair (a Czech girl, S10, and a Ukrainian girl, S29). The Czech girl was selected by a Belarusian boy (S5), reflecting cross-cultural bonding among immigrant children.
- Among boys, mutual selections included Polish boys (S15–S21, S4–S15 and S1–S27) and one mixed pair (a Polish boy, S15, and a Belarusian boy, S5). Boys also formed a group of mutual selections, with none of them entirely excluded.
- Three Polish girls (S19, S22 and S23) received five positive votes each, exceeding the class average. A Polish boy (S15) also achieved the same result.
- A Ukrainian girl (S2) received no positive choices and was rejected by the group, with 11 negative selections.
- A Polish boy (S4), who also received 11 negative selections, earned one positive vote; therefore, he could be considered a controversial student.

Results

The analysis of networks formed across all three classes indicates a relatively uniform level of engagement in interactions, with no clear division between core and periphery. This is particularly evident in the networks of positive selections, where the core/periphery correlation is low (the highest is in Class 4S at 0.2624). This suggests a balanced distribution of positive relationships, with no distinct close-knit crews. The average number of positive selections across the three questions for all respondents is 2.6 (0.86 per question, see Table 5).

Table 5. Positive selections received in the surveyed classes

Number of positive selections, questions 1–3	0	1–2	3–4	5–6	7–8	9 and more	Average
Class 4A	3	11	9	2	0	0	2.3
Class 4B	3	10	4	3	3	0	2.7
Class 4S	2	6	9	4	0	0	2.7
Total	8	27	22	6	3	0	2.6
Admired students (question 6)	14	3	3	3	1	0	0.4

Source: own research. High status = 9 and more

Three students received above-average numbers of selections (in Class 4B, two Vietnamese girls and one Polish boy), but no sociometric stars, defined as exceeding eight positive choices, emerged in the sample (see Bronfenbrenner’s table of “Critical Values of Sociometric Status”, cited in Pilkiewicz, 1973, p. 244). Only one student, a Czech girl (S10) from Class 4S, was admired by peers for her sporting achievements, receiving seven mentions in response to Question 6. Other admired students were mentioned by fewer peers (up to five), primarily for educational performance (“in mathematics”, “for good grades”, “good at history”) as well as other skills (“plays Fortnite well”). Eight students received no positive votes, including four of Polish origin and four of foreign origin.

Table 6. Negative selections received in the surveyed classes

Number of negative selections, questions 4–5	0	1–2	3–4	5–6	7–8	9 and more	Average
Class 4A	0	11	5	3	0	2	3.4
Class 4B	8	10	4	0	2	0	1.8
Class 4S	0	15	4	1	0	2	2.8

Number of negative selections, questions 4–5	0	1–2	3–4	5–6	7–8	9 and more	Average
Total	8	36	9	4	2	4	2.7

Source: own research. High status = 10 and more

The average number of negative selections across the two questions for all respondents is 2.7 (1.3 per question). Differences between classes are more pronounced in the negative networks. In Classes 4A and 4S, two students in each class received ten or more negative selections: two Polish boys, a Vietnamese boy and a Ukrainian girl (see details above). Class 4A has the highest number of negative connections, followed by Class 4S, while Class 4B has the fewest.

Discussion

- Positive selections reveal a clear division between girls and boys as well as a tendency for students to select peers of the same nationality. Informal groups characterized by ethnic homogeneity or similarity emerged in classes with a high number of students from various ethnic groups (4A and 4B). This pattern is evident among Polish, Ukrainian and Belarusian students, but less visible among Vietnamese students. Mutual selections in pairs rarely occurred between students of different nationalities. The tendency to form same-gender, same-nationality friendship pairs (dyads) during this developmental stage is described in sociometric studies as homophily (Gest, Graham-Bermann and Hartup, 2001, pp. 23–40).
- The number of unselected students is the same among Polish and immigrant children (4 and 4), as is the number of those considered as rejected students (3 and 3). This suggests that isolation or rejection is more closely associated with personality traits than nationality (Meijs et al., 2010, pp. 62–72).
- A separate issue involves unselected students from entirely different cultural backgrounds, such as the girls from India and Afghanistan, who lack peers of the same nationality in their classes. This likely hinders the formation of friendships.
- Efforts undertaken by the school to support foreign students include employing a cultural assistant for Ukrainian students, organizing multicultural days and providing individual learning support for some students. However, these measures are limited and the absence of

adequate regulations is evident. Countries where multiculturalism is common have developed and implemented significantly more relevant solutions. As noted by Canadian researchers, support in such classes is provided during lessons, in small groups, or individually (Koubeissy, Borges and Malo, 2016, pp. 100–101). Assistance during lessons and within the school environment facilitates integration, serving as a resilience factor, particularly with regard to mastering the language used in schools in the host country (Ialuna et al., 2024, p. 1288). Icelandic students from immigrant families reported that close contact with teachers and a personalized approach to students were more effective in overcoming school challenges and adapting to new conditions than a narrow focus on educational performance alone. They emphasized the importance of taking into account their cultural sensitivities (Benediktsson and Ragnarsdottir, 2019, pp. 463).

Conclusions

The surveyed classes vary in the proportion of Polish students to those from immigrant families. Social networks within the classes are not homogeneous; alongside the gender-based divisions typical for this age group, divisions along national lines also persist. The positions of immigrant children are comparable to those of Polish students; they are not rejected more frequently than their Polish peers. They tend to occupy above-average positions in the classes where peers of the same ethnicity are in the majority. They can earn admiration from their peers for special achievements (e.g., in sports), but this does not translate into being chosen as friends. Despite a significant language barrier, Vietnamese students tend to cope better than their Ukrainian counterparts as their families have been in Poland longer, giving them more time to adapt to the Polish school environment.

No significant conflicts between ethnic groups were observed, a factor that may facilitate the integration of foreign students. However, the dominant tendency to form pairs within the same nationality could hinder the development of intercultural relationships. These findings underscore the need for more targeted, intensive support systems and integration efforts, particularly for students from culturally distant backgrounds.

It should be noted that the findings of this study are not easily generalizable as they pertain to specific school environments and a relatively small sample of participants.

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Aspirations of Ukrainian women representing Generation Z in Poland. Educational choices and perspectives¹

Abstract: The article addresses the educational aspirations of young Ukrainian women from Generation Z who have emigrated and pursued their education in Poland. Using Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, it highlights the importance of education for social mobility and the future careers of these women. This theory posits that education serves as a tool for acquiring cultural capital, enabling individuals to improve their social position. The study includes women who emigrated both before and after Russia's invasion on Ukraine in February 2022. In-depth individual interviews conducted in 2024 provide insights into the participants' motivations for pursuing education and their aspirations related to its completion. The findings indicate that the decision to undertake education in Poland is primarily driven by the need for stability following the hardships of war, as well as a desire to develop professional skills. Despite challenges such as cultural and language barriers and differences in the educational system, the participants' perseverance and dedication have enabled them to adapt effectively to the new environment. Education in Poland has become a crucial factor in building a better future for them, both professionally and personally, as reflected in their aspirations and plans for the coming years.

Keywords: educational aspirations, Generation Z, cultural capital, migration, Ukraine, Pierre Bourdieu

Introduction

Generation Z, born between 1995 and 2012 (Twenge, 2017, p. 7), treats education with great importance. However, their approach to studying differs

¹ The text was translated using ChatGPT.

from traditional patterns (Manzoni et al., 2021, p. 55). Young people increasingly view education as a tool for acquiring practical skills that enable them to better navigate a changing labour market (Keown and Connolly, 2024). For this reason, they seek flexible educational pathways that allow them to gain knowledge and professional skills (HER Team, 2024). At the same time, they prefer shorter and more affordable programs that offer rapid development of competencies needed in the job market (ECMC Group, 2022).

Young Ukrainian women from Generation Z who have decided to migrate to Poland are seeking new educational and career opportunities here. This migration has intensified particularly since the outbreak of the armed conflict in Ukraine. Due to its geographical proximity and stable conditions, Poland has become a natural choice for them for continuing their education and developing future career prospects (Cedos, 2018).

In this context, Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital is particularly helpful, as it emphasizes the significance of education in the process of acquiring social and economic capital. Education is not only a tool for improving qualifications but also a means of enhancing one's position in the labour market and society (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 253).

This article contains an analysis of the statements of Generation Z Ukrainian women who live in Poland and pursue their education in regard to their motivations. The aim is to understand how they perceive education and the importance they assign to it in building their professional and personal futures.

Pierre Bourdieu's cultural capital

According to Pierre Bourdieu (1986, p. 243), cultural capital refers to the resources acquired by an individual through the processes of socialization and education, which influence their social position. Bourdieu distinguishes three forms of cultural capital: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized.

Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital includes skills, material goods, and formal qualifications, which contribute to social mobility (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 244). Cultural capital, in its embodied form, also includes certain patterns of thinking and behaviour that an individual acquires through the processes of upbringing and education. These largely determine the individual's ability to navigate various social situations.

Institutionalized capital refers to educational qualifications – certificates and diplomas that formally recognize acquired competencies. These creden-

tials open the door to better career opportunities and create a form of cultural capital with relative autonomy from the individual.

Objectified capital includes material goods such as books, dictionaries, and works of art. These resources not only signify the status but also provide access to culture, assuming the individual knows how to use them appropriately. Although it is the result of historical actions, objectified capital operates according to its own principles, independent of individual actions.

Educational aspirations of Generation Z

Generation Z values education, although their approach to formal education differs from traditional standards. Many young people believe that obtaining a higher degree is not always necessary for achieving career success, placing greater emphasis on developing practical skills (Pew Research Center, 2020). Research indicates (McKinsey and Company, 2018) that this generation often prefers online courses, self-directed learning, and gaining experience through practical projects. Additionally, the ECMC Foundation study (2025) shows that currently only 23% of young people view college as the only path to achieving professional success, while 70% point to the need to follow their own “road to success,” even if it does not include attending college.

Young people from Generation Z expect education to provide them with skills that are useful in the job market and prepare them to solve real-world problems. They pay a lot of attention to vocational training, internships, and other forms of education that have practical applications. Additionally, research by McKinsey and Company (2018) depicts Generation Z individuals as having a more pragmatic and analytical approach to their decisions compared to older generations.

The traditional educational system often frustrates them, as they believe that schools and universities cannot keep pace with the rapid technological changes and the demands of the modern job market. Despite the negative stereotypes of Generation Z (distracted attention syndrome, Internet addiction, health problems, social immaturity, low motivation, selfishness, narcissism, etc.), there are also positive ones – freedom, personalization, information control, honesty, cooperation, entertainment and pleasure, speed, and the desire for innovation (Shtepura, 2022, pp. 90–92). According to a report by Pearson Education (2020), Generation Z prefers flexibility in learning and seeks alternative opportunities to acquire knowledge outside traditional educational institutions.

Research methodology

Semi-structured online interviews were conducted with Generation Z Ukrainian women. The interviews took place from July to September 2024. The sampling was purposive, and participation was voluntary and unpaid. A total of 19 interviews were conducted, with an average duration of 1 hour and 11 minutes. The interviews were conducted by the authors of this study and were concluded upon reaching theoretical saturation. The study received approval from the Kozminski University Ethics Committee, No. 19/07/24.

The article is part of a series of analyses resulting from the conducted research. In this article, statements are cited from those interviews in which participants explicitly addressed the topic of education, which was not a primary focus of the original interview script. From the perspective of the data corpus analyzed in this article, it is important to note that 15 of the participants were studying at university, while 4 pursued more practical education in post-secondary schools. Some of them came to Poland specifically to study in secondary school and decided to stay and continue their education here at university. Therefore, all participants had experience in both the Ukrainian and Polish educational systems. It is worth noting that education was not one of the main topics in the interview script; however, the participants brought it up spontaneously, especially when explaining why they had chosen Poland as a place to live. This led the researchers to analyze this topic and to formulate the following research questions. Q1: What factors motivate Ukrainian women to pursue education in Poland? Q2: What challenges do the participants encounter while adapting to the Polish educational system? Q3: What significance do Ukrainian women studying in Poland assign to education?

All interviews were recorded in audio and video, and the participants could decide whether to turn on the camera. The interviews were automatically transcribed and then manually corrected. Statements in Polish that required correction were appropriately adjusted to maintain their meaning. The same procedure was applied to the translation into English.

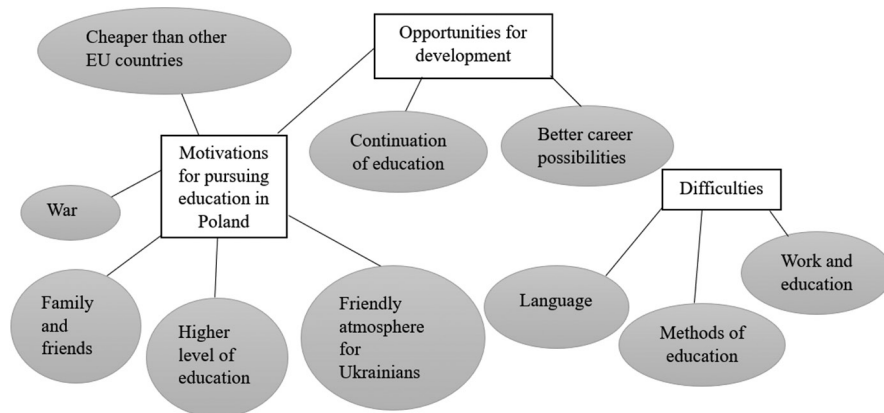
The data collection was conducted within the framework of feminism, particularly informed by Eagly's (2013) social role theory. The data were examined using thematic analysis, following the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic categories were generated inductively from participants' narratives. However, for the analysis presented in this article, Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) cultural capital theory was applied to interpret the findings.

This theory posits that access to education is one of the key tools for acquiring cultural capital, which influences individuals' social mobility. Consequently, the Ukrainian participants representing Generation Z and studying in Poland may view education as an important element in obtaining this capital. This, in turn, increases their chances in the job market, both in Poland and in other European countries. Migration and adaptation to the Polish educational system were not only challenges for the participants but also opportunities for personal and professional development, which is a key theme in analyzing the educational aspirations of this generation.

Results

As a result of the thematic analysis, the following themes emerged: 1) motivations for pursuing education in Poland (subthemes: war; family and friends; higher level of education); 2) difficulties (subthemes: language, work and education, methods of education); and 3) opportunities for development. The findings are schematically presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Highlighted themes and subthemes connected with education



Source: own elaboration

Motivations for pursuing education in Poland

The war in Ukraine motivated many to study in Poland due to its proximity and stability.

“I was studying in high school, but then the war started. I wanted to return to my parents in Kyiv, but I had to move to Warsaw” (I6).

Some of the participants made the decision to move to Poland because they already had family and friends here, or they saw others emigrating to Poland.

“My brother studied here, so... I knew that this is a good university” (I2).

“I came here to study because my friends were also going to Poland. I just decided to give it a try” (I7).

The participants also noted that the level of education in Poland is higher, and because of this, they decided to move to Poland. In some cases, this decision was made even before the war.

“(...) the level of education here is simply better, and now, looking at the situation in Ukraine, it seems a bit difficult, but back then, I didn’t know that it would actually turn out this way, and now I believe that it was the right decision” (I3).

“I have been living in Poland for a long time, almost 6 years. I made the decision to study in Poland while I was still at school; I knew that right after graduating, I would come here to study” (I16).

As one of the participants noted, the atmosphere at the university played a significant role in the decision, as it was easy to handle the formalities.

“I have been living in Poland for about five years now. I studied in secondary school, but then the war started... And I chose this university. Everyone says it has a beautiful campus, but I would say that it has a very friendly atmosphere [easy handling of formalities for Ukrainians – authors’ note]” (I6).

The reason for choosing Poland was also a financial one. As one of the interviewees states:

“I have a sister here (...) she wanted to go to the United Kingdom to study design, but when the war broke out in Donetsk, we didn’t really have the finances to afford her studies in the UK. So, Poland instead” (I9).

Opportunities for development

Motivations were also related to the fact that the participants saw education as an opportunity of development, although we decided to treat this as

a separate theme, as it has its own subthemes. Decisions about the choice of fields of study varied, but were most often driven by practical considerations. Studying in Poland represented a way for Ukrainians to improve their career prospects.

“Studying in Ukraine is not very good because it makes it hard to find a job later. She [my mother – authors’ note] talked to a friend who studies at universities in Ukraine, and he said it’s better to study abroad. Also, my dad was in Poland, and my aunt is in Poland too, so we decided it was better to choose Poland” (I18).

For many young Ukrainian women, studying in Poland is not only an opportunity to continue their education but also a way to expand their professional and personal horizons. They emphasized that in Ukraine, many women focus solely on their home and children, but women should have opportunities for self-development. Here is an example of such a statement:

“It is very important, for example, things like self-development, like for women – education. She can have an education, she can have a job that she loves. (...) I need to have a hobby, something I must focus on, not everything has to revolve around marriage, family, and so on” (I16).

A key factor in staying in Poland was the opportunity to obtain internationally recognized qualifications, which open doors to careers both in Poland and other countries. Some of the participants chose expensive private universities with well-recognized foreign brands for this reason. One of the participants emphasized that it gives her other opportunities that studying in Ukraine would not provide:

“I came to study because my parents wanted me to try something different... I became interested in business psychology because my parents work in business, so I decided that this would be the right direction” (I1).

Difficulties

Some of the respondents encountered difficulties in adapting to the Polish educational system, mainly due to the language barrier and differences in teaching approaches. However, this process also contributed to the development of their adaptive skills, which can be crucial in the global job market. Adaptation required from them not only mastering the language but also adjusting to new academic requirements. As one of the respondents recalls:

“When I realized that I had to go to university here in Poland, I started learning Polish... I began studying six months before my studies” (W8).

Other participant noticed more subtle differences between the Polish and Ukrainian educational systems:

“The Polish language was not a problem for me, as I had already been learning it in Ukraine. But the differences in teaching methods were a challenge. In Ukraine, everything was more theoretical, while here, there is more practical work” (W14).

Balancing work and education was challenging but provided valuable experience:

“I work in my free time. I started part-time at H&M, and now I have a full-time contract because I need to earn a living” (I10).

Discussion

The war prompted many Ukrainian women to choose Poland for education due to its proximity and stability (EWL Migration Platform, 2022). Choosing to study abroad can also be viewed in the context of acquiring cultural capital, which, according to Bourdieu’s theory (1986, pp. 247–248), enables individuals to enhance their chances for social and professional mobility.

The trends described in our findings meet the preferences of Generation Z, which, according to the research, seeks practical educational solutions and stability in times of uncertainty (American Student Assistance, 2022). Friends and family also played a significant role in the decision to study abroad, as they often had already settled in Poland or were choosing to emigrate. The war often accelerated the respondents’ earlier educational plans to study abroad and sometimes shifted them toward Poland, as, for example, the UK was more expensive and difficult to afford in hard times.

Adapting to a new environment was challenging but contributed to building cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986, pp. 243–248). The respondents identified the language barrier as a major challenge, requiring intensive preparation before studies (Koo, Baker and Yoon, 2021, p. 288). Poland’s education emphasizes practical skills, contrasting with Ukraine’s theoretical approach.

From the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu’s theory (1986, pp. 247–248), choosing education abroad helps accumulate cultural capital that enhances social mobility. The qualifications gained not only enhance social mobil-

ity but also enable better alignment with professional demands in different countries. Studying abroad, especially in the European Union, both provides access to qualifications recognized across Europe and allows Ukrainian women to develop key interpersonal skills that are important in today's work market. Cultural capital from education in Poland boosts professional prospects for Generation Z. As this generation is characterized by pragmatism in its approach to education, our research findings indicate that cultural capital gained through higher education in a foreign country is perceived by the interviewees as a means to greater professional opportunities.

In this aspect, it is also worth considering transnational migration theories, which emphasize that young female migrants, such as Ukrainians pursuing education in Poland, operate within the reality of two or more societies. Transnational migration links their aspirations in Poland with bonds in Ukraine (Näre and Akhtar, 2014, pp. 13–31).

Education in Poland provides opportunities for personal and professional growth (Gaweł et. al., 2025, pp. 1–15). Similarly to other representatives of Generation Z from different countries, Ukrainians prefer education focused on developing particular practical skills (Pew Research Center, 2020), which is supported not only by our research but also by studies on this generation indicating the preference for practical competencies over formal education (Nord Anglia Education, 2022). Interestingly, many of the interviewees have consciously chosen fields of study that promise better employment opportunities, indicating their pragmatic approach to education. This mindset, typical of Generation Z, reflects their emphasis on developing skills that are relevant in the work market, highlighting the differences in educational approaches compared to previous generations. Young people from Generation Z, including Ukrainians, often select educational paths that they believe will provide them with a professional advantage (Barhate and Dirani, 2022, pp. 146–147).

The limitations of our study arise from its focus on young Ukrainian women who volunteered for interviews, potentially introducing bias by excluding those with different views. It also targeted female students with educational and career aspirations, which may not represent the broader Ukrainian female population, including those not pursuing education. Furthermore, the interviewers did not explore education in depth, as it was a spontaneous topic. Future research, such as surveys of Ukrainian women studying in Poland, should address these gaps using the insights from this study.

Conclusions

The conducted interviews suggest that young Ukrainian women who have pursued education in Poland are strongly motivated by the need for stability after experiencing the hardships of war, as well as the desire for better professional development. Despite facing challenges such as language barriers and differences in the educational system, their determination and effort to adapt enable them to establish themselves in a new reality. Education in Poland is the key to improving career prospects.

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Intercultural relationships in Poland – the role of trust and support

Abstract: The statistics show an increase in binational marriages. Attention is drawn to their great potential, but also to a number of challenges. The problem of their durability is particularly discussed. The aim of the research was to assess trust and support received by people in intercultural and monocultural relationships, which seems significant for the integration of close relationships.

226 people of Polish nationality, aged 19 to 69, in intercultural (n=69) and monocultural (n=157) relationships were examined. The length of their relationship ranged from 6 to 360 months. The research was conducted with the use of a socio-demographic survey, the Diadic Trust Scale in the adaptation of Woźniak et al., (2023) and the Support in Marriage and Close Relationships Questionnaire (SIRRS) in the adaptation of Mandal and Moroń (2017).

The results of the study showed that trust and support are equally important for people in intercultural and monocultural relationships. No significant differences were found. Trust has proven to be essential for the received support. The study did not show the importance of relationship length for the development of trust and support in close relationships. Potential processes related to these findings were discussed.

Keywords: support, trust, intercultural relationships, integration conditions, relationship length

Introduction

The development of international scientific and professional cooperation, tourist mobility and migration promotes more informal and culturally diverse interpersonal bonds. An increase in binational marriages is observed.

In Poland 3,595 citizens decided to marry a foreigner in 2010, and in 2018 this number increased to 5,424. In turn 5,818 of such unions were registered in 2022 (*Rocznik Demograficzny/ Demographic Yearbook, GUS, 2023*).

The growing popularity of intercultural marriages sparks the interest of researchers. Attention is drawn to their great potential, but also to a number of challenges. The integration of mixed relationships is a complex and long-term process – it requires a synthesis of cultures (exchange of patterns, views, values) in relation to the complexity of multiculturalism (including racial and religious diversity, ethnicity) and transculturality (overcoming cultural barriers and creating new hybrid forms of culture) (Lendzion, 2017, pp. 137–150; Nikitorowicz and Guziuk-Tkacz, 2021, pp. 23–36). It depends on the place of residence of the partners (not necessarily the country of origin), the conditions of living together, and the desire to reach an agreement.

Sometimes, people quickly form close relationships without analyzing the potential difficulties, including cultural differences (Miluska, 2018, pp. 42–60). The cultural diversity of partners often leads to misunderstandings – caused by, e.g. difficulties in communication resulting from socio-cultural and religious differences, different perception of marital roles or misinterpretation of non-verbal signals (Janicka and Wnuk, 2021, pp. 142–172; Miluska, 2018, pp. 42–60; Okemini, 2016, pp. 65–88).

Due to these problems, research on the integration factors of such relationships is becoming important. However, their assessment is hindered by the wide range of analyzed variables and culture-different criteria for the success of marriage (Miluska, 2018, pp. 42–60). Referring to the achievements of family scientists (Campos et al., 2019, pp. 257–272; Walęcka-Matyja, 2020, pp. 791–806), for the purpose of our study, a decision was made that trust and support will be particularly important for the stability of close relationships and the sense of security of partners. They are located in the area of the central cultural value of familism. They have a universal character, they are desirable and expected in all relationships. They generate a communal attitude necessary for mutual acceptance of partners and deepening of relationships.

Trust is essential for building and sustaining social relationships. It includes kindness, availability, and honesty in the relationship and a belief in the honesty of the partner. Usually, it comes down to generalized positive expectations and even the certainty that on the part of another person one will attain the desired outcomes rather than what one fears (Wojciszke, 2006). The tendency to trust is a permanent feature, formed by life experience

(Wade and Robinson, 2012, pp. 1–4) and it does not depend on the gender of the partners (Woźniak et al., 2023, pp. 1–5; Yilmaz et al., 2023, pp. 1–9).

Trust is the most important psychological resource. It stimulates activation of the right ventromedial prefrontal cortex, responsible for reducing the level of perceived social pain in situations of exclusion (Yanagisawa et al., 2011, pp. 190–197). It is responsible for the development and stability of a well-functioning, happy relationship (Simpson, 2007, pp. 264–268). It correlates positively with the sense of closeness, relationship satisfaction and the support received from the partner (Juarez and Pritchard, 2012, pp. 188–200). It is an essential component of the process of providing support, care and satisfaction of needs (Murray et al., 2009, pp. 324–348; Wojciszke, 2006) and is also associated with the tendency to forgive (Kim et al., 2015, pp. 520–542). It can be seen as the foundation of commitment, satisfaction, cooperation and the pace of initiating future relationships, and its loss may result in the termination of existing ones (after: Balliet and Van Lange, 2013, pp. 1090–1112). People who reveal mutual trust are more likely to act for the other person and to seek compromise and constructive conflict solutions than those with low trust (Shallcross and Simpson, 2012, pp. 1031–1044; Balliet and Van Lange, 2013, pp. 1090–1112). In contrast, asymmetric trust has negative consequences for relationships (Korsgaard et al., 2014, pp. 47–70).

Trust is significantly higher in stable relationships than in casual ones. Stable relationships are characterized by greater disclosure of concerns, feelings and experiences, closeness, spontaneity and directness, and information about oneself than in other relationships (Buysse, 1998, pp. 55–66). Such open self-disclosure is associated with an increase in mutual trust in romantic relationships while concealment leads to its loss (Uysal et al., 2012, pp. 844–851). The level of trust results from both the experience of support and expectations of trust.

Support is a key element of social life and one of the main functions of a close relationship. It is most often understood as a source of various help forms available to the individual. Support involves the transmission of positive emotions that express care, love, understanding and trust. The lack of support in marriage is not compensated by the support provided by another, even a close family member (Dehle et al., 2001, pp. 307–324). Studies report that individuals who experience higher levels of support from a spouse will report greater marital satisfaction (Argyle, 2004). Support affects marital adjustment, is independent of possible negative behavior and discussions when solving marital problems. It is essential not only for quality but it also con-

tributes to the stability of a relationship (Kiecolt-Glaser and Newton, 2001, pp. 472–503).

The availability of support, especially from a loved one, is significant for dealing with difficult situations and adapting to stressful life events. It protects from stressors (Dehle and Landers, 2005, pp. 1051–1076; Mandal and Moroń, 2017, pp. 399–417; Pietnoczko and Steuden, 2020, pp. 157–165; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2016) recognize social support as an important factor in sustaining intercultural marriages.

The cultural background, values and beliefs of partners can be important for trust and expected support. The aim of the study was to compare the perceived trust and support in Poles in intercultural and monocultural relationships.

Referring to the research results presented above, the following hypotheses were formulated:

1. People in intercultural relationships will rate trust and support lower than those in monocultural relationships.
2. There is a relationship between trust and support in close relationships.
3. Length of the relationship will be a moderator of the relationship between trust and received support.

Methodology

Participants and procedure

A total of 226 people of Polish nationality were examined, including 180 women aged 19 to 57 years ($M=27.19$; $SD=7.22$) and 46 men aged 22 to 69 years ($M=29.57$; $SD=9.55$), who were in intercultural and monocultural relationships. The relationship length of the surveyed couples varied from 6 to 360 months ($M=55.54$; $SD=60.26$).

69 participants (57 females and 12 males) were in romantic relationships with people of different nationality. 39 respondents (56.52%) were in relationships with citizens of countries located in Europe, and 30 (43.48%) – with citizens of non-European countries. Partnership ($n=45$) prevailed over marriages ($n=23$). Most declared higher education ($n=48$), the rest ($n=21$) – p secondary education.

157 respondents were in monocultural relationships (123 females and 34 males). Partnerships ($n=131$) again prevailed over marriages ($n=26$). The respondents declared higher education ($n=108$) and secondary education ($n=49$).

The study was conducted using the CAWI (Computer-Assisted Web Interview) method. A set of online questionnaires was shared along with an invitation to participate in the study and information of its anonymity. The criterion for inclusion was heterosexual orientation, minimum six-month length of the relationship and residence in Poland.

Measures

Appropriate research tools were used for the research:

The Diadic Trust Scale by Larzelere and Huston (1980) in Polish adaptation by Woźniak et al. (2023, pp. 1–5). It was used to measure the level of trust in the partner. It consists of 5 statements, to which the respondents referred to on the 7-point Likert scale, where 1 meant *definitely no*, and 7 – *definitely yes*. The scale is accurate and reliable. Cronbach's α coefficient for tool adaptation is 0.89.

The Support in Marriage and Close Relationships Questionnaire (SIRRS) created by Dehle et al. (2001, pp. 307–324) and adapted by Madal and Moróń (2017, pp. 399–417). It was used to examine the level of support in a relationship. It consists of 22 statements. The respondents marked the answers on the 7-point Likert scale, where 1 meant that *he/she did not behave like this at all*, and 7 – *he/she always behaved like this*. The obtained results allow to evaluate the support in its 5 dimensions: taking care of physical comfort, help in searching for a solution, material help, consolation, prayer. SIRRS is an accurate and reliable tool (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.91$).

Socio-demographic survey included questions about gender, age, education, length and type of relationship (marriage/partnership) and the nationality of the partner.

Results

Normality of the distributions of the analyzed variables was assessed. Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests were used, which revealed that the distribution of none of the analyzed variables is close to the normal distribution ($p < 0.001$). Therefore, further statistical analyses were conducted with the use of methods appropriate for data that do not meet the assumptions of distribution normality.

In order to assess the significance of differences in length of mono – and intercultural relationships, an analysis was conducted using the Mann-Whitney U test. The detailed results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and Mann Whitney U test results for the relationship length variable

	Intercultural relationship (n=69)			Monocultural relationship (n=157)			Mann-Whitney U test	
	M	Me	SD	M	Me	SD	Z	p
Relationship length	47.62	69	64.03	59.01	40	62.66	-1.847	0.065

Source: own research

The analysis of the obtained average results indicates that people in intercultural relationships are characterized by shorter relationship length than people from monocultural relationships. However, it should be noted that these differences were not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$).

Then, a descriptive analysis of the examined dimensions of support and the trust variable was made, while checking whether monocultural relationships differ significantly from intercultural relationships in the level of trust and support. The nonparametric Mann-Whitney U test was used to assess the significance of these differences. The detailed results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Levels of support and trust in people in monocultural and intercultural relationships

	Intercultural relationship (n=69)			Monocultural relationship (n=157)			Mann-Whitney U test	
	M	Me	SD	M	Me	SD	Z	p
Physical comfort	5.64	5.88	1.35	5.62	6.25	1.49	-0.201	0.841
Help in finding a solution	5.43	5.67	1.35	5.32	5.67	1.51	-0.158	0.874
Material help	4.68	5	1.54	4.52	4.67	1.68	-0.593	0.553
Comforting	4.85	5	1.39	4.74	5	1.53	-0.454	0.650
Prayer	2.50	1	1.89	2.55	1.5	1.95	-0.321	0.748
General support	5.06	5.09	1.13	4.99	5.36	1.32	-0.066	0.947
Trust	29.57	32	5.50	28.21	29	5.91	1.592	0.111

Source: own research

None of the analyzed variables show significant differences between monocultural and intercultural relationships. People in intercultural relationships have achieved results comparable to those in monocultural relationships both in the context of support – the general result and on individual dimensions – and trust.

In the final part of the statistical analysis, it was verified whether the relationship length can act as a moderator for the relationship between trust and support (Table 3). The macro-PROCESS method by Andrew F. Hayes (v. 4.2) was used (Hayes, 2017).

Table 3. Relationships of trust and support, including the moderating role of the relationship length

Variables	B	SE	t	p	LL	UL
Constants	1.53	0.42	3.57	0.004	0.690	2.383
Trust	0.12	0.01	8.21	0.000	0.092	0.151
Relationships length	-0.005	0.004	-1.17	0.2402	-0.014	0.003
Trust x relationships length	0.004	0.004	1.09	0.27	-0.003	0.000

Source: own research

An analysis was carried out, where the relationship length was placed as a moderator for the relationship between trust and support. It was decided to draw 20,000 bootstrap samples to increase the accuracy and reliability of the results for the studied moderation. The obtained results showed that trust has a positive effect on support ($\beta = 0.1221$; $p < 0.001$), while the relationship length does not have a significant relationship with support ($\beta = -0.005$; $p = 0.24$).

The analysis of interaction indicated that the relationship length does not act as a moderator for the relationship between trust and support ($\beta = 0.001$; $p = 0.27$).

In conclusion, the variable trust shows a relationship with support, but this effect does not change depending on the level of the relationship length.

Discussion

The aim of the study was to compare the trust and support received by people of Polish nationality in inter – and monocultural relationships. The selected variables are universal and desirable for the integration of all committed relationships. It was recognized (after: Yilmaz et al., 2023, pp. 1–9) that close relationships reflect cultural values. It was expected that cultural differences between partners may undermine trust and support. This was not confirmed in the presented results of our own research. Small differences in trust and received support, in the assessment of people in inter – and monocultural relationships did not turn out to be statistically significant.

The explanation of this result requires reference to the psychological and social contexts of partner relationships. According to the psychological approach, trust and support are equally important for people in inter- and monocultural relationships. It has been confirmed that the creation and maintenance, especially of stable and dependent relationships, requires trust (Simpson, 2007, pp. 264–268; Wade and Robinson, 2012, pp.1–4) and support (Walęcka-Matyja and Janicka, 2021). The role of positive emotions is indicated in both of these dimensions, manifested in the form of care. The research justifies that the level of trust is a permanent feature, formed by life experience, attachment style, beliefs about the durability of close relationships (Yilmaz et al., 2023, pp. 1–9; Wade and Robinson, 2012, pp. 1–4) – the partners thus bring to the relationship a dispositional tendency to trust. However, it cannot be ruled out that it is their mutual actions (also support, assistance) that regulate partners' level of trust (after: Campbell and Stanton, 2019, pp. 148–151).

The social context refers to the process of assimilation – the tendency to completely adopt a new culture at the expense of rejection of the own. The decision to assimilate may result from the perception of one's own cultural group through the lens of the partner's culture, which due to the place of common residence can be considered dominant – being a part of it can be perceived as desirable and even as a kind of social promotion. Therefore, the assimilation process involves the adaptation of people of other nationalities to the rules in the country of residence and the related expectations of Polish partners.

The results of our own research confirmed earlier findings that the received support depends on trust, which is associated with care about the partner (Juarez and Pritchard, 2012, pp. 188–200; Larzelere and Huston, 1980, pp. 595–604; Murray et al., 2009, pp. 324–348; Rempel et al., 1985, pp. 95–112; Simpson, 2007, pp. 264–268; Wade and Robinson, 2012, pp. 1–4).

The own research did not confirm the importance of relationship length for the development of trust and support in close relationships. The relationship length also did not prove to be a moderator for the relationship between trust and support. However, two-year longitudinal pair studies (Miller and Rempel, 2004, pp. 695–705) showed that the relationship length strengthens dyadic trust. Our analyses took into account the large span of the relationship length of the surveyed couples with limited access to people in intercultural relationships. Assessing the role of relationship length for trust and support requires further research.

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Intercultural education as mediation between “domestic” and “foreign” Poles. Shaping the discursive image of Poles from the Czech Part of Cieszyn Silesia

Abstract: This article addresses the discursive construction of the Polish minority in the Czech part of Cieszyn Silesia within contemporary Polish media texts. Adopting a perspective of intercultural education, it is an attempt to answer the question how language and media shape the cognitive and emotional frameworks through which the Polish public perceives their “foreign” compatriots in the Czech borderland. Drawing on concepts such as connotation and habitus, the article demonstrates that seemingly neutral designations – such as “Zaolzie” or “Cieszyn Silesia” – carry associative images that influence how the Polish minority in the Czech Republic is perceived in contemporary Poland.

Through an analysis of corpus data, the article shows that the term “Zaolzie” is either unfamiliar to the average Polish reader or associated with the fraught legacy of past border conflicts between Poland and Czechoslovakia. These historical connotations tend to obscure the reality of today’s Polish minority in the Czech Republic, rendering it either invisible or ideologically burdened. In contrast, the term “the Czech part of Cieszyn Silesia” – though less widely used – avoids these associations and opens up interpretive space for more accurate and future-oriented representations. The article argues that replacing “Zaolzie” with “the Czech part of Cieszyn Silesia” in Polish public discourse offers several advantages. It restores the awareness that the region extends beyond Poland’s borders, reinforces a shared historical and cultural identity among Poles on both sides of the border, and dissociates the minority’s image from associations of loss or shame. This linguistic shift can support intercultural narratives that emphasize common cultural heritage.

Finally, the article presents intercultural education as a pedagogical tool that ultimately serves to shape public discourse. It can function as a form of mediation between “domestic” and “foreign” Poles, fostering greater inclusivity and the symbolic visibility of Poles living on the Czech side of the border.

Keywords: discourse, connotation, Teschen Silesia, Cieszyn Silesia, Polish minority, media image

In 2020, the region of Cieszyn Silesia [also known as Teschen Silesia or Těšín Silesia] marked the centenary of its partition between Poland and Czechoslovakia. Until the end of World War I, this territory had formed an integral part of the Habsburg Monarchy. The area that in 1918 declared its allegiance to Poland and fell under the jurisdiction of the National Council of the Duchy of Cieszyn [Rada Narodowa dla Księstwa Cieszyńskiego] was subjected to international division in 1920. The section incorporated into Czechoslovakia has since been known as Zaolzie [Trans-Olza]. At the time of the border's establishment, the speakers of the local Cieszyn Silesian dialect found on the Polish side differed in no significant way from those on the Czech side. Even though today the population on the Polish side primarily identifies as Polish-speaking and of Polish origin, while on the Czech side the majority speaks Czech and identifies as ethnically Czech, a smaller Polish minority still exists in the Czech part of Cieszyn Silesia (cf. Kajfosz 2022, pp. 101–115).

Most studies concerning the condition of the Polish minority in today's Czech Republic focus on the state-level conditions afforded to this minority. These are undoubtedly critical factors. From the perspective of intercultural education (Nikitorowicz, 2006, pp. 91–114; Wróblewska, 2006, pp. 237–260; Grzybowski, 2008, pp. 51–64; Bleszyńska, 2011, pp. 39–53), however, another question arises – how are members of the Polish minority in the Czech part of Cieszyn Silesia perceived in Poland? This question is not aimed at professional institutions, but at the broader public sphere, in which the audience size for any given message depends upon its comprehensibility to various social groups.

This article aims to address that gap by exploring the image of the Polish minority on the Czech side of Cieszyn Silesia as it is constructed within Polish media discourse for the “average” participant in Poland's contemporary public sphere. To this end, tools from corpus linguistics are used to examine whether and in what contexts mentions of Poles in the Czech part of Cieszyn Silesia appear within Polish media discourse.

“Discourse” is understood here in the sense of habitual and conventional modes of speaking that shape ways of thinking and perceiving the world. Dis-

course, in this sense, is composed of semantic associations which, through repetition in everyday language, become embedded in consciousness. These associations thereby create structures of perception and habitual interpretative frameworks. Discourse is thus synonymous with a system of communicative habits or linguistic routines that influence a speaker's common-sense knowledge. These habits translate into specific ways of perceiving, understanding, and instinctively or automatically evaluating the world. Discourse provides people with what are called reference frames – structures for interpreting all communicative content. In this way, linguistic habits serve as tools for socially constructing the reality (cf. Czachur, 2020, pp. 160–161).

At first glance, the concept of discourse may appear to be an abstract theoretical notion devoid of practical consequence. Yet nothing could be further from the truth, once one acknowledges that people in everyday life do not think in definitions, but in images. In colloquial communication and perception, the meaning of a word is not given by its dictionary definition but by a simplified image composed of the most salient traits deemed typical for the phenomenon evoked by that word. Such an image – if recalled frequently enough in similar contexts – functions as a shorthand for a circulating narrative (Barthes, 1972, pp. 110–113).

Each word evokes a chain of associations in the form of mental imagery. One image brings to mind another, and that another still another one. Together, these images form an unspoken narrative. Umberto Eco illustrated this with the word fish, whose “associative halo” compresses the story of a fish caught in a net by a fisherman. A variant of this narrative might be the tale of the golden fish – if such a story is well known among participants in the discourse (Eco, 1979, p. 70). Sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann describe this semantic layer through the example of a culturally coded scenario triggered by the phrase “conflict with one's mother-in-law” (Berger and Luckmann, 1966, p. 89). As soon as those words are uttered, the listener instinctively knows who is at fault and why. This is the power of language over the mind: words do not activate definitions, but rather culturally shared scripts drawn from gossip, anecdotes, jokes, and the most common genres of media communication. Words act as labels that both reflect the lived experience and simultaneously construct and shape it.

What follows from this is that the very selection of words can shape the experiences of message recipients – readers, listeners, viewers – even

before any argument or narrative begins. This is because each understood word activates not a definition, but a mental image, complete with an implicit, unconscious script that is never ideologically innocent – it always implies something. The same reality can be represented quite differently depending on the used words. It can be interpreted and evaluated in varying ways – mostly preemptively, before any reasoning is offered. If this were not the case, then commercial and political campaigns would focus more on logic and reasoning than on catchy, ambiguous slogans. Even before one e.g. reads the ingredients on a package of Activia yogurt, one already “knows” that consuming it will fill us with energy and vitality. This is the magic of language. If a cottage cheese container is labelled with the word protein, it immediately suggests an ideal product for athletes, regardless of the fact that all cottage cheese contains protein. Another example: there is a world of difference between calling a substance lemon extract and calling it citric acid solution. The former evokes freshness and nature, the latter chemistry and potential toxicity. These different labels cue different imaginative scripts and value judgments.

Discourse-driven world-modelling is not limited to marketing; it permeates all aspects of daily life. The same person may be labelled an immigrant or an expat. While these are partial synonyms, each triggers a completely different interpretive script. An expat is a welcome contributor to globalization and cosmopolitanism, whereas an immigrant is potentially a social burden. This is the power of what is called the “connotative halo” of words.

“Connotative halo” can be more precisely understood as a condensation of connotations, or a dense cloud of associations that shape how a given word is intuitively perceived, interpreted, and evaluated – even before any conscious reflection or explicit definition is applied, triggered by a word or other sign on the level of spontaneous, pre-reflective experience (Barthes, 1972, pp. 110–113). When two meanings are repeatedly paired in consciousness, one begins to evoke the other through a process similar to indexical reference. This process gives rise to dispositions that shape habitual ways of perceiving and understanding the world (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 81). Thanks to connotations, fragments of reality – as well as words themselves – cohere into meaningful wholes without requiring explicit explanation or logically deduced relationships. Connotative meanings, even if invisible or omitted from formal definitions, underlie the spontaneously experienced sense of meaning.

As Roland Barthes observed, connotation organizes the world without contradiction (Barthes, 1972, p. 143). It functions as a condensation of unarticulated and non-objectified knowledge (p. 118). Connotation acts as a kind of suggestion or cue – often unavoidable – for the recipient of a message. It relieves them of the need to analyze every event in detail. This capacity allows people to integrate fragmented perceptions into a coherent symbolic universe. Connotation thus becomes a tool for linguistic simplification of the world at the level of spontaneous perception – what presents itself “at first glance” before any critical reflection occurs.

In a world characterized by message overload, the “first glance” becomes decisive. Increasingly, reality is reduced to what is visible at first sight. Hannah Arendt notes that if individuals were perpetually compelled to analyze every event and fact they encounter, they would become quickly exhausted (Arendt, 1978, pp. 52–53). The technologically driven acceleration of information transmission and the oversupply of competing messages are hardly conducive to reflection. The tendency toward brevity is manifested not only in replacing stories with images – because showing is faster and more efficient than telling – but also in the increasing reliance of even verbal communication on short, striking, and fragmentary messages: single-sentence tweets, posts, memes, and their dissemination on social media. Another sign of this shift is the emergence of reels – short video clips designed for quick scrolling on smartphone screens.

The intelligibility of these flash-style communications depends on widely shared mythologies (cf. Barthes, 1972) that might be called “grammars of association”. These make it possible for short slogans, images, or soundbites to be meaningful, because the public can infer what is left unsaid. Through these associative grammars, in which each word implies a specific “silent” script, the world becomes interpreted, structured, and evaluated even at the level of form – that is, the choice of linguistic tools – before any substantive content is communicated. Senders of messages must closely align with the background knowledge of their potential recipients if they wish to be understood. Their arguments must not be overly complex or demanding – especially considering that reading comprehension is not the strongest asset of the modern user of interactive media. In the deluge of information, there is little time for reflection. Spontaneous reactions prevail over critical assessment, and the pressure for sensation and rapid associations eclipses logical reasoning (Kajfosz, 2018, pp. 127–135; 2019, pp. 27–47).

In the battle for public attention, the poetic function of communication becomes paramount. Information must entertain, surprise, and deliver a strong emotional impact. Added to this, there is the pervasive influence of rhetoric: rhetorically constructed representations of reality often become more significant than reality itself. The contemporary dominance of emotion over reason may be seen as a kind of *déjà vu* – a return of Romanticism in a new guise. Romanticism, too, was not only an era of idealization but also of purposeful mystification, exemplified by the “medieval” *Songs of Ossian*, supposedly discovered by James Macpherson (Cocchiara, 1981, pp. 332–333).

In this context, the famous words of Adam Mickiewicz from his ballad *Romantyczność [Romanticism]* seem strikingly appropriate: “*Czucie i wiara silniej mówi do mnie niż mędrca szkiełko i oko [feeling and faith speak more profoundly to me than wise-man’s glass and eye]*” (Mickiewicz, 2022, p. 14). This is almost a definition of post-truth or the post-factual era, as described by Ralph Keyes (Keyes, 2004, pp. 14–16). In contemporary public communication, it has almost become the norm to reverse facts or to engage in various manipulations. Emotional intensity and ephemeral sensations increasingly outweigh factual accuracy in shaping public opinion. Minorities with limited influence over the shape of public discourse are particularly vulnerable to being misrepresented, stereotyped, or rendered invisible within dominant narratives.

Intercultural education – when applied as a tool to mediate between the life worlds of “Czech” Poles and “Polish” Poles, defined by national affiliation and place of residence – should respond to two core challenges. Firstly, it must engage with the communicative conditions that shape contemporary media strategies. Secondly, it must recognize that integrity and honesty in communication are not incompatible with mastery and application of discursive strategies, which are simultaneously rhetorical strategies. The skillful use of linguistic tools to shape recipients’ images of the world does not automatically entail dishonesty or manipulation. On the contrary, it can be mobilized to foster intercultural understanding, amplify marginal voices, and support ethical communication – provided that it is used with responsibility and awareness of its implications.

“The Duchy of Cieszyn” versus “Cieszyn Silesia”

The first issue to be considered here concerns the images and cognitive scripts activated by the terms Cieszyn Silesia and Duchy of Cieszyn. These are not interchangeable – neither within historiography nor in memory discourses – although for different reasons in each case.

Our premise is that public discourses do not operate according to Aristotelian categories, where the identity of a phenomenon would be determined by a precise definition of its boundaries. The borders of the former Duchy of Cieszyn – the territory now referred to as Cieszyn Silesia – have been historically fluid, particularly due to the emergence and disappearance of small feudal domains on its periphery, which reshaped its outer boundaries. For this reason, it is necessary to consider another model of categorization alongside the definitional one: the so-called natural category. In this model, what matters is not a set of fixed features, but a prototypical image – an entity possessing the highest concentration of traits considered typical for the category (Rosch, 1973, pp. 328–350). Both the Duchy of Cieszyn and Cieszyn Silesia evoke the image of a cultural and political centre, which is the town of Cieszyn. A natural category has what cognitive scientists call a radial structure, in which the central element embodies all the core features, and peripheral elements are more or less similar to it. In this respect, it is of little consequence whether a particular municipality lies within or outside the region, as long as it bears resemblance to the centre.

If the advantages and disadvantages are to be considered of using one term over the other in local memory discourses, it would have to be acknowledged that the term Duchy of Cieszyn is notably resistant to what Walter Ong (Ong, 1982, p. 41) called structural amnesia – that is, the collective forgetting required for social memory to adapt to new realities. Due to the gradual “colonization” of the past of Cieszyn Silesia by the national states that now exist in the region, the history of the Polish part is typically viewed as a chapter of Polish national history, while the history of the Czech part is interpreted as part of the Czech national narrative. This division is reflected in the linguistic usage: on the Polish side, the term Cieszyn Silesia in Polish typically refers only to the portion of the region that remained in Poland after the 1920 division; on the Czech side, the Czech-language term Těšínsko is generally used to denote the area incorporated into Czechoslovakia. Historiographical literature has had limited success in challenging this tendency,

as linguistic conventions tend to carry more weight than scholarly clarification.

According to everyday experience, the term Cieszyn Silesia – in its respective national-language form – refers to municipalities located within one’s own state, not in another. In this way, Cieszyn Silesia is always perceived as “here” and never “abroad.” This unconscious conceptual structure – namely, a cognitive habitus shaped by historical processes – that governs spontaneous ways of experiencing and interpreting the world is a product of what Michael Billig terms banal nationalism (Billig, 2010, pp. 174–177). What is dealt with here is a form of national-territorial labelling that gives the impression of a timeless and natural order of the world. Within this framework, all spatial reality is “pre-flagged” from the outset by the state to which it currently belongs. Only the concept of the Duchy of Cieszyn, which connotes an alternative form of historical statehood, possesses the capacity to resist such a logic of demarcation.

The term Duchy of Cieszyn does not fall within the borders of either of the two neighbouring states. It is a powerful antidote to nationalized images of the past that interpret history through ethnic distinctions. It is not widely understood among the inhabitants of the territory in question that in the premodern era – before the advent of industrialization – there were no ethnically defined nations in the modern sense, and the written languages used by the ruling elites in the Duchy of Cieszyn bore little resemblance to the everyday speech of the local population (Morys-Twarowski, 2023, pp. 237–251).

“Zaolzie” versus “the Czech Part of Cieszyn Silesia”

Let us recall that in consciousness, every prototypical image associated with a word evokes collectively shared connotations. Even if two different words, in terms of denotation, represent nearly the same phenomenon, their networks of connotations may differ fundamentally. The same applies to a formally identical word used in two different discourses understood as subsystems of the same language.

In the corpus of regionally focused journalistic texts from Cieszyn Silesia, the term *Zaolzie* (that is Trans-Olza) – regardless of whether it refers to the past or the present – typically denotes both a geographic area and its inhabitants. Most often, the term evokes an imprecisely defined territory on the Czech side of the border, once inhabited predominantly by Poles and by Polish-speaking supporters of the Silesian People’s Party, which promoted

a territorial rather than a national identity. In contemporary discourse on the Polish side of Cieszyn Silesia, the term refers to the Czech-speaking area still partly inhabited by people, some of whom continue to identify as Poles and can be understood when speaking the local Cieszyn dialect, or even standard Polish.

In local media texts, the term Zaolzie frequently appears in the context of reports on folklore events across the border – such as the “*Gorolski Święto*” festival, dialect competitions, regional ensembles, and other similar ones. It is understandable that local institutions – including those in the Polish part of Cieszyn Silesia – seek to promote this area by emphasizing its cultural uniqueness and heritage rather than its fraught historical conflicts or political entanglements. In this context, the designation Czech part of Cieszyn Silesia is considerably more appropriate than Zaolzie, especially in public discourse outside the region.

In broader Polish public discourse, the word Zaolzie carries negative connotations – if it is even understood at all. Outside of Cieszyn Silesia, the term is either unfamiliar or associated with historical territorial disputes between Poland and Czechoslovakia. In other words, for the average Pole, Zaolzie either means nothing or evokes memories of border conflicts – eliciting feelings of discomfort, unease, and sometimes even an instinctive desire to avoid the topic altogether. Even when the term is understood in its denotative sense, it connotes a former disputed territory rather than a living community where two national cultures intersect. In this context, Zaolzie does not refer to contemporary people but to lost land. In Polish public discourse, distinctions between Poles from Zaolzie and Czechs are often blurred; both groups may simply be perceived as “Czechs,” especially considering that all are citizens of the neighbouring state.

The PWN Polish Language Corpus, which includes texts produced between 1920 and 2005, provides 11 results for the query Zaolzie. As many as seven of these instances relate to the historical context of the Polish annexation of Zaolzie in 1938. The National Corpus of Polish (NKJP), which includes textual sources from the years 1992–2010, provides 84 results for the same query. Of these, 51 are used in the context of Polish-Czechoslovakian border disputes during the interwar period. A similar pattern emerges from the analysis of online discourse. According to the data from Brand24, the term Zaolzie appeared in 207 online statements in 2024. Excluding 70 instances produced by actors embedded in the local discourse of Cieszyn Silesia (e.g., local journalists or the Polish Consulate in Ostrava), the remain-

ing uses of the term Zaolzie refer predominantly to the context of Polish-Czechoslovakian border disputes during the Second Polish Republic.

Thus, the term Zaolzie, which carries positive associations for the local Polish minority, may evoke negative connotations for audiences in Poland. If the term is unfamiliar, the Polish minority in the Czech part of Cieszyn Silesia becomes invisible or is perceived as irrelevant. If the term is recognized, it tends to activate connotative scripts related to past territorial conflicts. Moreover, such historical references are often viewed as burdensome or unappealing in the current climate of good neighbourly relations between the two countries – a climate that prioritizes the future of European integration. As a result, these factors combined mean that the term Zaolzie contributes neither to the visibility nor to the prestige of the Polish community in the Czech borderland within the framework of public discourse in Poland.

Conclusions

A possible solution would be to use, in reference to contemporary realities, the term Czech part of Cieszyn Silesia. Admittedly, this label is somewhat imprecise, as it also includes areas that were never under the jurisdiction of the National Council of the Duchy of Cieszyn. Nevertheless, across today's Czech side of Cieszyn Silesia – whether strictly Zaolzie or beyond – Poles remain a minority. Employing the term Czech part of Cieszyn Silesia in Polish public discourse could serve several strategic functions:

- It would dissociate Polish minority in the Czech part of Cieszyn Silesia from problematic associations with historic border conflicts;
- It would restore broader awareness that over half of Cieszyn Silesia lies within the Czech Republic;
- It would help rebuild a sense of shared identity between Poles on both sides of the border – a connection that is currently weakened. This is regrettable, as Zaolzie is not an isolated cultural enclave but an integral part of the broader Cieszyn Silesian tradition, including its German and Czech cultural legacies;
- It would reinforce the historical agency of Poles in the region, highlighting their role as active participants in shaping Polish statehood after World War I rather than as “passive victims”. A narrative of success, rather than one of defeat, better serves the current interests of Poles in Zaolzie. It is therefore not irrelevant which terms are chosen, since even words that are dictionary synonyms or near-synonyms can

differ dramatically in their connotative halo – that is, the cluster of associations they evoke. These, in turn, activate different narratives and distinct sets of values.

When constructing narratives about contemporary Poles in Zaolzie within the broader framework of Polish public discourse, it is essential to choose terms that position them within a narrative of success. References to past Polish-Czechoslovakian conflicts risk placing them in a narrative of failure and shame, implicitly suggesting that they were merely the object of actions taken by others.

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Social distance toward LGBT+ individuals and coping styles of psychology and pedagogy students from the perspective of intercultural education

Abstract: The aim of this article is to analyze the relationship between coping styles in stressful situations and social distance toward LGBT+ individuals among students of social sciences (psychology and pedagogy). Researching these students is vital as their careers will demand knowledge, empathy, and understanding of diversity, including LGBT+ sensitivity. The article addresses the significance of social distance as a behavioral component of attitude and the role of direct contact and intercultural education in reducing prejudice. The study used Endler and Parker's CISS Questionnaire to assess the styles of coping with stress and the Bogardus Social Distance Scale. The research findings indicate that individuals who prefer emotion-focused coping styles, as well as women and psychology students, declare lower levels of social distance. These relationships were not confirmed for task-oriented and avoidance coping styles. The results highlight the importance of emotional and intercultural competencies in psychology and educational training as resources for promoting openness and reducing exclusion.

Keywords: coping styles, intercultural education, social distance, LGBT+, social attitudes

Introduction

This article explores the relationship between coping styles in stressful situations and the social distance maintained by pedagogy and psychology students toward individuals belonging to the LGBT+ community. The acronym LGBT+ is used to refer to individuals with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and sex characteristics (Dębińska, 2020; Świder and Winiewski,

2017). The situation of LGBT+ individuals in Poland is inextricably linked to the broader context of cultural diversity. In relation to the position of LGBT+ individuals, the concept of Geert Hofstede's (2007) cultural dimensions is particularly useful, as this model encompasses four dimensions: individualism/collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity/femininity. What seems of particular importance in the context of the situation of LGBT+ individuals is the masculinity/femininity dimension. In culturally masculine societies, there is a distinct division between male and female roles, while in culturally feminine societies, both male and female roles can be assumed freely, with an emphasis on the interdependence of both genders. This results in a less rigid division of social roles not only in terms of gender but also of psychosexual orientation, nationality, or age (Ross, 2001, pp. 26–29). The cognitive aim of the presented research is to identify the relationship between coping styles in stressful situations and social distancing towards LGBT+ individuals among students of psychology and pedagogy. The research findings may serve as a foundation for designing intercultural education programs and training aimed at improving the social competence of future educators and psychologists. This group is particularly important as their future work will require empathy, understanding, and sensitivity to social diversity, including LGBT+ individuals.

Social distance as a dimension of attitudes toward LGBT+ individuals in the context of intercultural education

The concept of attitude, as presented by Stanisław Mika (1987), is discussed in various psychological, pedagogical, and sociological traditions, drawing on learning psychology, behaviourism, and cognitive theories. According to David Krech and Richard Crutchfield (1948), an attitude is a complex structure that encompasses enduring motivational, emotional, and cognitive processes linked to various areas of human life. According to the widely accepted three-component theory in contemporary research, an attitude comprises three elements: the behavioural component, the cognitive component, and the emotional one (Aronson et al., 1997).

Social distance is one of the key dimensions of attitude, enabling the study of the degree of acceptance or rejection of various social groups. This concept was introduced into social sciences by Robert E. Park and Emory S. Bogardus in the 1920s. Bogardus (1925, pp. 299–308; 1933, pp. 265–271) created the Social Distance Scale, which measures the willingness to main-

tain contacts of varying closeness with members of different groups. This tool remains one of the most widely used research instruments in sociology, social pedagogy, and social psychology, allowing for the determination of the degree of closeness or distance that individuals are willing to maintain towards members of other social groups (Wark and Galliher, 2007). Bogardus' Social Distance Scale was initially used to study distance between ethnic and national groups (Wark and Galliher, 2007, pp. 383–395). Over time, the scale has been applied in studies concerning various minority groups, including LGBT+ individuals.

Research using Bogardus' Social Distance Scale has shown that individuals with direct contact with LGBT+ individuals typically exhibit less social distance than those without such contact. This supports Gordon W. Allport's (1954) intergroup contact hypothesis, which states that direct contact between members of different social groups can reduce prejudice and social distance, provided certain criteria are met, such as equal status, shared goals, intergroup cooperation, and institutional support (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006, pp. 751–783). In the context of research on attitudes towards LGBT+ individuals, social distance can be viewed as the behavioural component of an attitude – it indicates the willingness, or its lack, to engage in various types of relationships with members of a given group (Goode and Haber, 1977, pp. 12–21). High social distance towards LGBT+ individuals may be an expression of negative attitudes, prejudices, and stereotypes, which in turn can lead to discrimination. On the other hand, low social distance suggests attitudes of openness, acceptance, and readiness for integration (Herek, 2002, pp. 264–274).

Studying social distance towards various minority groups is a crucial element in diagnosing the functioning of a multicultural society. As Jerzy Nikitorowicz (2001) notes, the extent to which one is willing to interact with individuals from other cultural groups is a measure of one's openness and willingness to genuinely (rather than only declaratively) recognize social diversity as a value. Research by Tadeusz Lewowicki (2000, 2012) also clearly emphasises that social distance towards ethnic and national minorities, which can similarly be applied to LGBT+ individuals, is one of the key challenges for intercultural education, which should aim to foster attitudes of openness and acceptance towards diversity.

Coping styles in stressful situations and attitudes towards LGBT+ individuals

Stress, particularly psychological stress, can lead to serious health consequences when it becomes chronic and depletes the body's resources (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). One concept of coping styles is that of Norman Endler and James Parker, who distinguished between Task-Focused Coping (TFC), Emotion-Focused Coping (EFC), and Avoidance-Focused Coping (AFC) (Heszen, 2016; Terelak, 2017). This concept originates from Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman's (1984) stress theory, which highlights these as typical ways individuals manage stressful situations. The Task-Focused Coping style refers to coping with stress by undertaking tasks and activities. The Emotion-Focused Coping style refers to individuals who, in stressful situations, focus attention on themselves, their own experiences, and feelings that arise in response to the stressful situation. These individuals tend to engage in wishful thinking or fantasizing, which helps reduce tension associated with stress (Strelau et al., 1996, pp. 187–210). In contrast, the Avoidance-Focused Coping style characterises individuals who avoid thinking, experiencing, or confronting difficult situations in stressful circumstances. Their strategy involves engaging in substitute activities (SAC), such as overeating, watching television, excessive sleeping, focusing on pleasurable things, or seeking social contacts (Terelak, 2017).

There is a relationship between preferred coping styles and attitudes towards minority groups, including LGBT+ individuals. Research by Ilana H. Meyer (2003, pp. 674–697) indicates that individuals who use problem-focused strategies and actively seek information are more likely to display open and accepting attitudes towards people with differing sexual orientations or gender identities. Conversely, individuals preferring avoidant strategies, based on denial or repression, may exhibit greater social distance towards LGBT+ individuals. It is also important to note that simply functioning in an environment where there is strong stigmatization and discrimination against LGBT+ individuals can be a source of chronic stress for members of this group. The Minority Stress Model (Meyer, 2003, pp. 674–697) suggests that prolonged exposure to prejudice and discrimination increases the risk of mental disorders such as depression, anxiety disorders, or substance abuse.

The issue of distance towards LGBT+ individuals in Poland as a challenge for intercultural education

The issue of social distance towards LGBT+ individuals in Poland presents a significant challenge for intercultural education. Intercultural education, whose primary goal is to build a multicultural society based on principles of equality, tolerance, freedom, and a positive attitude towards minority groups (Lewowicki, 2000), must confront attitudes towards individuals with differing psychosexual orientations and gender identities. Przemysław P. Grzybowski (2007) points out that the foundation of intercultural education should be openness to Others/Foreigners and their problems, which, in the context of LGBT+ individuals, means creating space for respect and acceptance of diverse identities.

The development of intercultural competencies, understood by Katarzyna Gajek (2011, pp. 205–220) as the ability to work effectively at the intersection of different cultures, is key to overcoming distance towards LGBT+ individuals. These competencies include knowledge and practical skills concerning the disposition to make appropriate communication decisions in relationships with individuals from other cultures. In the case of LGBT+ individuals, this means the ability to establish dialogue based on respect and understanding, without resorting to stereotypes and prejudices. In educational practice, this means incorporating content concerning psychosexual diversity in curricula and preparing teachers to work with LGBT+ students in a spirit of respect and inclusion.

Method and research procedure

The subject of the study was social distance towards LGBT+ individuals, and its aim was to identify differences in its level with respect to coping styles, gender, and field of study (pedagogy or psychology). The following research hypotheses were formulated: H1: There is a relationship between task-oriented coping style and the level of social distance towards LGBT+ individuals; H2: There is a relationship between emotion-oriented coping style and the level of social distance towards LGBT+ individuals; H3: There is a relationship between avoidance-oriented coping style and the level of social distance towards LGBT+ individuals; H4: Women exhibit a lower level of social distance towards LGBT+ individuals compared to men; H5: Psychology

students exhibit a lower level of social distance towards LGBT+ individuals compared to pedagogy students.

Coping styles in stressful situations were assessed using the Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (Endler and Parker, 1990). The Polish adaptation of the tool was developed by Jan Strelau, Piotr Szczepaniak, and Kazimierz Wrześniewski (1996, pp. 187–210), and later expanded by Strelau and Jaworowska (2020). Social distance towards LGBT+ individuals was measured using the Social Distance Scale by Emory Bogardus (1925, pp. 299–308; 1933, pp. 265–271).

The study was conducted in the first quarter of 2025 and involved a total of 177 participants. The respondents were students from three universities: the University of Białystok, Podlasie Academy in Białystok, and the University of Business and Applied Sciences “Varsovia”, located in the Podlaskie and Mazowieckie voivodeships. A small number of participants represented other institutions. Among the respondents, 67.8% were pedagogy students and 26.6% – psychology students. The study group consisted of 150 women (84.7%), 21 men (11.9%), and 3 individuals who identified as another gender. The gender imbalance reflects the gender distribution typical for these fields of study.

A simplified random selection procedure was used to choose universities from among institutions located in the Mazowieckie and Podlaskie voivodeships that offer pedagogy and psychology courses. Three universities were randomly selected, and their students were given access to the questionnaires via the Ankieter online platform.

Analysis and interpretation of results

In accordance with the aim of the study, a statistical analysis was conducted to verify the hypotheses regarding the relationships between social distance towards LGBT+ individuals and coping styles, gender, and field of study. The results are presented with reference to each individual hypothesis. To test hypotheses H1–H3, Pearson’s linear correlation coefficient was used to assess the relationships between coping styles (task-oriented, emotion-oriented, and avoidance-oriented) and the level of social distance towards LGBT+ individuals.

Table 1. Relationships between coping styles and the level of social distance towards LGBT+ individuals

Bogardus Social Distance Scale	Task-oriented Style	Emotion-oriented Style	Avoidance-oriented Style
Pearson Correlation	-0,07	-0.23	-0.08
Significance (two-tailed)	0.37	0.01	0.32
N	175	175	175

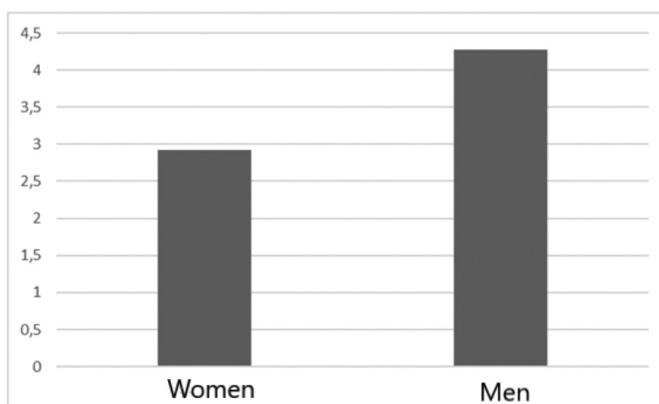
Source: own research

The analyses indicate that the correlations between task-oriented coping style ($r=-0.07$; $p=0.37$) and avoidance-oriented coping style ($r=-0.08$; $p=0.32$) and the level of social distance are very weak and statistically non-significant ($p > 0.05$). This provides no basis to support hypotheses H1 and H3 – no statistically significant relationship was found between these coping styles and the level of social distance towards LGBT+ individuals.

In the case of the emotion-oriented coping style, a statistically significant result was obtained ($r=-0.23$; $p=0.01$), which supports hypothesis H2. The Pearson correlation coefficient ($r=-0.23$) indicates that the more frequently the respondents use an emotion-focused coping style, the lower their level of social distance towards LGBT+ individuals is.

To test hypothesis H4, differences in the level of social distance between women and men were analyzed.

Figure 1. Level of social distance towards LGBT+ individuals by gender

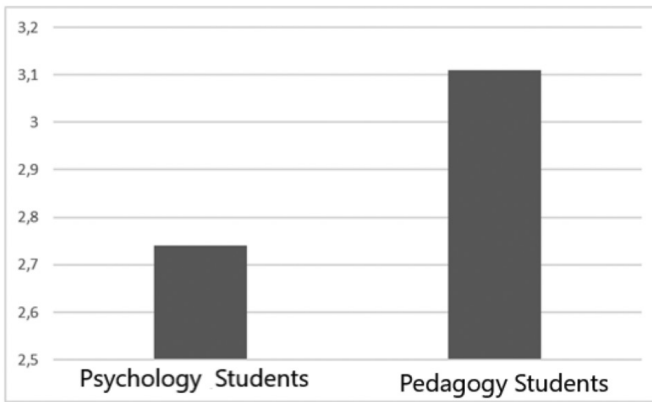


Source: own research

An analysis of the means, standard deviations, and medians indicates that women display lower levels of social distance towards LGBT+ individuals compared to men. The mean social distance score among women was 2.92, while among men it was 4.28. The median values ($Me=2.09$ for women and $Me=5.00$ for men) confirm this difference. These results support hypothesis H4.

Hypothesis H5 concerned differences in the level of social distance between psychology and pedagogy students.

Figure 2. Level of social distance towards LGBT+ individuals by field of study



Source: own research

The analysis shows that psychology students demonstrate a lower level of social distance towards LGBT+ individuals ($M=2.74$; $Me=2.00$) compared to pedagogy students ($M=3.11$; $Me=2.54$). Although this difference aligns with the assumption of hypothesis H5, its practical significance requires cautious interpretation due to its relatively small magnitude.

Conclusion and implications

The study identified several important relationships. The results confirmed that an emotion-focused coping style is associated with lower levels of social distance towards LGBT+ individuals (H2). This finding supports Meyer's Minority Stress Model (2003, pp. 674–697), which highlights the role of empathy and emotional sensitivity in reducing prejudice against minority groups. Individuals who focus on their own emotions in stressful situations

may be more attuned to the emotions of others, which can foster lower social distance.

Gender also emerged as a significant factor—women demonstrated lower levels of social distance towards LGBT+ individuals than men (H4). This result is consistent with earlier research (Herek and Capitanio, 1996, pp. 412–424; Jasińska-Kania and Staszyńska, 2009), showing that women more often display acceptance and empathy towards LGBT+ individuals. This may relate to Hofstede's (2007) masculinity/femininity cultural dimension and gender socialization theory, which suggests that women are raised to show greater empathy and care for others.

Hypothesis H5, predicting that psychology students would exhibit lower social distance than pedagogy students, was also supported. This may be explained by the specific focus of psychological education, which develops an understanding of human behaviour and fosters sensitivity to diversity. Similar findings were reported by Jasińska-Kania and Staszyńska (2009), who showed that individuals with higher education and a focus on psychological processes tend to display lower social distance towards various minority groups, including LGBT+ individuals. It can be assumed that the characteristics of psychology academic courses contribute to greater openness to diversity. This is supported by research from Gawlicz et al. (2015), which suggests that those trained in psychology, better prepared to work with diverse individuals, exhibit less social distance than pedagogy students.

These findings have important implications for intercultural education, particularly in the training of future psychologists and educationalists. They highlight the need to foster openness and to counteract exclusion through intercultural education (Lewowicki, 2012; Nikitorowicz, 2005, pp. 15–33; Grzybowski, 2007). Educational university curricula should focus on developing emotional and intercultural competences (Gajek, 2011, pp. 205–220), as contemporary stress-inducing situations require not only psychological resilience but also well-developed social and intercultural competence (Greenberg, 2023).

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Educational Practice



Intercultural intergenerational education at the first stage of education – the concept of updating the core curriculum

Abstract: This article comprises a pilot concept for intercultural intergenerational education in grades I–III, which is a distinctive approach to implementing the core curriculum. This method aims to enhance students’ emotional, social, and moral development. The research sought to answer the question: What elements should be included in the intercultural intergenerational education concept? A qualitative method was employed to analyse secondary sources by reviewing existing data sets. In the literature on the subject, it is clearly emphasised that intergenerational education creates many development opportunities for people belonging to all generations. Thanks to intergenerational education, intercultural education is also implemented in a natural way. Learning in groups of people of different ages, identifying with different origins, strengthens the cultural identity of generations and fosters drawing on the experiences of other cultural generational groups. Therefore, it is justified to give it a specific role and importance in the process of early school education.

In the article, the theoretical foundations are explored of generational and cultural identity, as well as the roles of education and intergenerational communication. It also comprises an analysis of the core curriculum for grades I–III of primary school within this context. Based on these theoretical insights, the article develops conceptual guidelines for intercultural intergenerational education aimed at early school education. It is emphasized here that actively involving individuals from both early, middle and late adulthood in the educational process is vital for the emotional, social, and moral development of students. Seniors, in particular, serve as mentors and provide invaluable insights that help children connect with the experiences of past generations. This involvement not only aids students in forming their own identities but also fosters their judgments, thoughts, and values.

Keywords: early childhood education, intercultural education, core curriculum for grades I–III of primary school, generational identity, intergenerational communication, intergenerational education

Introduction

Intergenerational education has a beneficial impact on generational cooperation and contributes to social integration and to the solidarity of generations (Kilian, 2011, p. 105). This type of education occurs naturally and spontaneously in environments such as families, schools, and workplaces, as well as in groups of friends and neighbours. However, it is important to implement intergenerational education more intentionally and broadly within the existing formal structures, particularly in primary schools and early education. It is worth noting that intergenerational education is also a natural way to implement intercultural education. Learning in groups of people of different ages and identifying with different reference groups strengthens the cultural identity of generations and fosters drawing on the experiences of other cultural generation groups.

The aim of this study is to present a theoretical pilot concept of work concerning intergenerational intercultural education in grades I–III, which is a specific form of implementing the core curriculum, leading to learners' emotional, social, and moral development.

The study focused on seeking the answers to the following main question: What should the components of a concept of intergenerational intercultural education be? In particular:

- What elements of the core curriculum in grades I–III can be used in developing and implementing a concept of intergenerational intercultural education?
- What elements should be introduced into the core curriculum in grades I–III to allow the implementation of intergenerational intercultural education to enable learners' best emotional, social, and moral development?

The study was done with the use of a method of analyzing secondary sources, understood as the research of existing data sets that constitute tangible traces of human activity. This method is also referred to as the analysis of existing qualitative data. It is situated within the critical paradigm, which pertains to the construction of universal or particular theories (Lewowicki,

2016, p. 12). It was considered that data extracted from secondary sources create texts in the form of explicit and implicit variables (Rubacha, 2016, p. 157). The secondary source is the core curriculum for education in grades I to III of the primary school. Explicit variables are elements of the core curriculum that allow for the teaching-learning process that will have an optimal impact on the development of children at early school age, recorded in the range of emotional and social achievements. Hidden variables include elements included in the entire core curriculum and data resulting from their interpretations, enabling the development of learners in the emotional, moral, and social spheres.

The raw data collected from the analysis was processed in a series of steps: reduction, representation, and data verification, with the use of a circular approach. Elements that make up the context of the data were detected, and analytical induction was used during verification (Rubacha, 2016, p. 259). A coding and categorization system was introduced, and the theoretical codes were formulated. It was found that the concept of intergenerational education can encompass various aspects of educational activities that influence children's emotional, moral, and social development. The following should be considered as elements leading to the achievement of: social development – aspects of education directing learners towards the construction of social identity based on family values and social norms; emotional development – aspects of the educational process enabling the acquisition of the ability to notice and understand the multiplicity of feelings in society and their dependence on various aspects of life (variability of their experience and emphasis); moral development – educational activities and goals related to the development of children's own dignity, respect and tolerance towards Others and their diversity, and introducing students to the world of fundamental values.

Theoretical assumptions of the concept

A “generation” is an ambiguous term which is defined as: a link in a genealogical sequence or a cultural sequence; a group of people of a similar age; a group of people at specific stages of life; a group of people who have common experiences and memories from a young age, called a historical or cultural generation (Osowska, 1963, p. 47). The boundaries between cultural generations are often blurred and conventional. Instead of age, significant events that occurred during a person's youth hold greater importance. For

example, in Poland middle-aged individuals (aged 40–59) may identify with the generation associated with the Solidarity trade union (Szafranec, 2022, p. 11). In Anglo-Saxon studies, such terms are used to describe generations as “the Greatest Generation”, “the Silents”, Baby Boomers and Millennials, as well as generations X, Y, Z (Twenge, 2023, p. 19). Generations are also defined by the solidarity dimension of their structure, which assumes “kindness, readiness to cooperate, support and carrying help to people included in the “we” category: members of one’s group or social category” (Sztompka, 2003, p. 197). Members of the same generation co-create culture, which manifests itself when confronted with otherness, and the stronger the culture conflicts, the stronger its awareness (Sztompka, 2003, p. 197).

Margaret Mead (2000, pp. 7–8) distinguishes three types of cultures that characterize different generations: post-figurative, cofigurative, and prefigurative. These cultures differ in how individuals within a generation think and approach life crises.

Regardless of age, a crucial aspect of everyone’s life is their generational identity. This refers to the “symbolic affiliation with particular temporal and territorial segments of social reality, where the identifying features of successive generational groups and circles are manifested” (Wrzesień, 2016, p. 230). This development is preceded by earlier social and educational processes that shape the individual’s overall identity and by how they perceive their relationship with others, categorizing them as We, You, or They (Lisowska, 2022, p. 172).

A person experiences generational affiliation, which involves shared experiences, norms, values, behavioural patterns, and interests that shape a particular lifestyle and foster a sense of solidarity. Individuals contribute to the development of specific communication codes for their generation, resulting in greater cohesion but also creating difficulties in communicating with older generations. This can lead to the marginalization of older generations as unimportant, which is reflected in theories of cultural transgression. Intergenerational dialogue is necessary to create conditions for the growth of individual representatives of different generations and to strengthen the sense of social identity.

Intergenerational education is based on the joint learning of people of different generations, taking the form of formalized and informal activities (Leszczyńska-Rejchert, 2019, p. 138). Learning in a group of different ages creates much better conditions for the development of the individual. There is greater stimulation, which forces you to develop different communication

strategies. It has been proven that in a group of different ages, people have a greater opportunity to learn the Other. This is because: “being with the Other leads to taming the stereotype of the stranger. This stranger for older people is youth, and for younger people – old age” (Muszyński, 2015, p. 9).

Intergenerational education is closely related to intercultural education, both focus on building a friendly world, tolerant of diversity, in which individuals belonging to different generations draw from each other. In the perspective of intercultural interactions, special attention should be paid to intergenerational interactions. Within their framework, there can be an exchange of views and experiences shaped by the elderly on the basis of socio-political conditions, and by the young in the process of adaptation to dynamically changing social, cultural, but also economic and political conditions. Older people can support the development of children’s identities by providing valuable advice based on their own experiences. The task of young people is to help older generations in acculturation in the intercultural spaces of contemporary existence (Jas, 2015, p. 256).

Analysis of the core curriculum

Intergenerational intercultural education in teaching children and adolescents is an element integrated with other areas of knowledge and skills provided to learners at various stages of education. Its content and tasks are not present directly in the 2024 school core curriculum, but they should be identified in a multidimensional space of the teaching-learning process in the emotional, moral, and social areas.

Emotional development

An analysis of the educational objectives developed for stage I of education shows that intercultural intergenerational education can be based on such actions that aim at supporting a learner’s emotional development, in particular, acquiring the following skills: recognizing, understanding, and defining emotions, as well as other people’s feelings; establishing relations; feeling the need to build an emotional bond with the family; understanding the feelings experienced by others and the occurring reasons for them and the diversity of feelings the others express depending on their experiences and age, related to belonging to a given cultural generation.

Moral development

Individual aspects of intercultural intergenerational education can be found in primary school in the area of general education, which is oriented towards introducing a learner into the world of values, including sacrifice, cooperation, solidarity, altruism. This is how the student is shown the patterns of conduct, which should contribute to building beneficial social relations and to their proper development in the space of family, peer group and social environment. Intercultural intergenerational education manifests itself in the process of forming a sense of self-dignity, thereby teaching learners to show respect to other people, including those from other cultures.

The core curriculum for learners' moral development focuses on actions aimed at helping them internalize values recognized within their home environment. The theoretical concept of intergenerational intercultural education should be rooted in these values, enabling learners to assess the propriety of their own and others' behaviour based on principles such as dignity, honour, justice, reliability, responsibility, friendship, kindness, moderation, self-restraint, assistance, loyalty, apology, recognition, honesty, gratitude.

In this context, it is also crucial for students to learn how to respect elderly individuals and express that respect appropriately. This can happen when a learner identifies with their family, learns about its history, thus forming their own social identity while adhering to the norms and rules of conduct established within their community.

Social development

The guidelines for general education include elements of intercultural intergenerational education. They focus on fostering an open attitude in students towards the world and others, encouraging active participation in social life, and promoting a sense of responsibility towards the community.

They are reflected in the tasks of school, which include supporting a child's multi-directional activity in the social area, organizing activities that will help them to learn about social values, norms and skills arising from the family environment, and developing behaviours that reflect those values. The school's tasks also concern the development of each child by social integration, characterized by collaboration with the parents, various circles, organizations, and institutions that are the sources of values.

By achieving awareness of values recognized in the home environment, the child is able to evaluate them and refer to their importance. Children are aware that everyone has rights and duties, and that consequences resulting from belonging to a social group should be accepted. They acquire a social identity (cultural and regional) that helps them to be rooted in the perspective of functioning in a group and for the benefit of the group. In the cognitive sphere, the learner should be taught the ability to use the traditions and culture of the family environment and the need for conscious participation in culture should be shaped.

The theoretical concept of intergenerational intercultural education

Intercultural intergenerational education should be taken into account in the primary school core curriculum, including grades I–III, and should deal with intergenerational integration and education in such spaces as: general objectives of education for primary school learners, specific objectives concerning education at an early school level, the teaching content, and so-called specific requirements for the teaching-learning process at schools. The concept concerns children's education in three areas: the emotional, social, and moral. It makes use of the existing solutions introduced in the core curriculum and introduces new elements supplementing and extending the values of intercultural intergenerational education in shaping grade I–III learners.

Emotional development

The family should be the first stage in noticing the emotional multiplicity in the life of multigenerational and multicultural communities. It is advisable for the child to acquire awareness of the variability of perceiving emotions and feelings in the global space already at the first stage of education with the use of the transition: family – local environment – national space – emotional plurality in the multicultural space in the world. The emotional development of children at early school age requires the presence of other people, then it is easier for them to understand their own emotions and the emotions of another person.

Intercultural intergenerational education during the initial stages of learning creates ideal conditions for developing students' emotional intelligence. This can be achieved through activities such as games that involve one or multiple generations. Games are a cultural phenomenon; they provide an effective

space for intergenerational exchange of values and modelling behaviours. Other activities aimed at mutual generational renewal also include digital education, artistic creation through joint creation of works or participation in artistic events, or intergenerational volunteering (Opiela, 2020, p. 99).

Moral development

The objectives of general education should include fundamental statements aimed at helping young people navigate a world rich in values. Additionally, these objectives should address issues that promote the development of intergenerational social relationships and foster an understanding of the needs of individuals across different age groups – especially in the context of families functioning as multigenerational communities. Each generation brings unique resources and skills that enhance the community. Therefore, schools have the important task of preparing children for life in a generationally diverse community. From this perspective, respect for others is rooted in self-respect. As the society ages and individuals encounter inevitable existential changes, often referred to as developmental crises, it becomes essential to challenge and eliminate negative stereotypes associated with different generations. Thus, it is crucial to establish general objectives in early school education that promote a positive image of people from various age groups and cultivate tolerance and openness towards both the local multigenerational community and the broader multicultural national community as a reflection of cultural heritage.

By becoming engaged in practical intergenerational activities carried out at school, individuals in medium and late adulthood can show by example what moral values and principles are important in life. This is a significant task of school, as the transfer of values between generations is the basis of social and cultural development. Martin Buber (1993, p. 130) said: “Without you, there is no I”. He postulated that meetings with other people should have a personal dimension, take place with openness to other people, with full acceptance of their existence and otherness (e.g. Wiśniewska, 2017, p. 37), including tolerance for otherness resulting from cultural differences.

Social development

In terms of social development of students, intergenerational dialogue should be taken into account, which is an opportunity to establish relationships be-

tween individual generations, whose behaviour and language depend on different social identities. Each generation is defined by cultural codes that translate into symbols and rituals. Mutual understanding on the level of norms and principles, decision-making and creation of reality depends on learning to recognize and appreciate the codes appropriate for a given generation.

Intergenerational dialogue is the basic determinant of beneficial intergenerational relations, a factor preventing generational egocentrism and a way to counteract social problems (e.g. Wiśniewska, 2017, p. 37). Individual generations live in separate cultural worlds, which is why creating an appropriate educational space focused on intergenerational dialogue should become an important element of early school education.

Intercultural intergenerational education should take into account the multiple perceptions by different generations of national symbols, meaningful words describing valuable aspects of behaviour, manifestations of respect for people of different ages. Attention should be paid to the dynamic hierarchy of values, depending on the period of life and civilizational development and significant events experienced here and now, as well as the family and its role in preparing for life in a changing global multigenerational – multicultural society. Individual and collective identity should be taken into account – constant due to the identification of the generation, variable on the periphery, valuable during the intergenerational relationship. Communication codes should be considered as well as they are used to establish an intergenerational relationship and break communication barriers between generations.

Intercultural intergenerational education should be based on goals within which the student knows what a “generation” is, can identify the differences between generations in their own family and tell interesting facts important from the perspective of people forming an intergenerational group. They are aware of the need to be among people from different generations in the same social space and know that by being in a multi-generational group, they have the opportunity to shape their own generational and cultural identity, understand what words and symbols adequate for a given generation mean, i.e. a language code – meaningful for a specific generation from the point of view of an individual in a particular period and trajectory of life. They are open to the elderly and are able to establish a dialogue with them, while respecting the views and ways of speaking of people representing other generations. They evaluate their behaviour towards the elderly and respect the norms and rules of conduct in the changing intergenerational space. They understand

that each generation can attach different importance to particular values and that together with their peers they form a specific group, whose members are of a similar age and at the same educational stage.

A good practice in the field of intercultural intergenerational education is to invite people representing older generations to join the educational process in grades I–III. Their resources of knowledge and skills can be used to enrich lessons, e.g. on historical knowledge, technical, economic and natural knowledge and social skills. Adults, especially people in late adulthood (old age), are a treasury of knowledge and skills, and the use of their sources of wisdom and experience is an important determinant of social development (Wiśniewska, 2017, p. 37). It is worth encouraging older generations to participate in school events, in volunteering actions combining generations. A good idea is the so-called active school parent-teacher conferences, to which students are invited with their parents and get involved in various joint tasks, in the implementation of activities introducing children to the world of creativity, or projects in the field of digital education. In this way, favourable conditions are created for generations to get to know each other better and for intergenerational dialogue to take place.

Conclusions

Due to the values of intercultural intergenerational education, one should call for the primary school core curriculum to deal with issues associated with this form at an early school education stage to a greater extent. Intercultural intergenerational education can contribute to the harmonious development of a learner at the first stage of education, in the areas of social, emotional, moral, and intellectual development. It is also an opportunity to develop an awareness of the need for intergenerational contacts and, as a consequence, to remove intergenerational barriers. Intercultural intergenerational education can strengthen the generational and cultural identity of individual generations – the cohesion of social groups in individual generations. Such education helps the young to open up to elderly people's communication codes and helps the elderly to open up to proposals from young people. Intergenerational education contributes to good intergenerational cooperation and to the development of individual and group identity by drawing on the experience of other cultural generational groups.

In conclusion, one should stress that the concept of intercultural intergenerational education presented here is based on and makes use of solutions

indicated in the core curriculum, which enable introducing children into a world of social and moral values, meanings, and norms, but also enables growing and acquiring emotional maturity. The concept has an added value as well: it constructs such a space for education that uses active participation of people of various age groups in educational activities, oriented towards the development of children in diverse life spaces. Adults are now regarded as mentors in pro-social conduct, creating their own individual identity while at the same time creating a collective identity. They also act as advisors on the ways of solving problems occurring in the life of peer groups, in the family, and at work. Moreover, being witnesses to history, they open learners to the world of past generations and political, economic, and social events. Based on this, learners in grades I–III can shape their own opinions, thoughts, and values.

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Anthropology in the classroom: toward global competence in geography and history education

Abstract: Anthropology fosters the understanding of human diversity and encourages the perception of the world as a network of interconnected societies, thus promoting the development of both analytical and social skills. The aim of this article is to analyze the possibilities of using an anthropological approach in the process of shaping intercultural competences among students. In this article, a hypothesis is put forward whether anthropology and an anthropological approach to teaching geography and history at the secondary school level is an effective method of achieving these goals. In geography education, this approach enables students to perceive the interconnections between the environment and culture. In history teaching, it emphasizes the multiplicity of narratives and the need for a critical approach to sources. The International Baccalaureate (IB) program is an example of an effective implementation of these principles by integrating a global and interdisciplinary perspective with the development of research competences. Today's global challenges require that schools prepare students not only for exams, but for responsible participation in complex social realities. An anthropological approach in education meets these needs by supporting the development of globally aware, empathetic citizens.

Keywords: intercultural education, global awareness, curricula, anthropological postulate, student profile, students' global competencies, international identity, international mindedness

Introduction – cultural anthropology and educational challenges

Cultural and social anthropology, as a discipline concerned with human beings and their diversity in all spheres of life, is – alongside philosophy, eth-

ics, and psychology – one of the fields that support the implementation and development of educational goals in schools. However, for various reasons, the introduction of cultural anthropology as a school subject is currently unfeasible. This does not mean, however, that the contents and attitudes developed in anthropology are or should be absent from schools. In this article, the focus is on supporting the development of students' individual identities through the implementation of typical anthropological values.

The connections between anthropology and various educational systems are explored by educational anthropologists. In Poland, the school system has been studied from the perspective of stereotypical and negatively biased representations of the Global South in textbooks, viewed through the Eurocentric lens, by scholars such as Anna Chomczyńska-Czepiel (2019), Elżbieta Kielak et al. (2016), Marzanna Pogorzelska (2023), and Monika Popow (2015). Jarema Drozdowicz (2018, pp. 135–151) has dealt with cultural diversity in school and educational contexts and Marcin Gołębiak (2017, pp. 45–60) has examined the intersection of ethnography and pedagogy. Hana Červinková (2013, pp. 123–137; 2020, pp. 47–59; Červinková and Gołębiak, eds. 2010) has made a significant contribution to the study of Polish education from an anthropological perspective, researching, among other topics, the orientation of teaching toward social change and engaged action research. The call for an anthropological approach is therefore not new and has influenced the shape of Polish schooling for over a decade.

The aim of this article is to show how integrating the anthropological approach with geography and history education promotes the development of learners' global competencies. The focus is specifically on these subjects and the following research question is formulated: Which academic discipline is most appropriate for developing school education within existing subjects to expand and deepen the new, future-oriented student profile desired in a globalized, rapidly changing world?

For the purposes of the study, ethnographic methods were applied, including participant observation, conversations with teachers, and analysis of written sources (Okely, 2020). This article is based on an analysis of the syllabi of two selected subjects in two different systems. We draw on our experience as ethnologists and teachers with many years of experience teaching in both Polish and international systems. We also monitored teachers' responses on dedicated social media groups, such as Facebook. One such group for Polish geography teachers has 6,122 members, while another has 4,723. The global group for teachers of international geography has 2,126 members. The study

included an analysis of the content of these subjects in the International Baccalaureate (IB) program and in the Polish national curriculum.

Anthropological approach in education – what does it mean in practice?

Although cultural anthropology is not currently a separate school subject in Poland, the values and perspectives it promotes can still find application in teaching, especially in subjects such as geography, history, or civic education. Anthropological knowledge and tools can support learning objectives – understanding human diversity, developing empathy, fostering critical thinking, and reflecting on one’s own cultural identity. For this reason, the anthropological approach is treated by us as an essential component of inclusive, transformative, and interculturally sensitive education.

Looking at cultures as dynamic systems of meanings allows students to question their own assumptions and to avoid simplifying or exoticizing other cultures. It also supports building attitudes of openness, dialogue, and critical reflection, which are particularly important in today’s world of intensified migrations, cultural contact, and social inequalities.

In practice, this means working with texts and images that represent cultural diversity without reproducing harmful stereotypes, applying participant observation and reflexivity, and introducing concepts such as ethnocentrism, cultural relativism, or social norms and values. These concepts are typically taught in anthropology courses at the academic level, but they can also be adapted to the cognitive capacities of school students. The goal is not to “teach anthropology” *per se*, but to equip students with tools that help them better understand the world.

The anthropological postulate and the classification of school curricula

It is worth considering where our postulate fits within the general classification of school curricula. Three main approaches to school curricula are typically distinguished: the behaviorist, humanist, and constructivist approach (Gołębniak, 2019, pp. 858–961). Our postulate draws from all the three, though it is most strongly rooted in the humanist and constructivist traditions. The Polish academic community after World War II recognized a strong need to shift away from the classical, class-lesson model of teach-

ing, which emphasized factual knowledge detached from broader contexts, toward progressive education. This progressive model loosened the rigid framework of traditional schooling and placed greater emphasis on student agency and situating education within real-life contexts (Gołębniak, 2019, p. 865). Such changes began to emerge in schools during the 1980s. Alongside traditionally teaching schools, there are also those that implement reflective and emancipatory models (Gołębniak, 2019, p. 870).

Although the anthropological postulate is closest to the emancipatory model, it is important to note that it can be implemented in all types of schools. It is not a revolutionary proposal nor the introduction of an entirely new model. It is rather an attempt to highlight the educational role of worldview framing within subject teaching and the formation of a student profile. It draws on both the philosophical and psychological foundations of the constructivist and humanist approaches (Gołębniak 2019, pp. 878–879). This approach is rooted in the pedagogies of Korczak and Freinet, which are oriented not only toward the child as an individual educational subject but also as a member of a community – a peer group. One could say that pedagogy should function as a microscale of proper human relations, based on the most appropriate approaches. At later stages of education, this model should be expanded to include new spatial, temporal, phenomenological, and relational perspectives, encompassing both the microscale and the national and global macroscale.

During adolescence, a process of transformation takes place – from a child's identity to that of an adult. At the same time, this stage of psychological and neurological development coincides with a transition to a new level of education. A diversity of cognitive perspectives, broader reach, and deeper understanding of content come to the fore and should predominate in teaching. These elements have a real impact on shaping a teenager's identity and personal worldview (Nikitorowicz, 2007).

One of the most important qualities that teachers should nurture in their students in today's schools is acceptance of the fact that the world is diverse. Some researchers have described this as international mindedness (Rodriguez, 2018, pp. 87–98; Trisnawati, Zakaria and Kamaruddin, 2025, pp. 2188–2192), characterized by a multi-perspective outlook and the ability to collaborate in groups. It is a quality of thought, the ability to perceive and understand various viewpoints and concepts. This trait is essential for understanding other nations, cultures, religions, and global issues, but also, on a local level, for understanding other social and class groups, simply "others."

It should be developed from the primary school level so that it becomes an immanent part, indeed a foundation, of the young person's emerging world-view and self-identity.

To understand what international mindedness entails, it is worth noting that it encompasses terms such as global awareness combined with engagement, including engaged citizenship based on social thinking or approaches, as well as internationalism (in political, economic, and intergovernmental cooperation terms), cosmopolitanism, the awareness that all human beings belong to the same global community and should be able to coexist (a moral dimension). The idea of a shared humanity, transcending culture, time, geography, and history, embedded in the concept of international mindedness, opens the door to a universal moral code (Hreha, 2012, p. 2). This pedagogical approach is not about moral relativism, which can be especially dangerous in the context of young people's identity development, but about understanding the world and taking responsibility for it. At the macro-organizational level, this approach is reflected in examples such as respecting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN) or implementing the fair trade concept by NGOs and international corporations.

Although the concept of international mindedness emerged mainly from an economic perspective, it should be applied more broadly across school subjects. This idea requires both cognitive and subjective components and, in this context, should become one of the core values shaping the student profile. In subjects such as geography and history in particular, it can be woven into most topics, as it encourages a reflective view of other countries, economic institutions and organizations, trade, and relational approaches to other nations, supranational organizations, and an understanding of the necessity and mechanisms of distributing wealth and resources, as well as the functions and responsibilities of governments.

Other values that should form the foundation of a mature and responsible secondary school graduate include those that support openness to diversity. The structure of school curricula and textbooks should reflect this pedagogical goal and shift the emphasis from factual education toward personal and social development. In the age of the Internet, when any piece of information can be quickly found on a personal device, the main goal of education should not be the quantity of memorized facts but the proper shaping of a student's identity. The school should be responsible not only for transmission of knowledge, but above all for critical evaluation of the learned contents. The school environment offers the greatest opportunity to shape the identity of

a new generation, one capable of critically and constructively engaging with the attitudes of older generations and existing norms, and able to transform them in the spirit of democracy.

The anthropological approach in teaching geography and history in secondary school as an appropriate method for developing a comprehensive student profile

In traditional geographical education, emphasis is often placed on memorizing topographic features, climate classifications, or statistical data about various countries. While this is important, such an approach entails the risk of reducing students' understanding of the world to dry facts, disconnected from real human experiences.

By adopting an anthropological approach, geographical education is transformed into an exploration of how people adapt to various environmental conditions, how they shape and are shaped by their landscapes, and how cultural, economic, and political processes influence spatial organization. Students learn to perceive geographical phenomena through the lens of human experience, exploring not only what happens and where, but also why, and how it affects the people living there. For example, instead of studying desertification in Africa solely through climate data, students investigate how local communities adapt to environmental changes, how international economic policy contributes to land degradation, and how cultural practices affect sustainable land use.

In history education, the anthropological approach emphasizes the multiplicity of narratives. Students are encouraged to explore historical events not only from the perspective of dominant powers but also from the viewpoints of marginalized groups. This includes critical analysis of sources, including oral histories, local records, and minority perspectives that often contrast with official narratives. Such an approach helps students understand that history is not a monolithic, objective account of the past, but a dynamic and contested field of interpretation. By being exposed to diverse points of view, students develop a more nuanced understanding of past events and greater sensitivity to the complexity of human experiences.

The anthropological approach involves taking on challenges. Most ethnographers spend many months conducting fieldwork, taking the risk of stepping outside their comfort zones. These are social, cultural, and ethical challenges faced when a field researcher engages with a new environment,

confronting their own attitudes, beliefs, and values. Therefore, the geography and history curriculum should be expanded to include a field research that involves direct interaction with other people. Through conducting field research, students can experience socio-cultural differences firsthand. Field research is an ideal foundation for project-based learning, which teaches teamwork like no other method. Furthermore, field practice reinforces the knowledge and application of technical geographical and historical skills necessary for academic education, such as scaling, time calculation, drawing, analyzing and interpreting maps, satellite images, graphics, and charts, statistical calculations, creating various types of economic and demographic graphs and diagrams and interpreting them, and finally, initiating conversations with locals through surveys and interviews. For many years, field research has been successfully practiced in other countries such as the United Kingdom, Spain, or in international schools.

The anthropological approach in the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum

Educational goals in Poland reflect several elements of the anthropological perspective, but they are not systematically connected or intertwined with broader educational and formative objectives. The national curriculum considers the emotional aspect of student development by promoting connections with one's local environment and homeland – primarily in the context of Poland and the Polish people (*Podstawa programowa*, 2024, pp. 18–21, 181–214). An example of how the anthropological approach can be integrated into geography and history education is the International Baccalaureate (IB) program, particularly the higher-level geography curriculum.

A comparative analysis of the curricula in both systems, based on the number of hours allocated to specific topics and the structuring of content, clearly shows that the IB program aims to broaden students' horizons and support deep, contextual thinking. Topics are addressed not only from national perspectives but also globally, encouraging students to understand processes and phenomena from multiple angles. Moreover, the IB program strongly emphasizes interdisciplinary connections, enabling students to recognize the complex relationships between geography, economics, politics, environmental science, and social studies. This comprehensive perspective is crucial in educating graduates who understand global mechanisms and are capable of critical analysis and independent judgment.

The objectives of geography education in the IB program are subordinated to the overarching educational goal shared by all subjects and school activities, namely the development of the appropriate student profile (*Geography Guide*, 2017, pp. 2–5, 18). This profile must be interwoven into the teaching of each subject and the interactions between them. In the case of geography, formative development is integrated with intellectual goals such as understanding the dynamic interrelationships between people, places, spaces, and environments across various scales. These priorities demonstrate a dynamic, rather than static, educational aim.

When examining the number of hours devoted to specific topics and the way the content is divided and presented, it becomes clear that the emphasis is primarily on cognitive rather than formative aspects. The Polish Ministry of National Education recommends a structure in which, in the first year of secondary school, 35 lessons are dedicated exclusively to physical geography. Problem-based topics are addressed only twice: when discussing oceans, there is a mention of pollution; and when discussing Earth's ice cover, there is a presentation on the impact of its reduction on the economy.

In contrast, geography education at the IB standard level shows notable differences. While Polish geography consists of approximately 126 lessons over three years, the IB program includes about 260 lessons over two years. In Polish schools, the entire first year is dedicated to physical geography. Additionally, in the second year, within economic geography, students study forests, and at the end of the year, there is a separate section titled “*VII. Human Impact on the Natural Environment*”. This section, which should be central to physical geography, is instead separated: these topics are not integrated into the first-year curriculum but are presented briefly and in isolation. In the third year, physical geography is revisited, but only in the context of Poland. The curriculum allocates nearly half the time to physical geography. Moreover, only the last two lessons of the school year (often not implemented in practice) are designated to address the state of the environment in Poland and its protection, instead of embedding these issues throughout the course in direct connection with physical geography topics. According to teachers, many are aware of this and adapt their lesson plans to better integrate these problem-based issues throughout the year.

Socio-political-economic-global geography in the Polish curriculum is taught only in the second year with a total of 60 lessons. The political section includes five lessons, the economic section two; the demographic-migration section six lessons, and ethnic-cultural diversity – three. Settlement topics

are presented separately from migration issues (four lessons). The globalization section is supposed to be covered in just three lessons. Almost the entire second semester is devoted to economic topics (agriculture, industry, energy, fisheries, tourism, services, forestry), structured in a traditional, didactic way without problem-based topics or connections to globalization, demographic development, migration, or other socio-political issues. In the third year, students study economic geography again, but only in the context of Poland.

The international program is designed differently. Students study essential, core knowledge and choose two out of seven optional topics (*Geography Guide*, 2017, pp. 6, 12–13, 19–21, 24–51). The core content includes “*Geographic Perspectives – Global Change*,” divided into three main units: 1) *Population distribution – changing populations*; 2) *Global climate – vulnerability and resilience*; 3) *Global resource consumption and security*. This presents a fundamentally different approach to geography education than that found in Polish schools. The optional topics include: A) *Freshwater – drainage basins and reservoirs*, B) *Oceans and coastlines*, C) *Extreme environments*, D) *Geophysical hazards*, E) *Leisure, tourism, and sport*, F) *Food and health*, G) *Urban environments*. These selected topics expand and deepen key issues using problem-based and discursive methods. Each topic is supported by international case studies. The structure is problem-focused and emotionally engaging. Geographical knowledge is presented through the lens of current global problems, usually caused by human activity and the need to take responsibility for them. Students are also required to write geographical essays, complete group projects, and prepare an extended essay.

Each topic is designed to implement a revised classification pyramid based on Benjamin Bloom’s taxonomy (1956, p. 18): remembering (knowledge), understanding, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, evaluating, and creating. This method of teaching aligns closely with the anthropological approach, as it also promotes distinguishing cultural perspectives that challenge Eurocentric viewpoints.

Conclusion

Subjects such as history and geography play a crucial role in the educational system, as they directly implement the desired values by teaching examples from around the world and explaining how the world works from appropriate perspectives. Key topics include: learning about linguistic, ethnic, national and religious diversity, adaptation to the environment, the impact of global

politics and macroeconomics on the lives of local communities, migrations, including forced migrations and contemporary forms of slavery, armed conflicts and dictatorships. When properly presented, these topics give students the opportunity to deeply understand that different cultures and their practices are unique attempts and ways of adapting to the surrounding conditions. Reassessment of the geography and history curriculum, modifications to its basic assumptions are necessary for Polish schools to modernize education, strengthen its formative role in educating people with international awareness, who take responsibility for the planet and strive to create a better, more peaceful world.

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Traditional games in the educational practice of physical education teachers in the Polish-Czech borderland (a research report)

Abstract: The article constitutes a report of the conducted studies. They were aimed at assessing the methods of understanding traditional games, the knowledge of their examples, their evaluation and scope of use in the work of physical education teachers in selected primary schools of the Polish-Czech borderland within Cieszyn Silesia. PE teachers from Polish and Czech schools, a group predisposed to popularizing traditional games, were chosen as study participants. The current PE education programs are based on exercises and sports rooted in West European traditions. Studies have shown that teachers are aware of the potential of traditional games. However, they do not have the necessary teaching materials at their disposal and often feel unprepared to introduce forms of ludic activities, especially local ones, into the process of physical education of children and teenagers. Therefore, it is necessary to determine solutions which would support PE teachers in popularizing these components of cultural heritage. The research results provided a basis for suggested actions which could enable physical education teachers to actively participate in reintroducing the knowledge of once popular games and accustom the youngest residents of the region to practicing also these playful behaviours that originate from the local cultural traditions.

Keywords: traditional games, physical education, cultural heritage, Cieszyn Silesia, Polish-Czech borderland

Traditional games as a research issue

The need for preserving the diversity of ludic cultures from various countries and ethnic territories has been emphasised for years in academic studies. The games that stem from local traditions are a manifestation of non-material

cultural heritage. They are a major topic of academic research (Prabucki, 2013, pp. 205–217) and a subject of revitalizations conducted, among others, by theoreticians and practitioners of physical education (Prabucki, 2013, pp. 205–217). The issue is studied in the context of globalization processes, mass culture and mass media domination, of directing the consumerist society towards fulfilling ludic needs as well as the mediatory role of games in shaping intergroup relations in an increasingly cultural world, including the ethnic and national borderlands (see: Kantor, 2001, pp. 355–362; Kantor, 2013; Rugała, 2023, pp. 221–234).

This study is a part of a multi-stage research project and another article in a publication cycle on the revitalization of traditional games (Szalbot, 2019, pp. 63–76; Szalbot, 2022, pp. 61–79). The project includes, apart from field studies, preliminary research in museums and archives as well as workshops. Its purpose is to assess the interest in traditional ludicity among the regional toymakers, collectors and the staff of the education and culture sector, including PE teachers. The latter have the opportunity to introduce traditional games to the children and youth they work with.

The article provides the definition of traditional games and the reasons for including them in the physical education program. It characterizes the region of the study and refers to the level of knowledge concerning the traditional ludic culture in Cieszyn Silesia. The empirical section provides the methodology, process and results of the studies conducted. In the conclusion, some solutions are suggested for including traditional games in school PE programs in a way adapted to the local conditions and with the participation of PE teachers.

Traditional games: the definition and application in physical education

Authors who study the issue of traditional games often quote Roland Renson when defining their research subjects. In this article, his explanation is also adopted in assuming that traditional games contain a component of physical activity, are based on cultural elements of a given region, are practiced locally, their historical origins are irrelevant and they do not include board or computer games (see: Bronikowska, 2013, pp. 32–33).

Nothing prevents traditional games being used in modern physical education in schools. They help develop the creativity of the participants, facilitate group integration and teach the culture of past generations (Cieśliński

and Chaliburda, 2018, p. 125). The achievements of PE methodologists in documenting, preparing game scenarios and experimental reconstruction of selected traditional games are unquestionable (see, e.g.: Lipoński, 2004; Cieśliński and Chaliburda, 2010; Kowalewski and Kalecińska, 2017; Piech 2019; Winczewski, 2016). They return the “small-scale sports” to their rightful places in education and culture.

The issues of traditional games are discussed by UNESCO and various regional, national and international organizations that function also due to the involvement of professionals working in the field of physical education (see: Lipoński, 2001, pp. 286–307). PE teachers can support the endeavours of introducing traditional games into educational programs so often neglected in many countries. It is also crucial to put these suggestions in writing in primary school PE programs as in the Polish core curriculum altered in 2017 and its document counterparts in other countries. These texts enable teachers to implement traditional elements into PE classes.¹

Description of Cieszyn Silesia and the academic research into the notion of traditional local games

Traditional games are an important element of cultural heritage of individual regions. Playing them serves to manifest and strengthen cultural identity (Bronikowska, 2022, pp. 1–13). In this article, Cieszyn Silesia becomes the context for the research and interpretation of collected materials. Therefore, a short description of the regions seems necessary.

Historically, the territory and borders of Cieszyn Silesia, the southernmost part of Silesia, are of the former Duchy of Teschen, located on the borderland of southern Poland and north-eastern Czechia. The borderline between Poland and Czechoslovakia (currently Poland and Czechia) was delimited here in 1920. Cieszyn Silesia is an area with a unique cultural profile, which emerged also as a result of Polish people living on the Czech side of the region (the so-called Trans-Olza community²). Due to ventures that cultivate

¹ See: Dz.U. (Journal of Laws), 2017, entry no. 356, <https://podstawaprogramowa.pl/Szkola-podstawowa-IV-VIII/Wychowanie-fizyczne> and RVP ZV – Rámcový vzdělávací program pro základní vzdělávání, edu.cz, Prague, June 2023 (2024–03–05).

² In 2022, the number of people with both a Czech citizenship and solely Polish national identity (as declared) was estimated at almost 27 thousand. See: Obyvatelstvo podle národnosti. Sčítání 2021. *Český statistický úřad, 2022–01–13*.

local traditions, the residents of Cieszyn Silesia have a strong sense of a separate cultural and regional identity (see: Studnicki, 2015).

The current state of knowledge on the traditional accessories and culturally-based ludic behavioural patterns in Cieszyn Silesia encompasses few academic studies (Fryda, 1977; Grzegorzewska and Kaczurbina, 1978; Odoj, 1997, pp. 107–119; Jasińska, 1997, pp. 101–106; Marcol, 2008) and scientific works (e.g.: *200 razy Kolberg*, 2014) with different methodology, premises and research scope. Among them, the ethnographic monograph by Władysław Młynek (Młynek, 1979) stands out. At an earlier stage of research it was used to assess the state of preservation of traditional Cieszyn Silesian games in the memories of the oldest locals, residing on both sides of the border river Olza. The results confirm the atrophy of traditional patterns of ludic behaviours, especially these that originate in the regional ludic culture. This atrophy occurs in the whole Cieszyn Silesia (Szalbot, 2023, pp. 255–268). As in other regions (see: Klasińska, 2011, pp. 179–183; Burdyka, 2017, pp. 82–90), in Cieszyn Silesia traditional games are neither a visible component of everyday life nor of the organized cultural, sport or recreational events. This encourages discussion on finding solutions to reintroduce and popularize them.

Research methodology, process and obtained materials

The methodologically-discussed research project is complex and draws upon several currents. The studies fall into the category of urgent anthropology, since they serve to document a cultural legacy that is being forgotten (Posern-Zieliński, 1987, pp. 34–36). They are also a part of applied anthropology due to the educational connotations of the project and the intention to make use of the obtained knowledge to solve specific problems associated with shaping socio-cultural change (Ząbek, 2013, p. 13). Moreover, their evaluative nature puts them on a socio-pedagogical level.

The research in the form of surveys were conducted in 2022 and 2023 in Cieszyn Silesia. The surveys were taken by physical education teachers employed in Polish and Czech primary schools in the borderland. Prepared in both Polish and Czech language versions, they were printed and delivered to selected primary schools in the region³. The purpose of the study

³ The survey included primary schools in the following Cieszyn Silesian locations: on the Polish side – Cieszyn, Jaworzynka, Skoczów, Ustroń, Wiśla, and on the Czech side – Český Těšín, Frýdek-Místek, Frýdlant nad Ostravicí, Havířov, Jablunkov, Karviná,

was explained and the deadline for filling in the survey was set. In case of absent PE teachers, the surveys were kept for them in their respective offices and an employee was designated to pass them over. The teachers then browsed through the survey and decided whether to take it or refuse. Returning a completed form was synonymous with agreeing to use the provided information for research purposes. The survey headline stated the research purpose, the personal details of the author, the institution represented by the author as well as the estimated time needed to fill in the form. The survey collected the respondents' particulars and answers to 10 questions. The data on the teachers' year and place of birth, location, school level and number, length of time working in this profession and classes in their care was collected as well.

The survey questions were closed, semi-closed, and open. The issues raised included: the understanding of the notion of traditional games, their examples, the possible introduction of traditional games into higher education programs and their current presence/absence in school practices. The respondents answered whether they introduce exercises and forms of competition that are part of the cultural heritage of Czechia, Poland, or another country or games popular in Cieszyn Silesia in the past. They listed the props that help prepare such classes and evaluated them. They were also asked to name other forms of exercise they would like to introduce into their PE classes.

Physically taking the form was not always tantamount to returning it. Out of 106 surveys distributed, 61 were returned and filled in. Due to the method of filling them in, only 48 of them were coded to be analyzed. Collecting data via the method of surveys has revealed problems with this research technique (Babbie, 2004, pp. 287–288). The low percentage of returned surveys suggests that the author presents mostly the conclusions that stem from qualitative data. The quantitative data obtained has limited applications. The number of responses makes it difficult to settle detailed questions, but makes it possible to see significant tendencies.

The analysis involved 20 surveys from Polish teachers and 28 from Czech teachers. The research sample on the Czech side of Cieszyn Silesia encompassed 25 employees of Cieszyn primary schools and 3 teachers employed in Polish, Cieszyn-Silesian schools in the Czech Republic. Most of the respon-

Albrechtice, Ostrava, Stonava, Třinec, Třanovice, (here, to make the data anonymous, the school numbers and addresses were omitted).

dents were born in Cieszyn Silesia. They have experience in running PE lessons for younger classes – grades 1 through 3-4 – and older primary school students. The declared number of years spent teaching PE was 2-39, which gives the mean of 22.2 for the whole group.

The analysis of data obtained in the study was based on the method of content analysis. Thematic coding was applied. After the transcription of the collected material, the statements were ordered by category, depending on the content of the survey questions. The idea was to identify the similarities, differences, and frequency of repetitions in the respondents' statements.

The purpose of the study was to determine the knowledge of traditional games and the attitude towards them based on the research sample of Polish, Czech and Trans-Olza PE teachers treated as joint representatives of teachers employed in this borderland region. National self-identification and linguistic differences were taken note of, but were not a main key for the interpretation of results. The aim was to identify the needs of the representatives of this environment in order to prepare solutions to introduce traditional regional games – a common cultural legacy in the Polish-Czech borderland – into school practices.

The review of survey results

The most crucial conclusions from the analysis of responses given to the 10 survey questions are provided below in the order of placement in the form.

1. The teachers' definitions of traditional games show repetitiveness. The respondents answered that such games undergo an intergenerational transmission, they have their origin in the past and are preserved until the present: "that what survived", "games of people born earlier", "the ones that have been played for a long time", "known since the times of our grandfathers". They are fun-oriented activities, commonly practiced in a given environment and "known by everyone". They are mostly "cheap and simple", have a "physical, sporty" nature, and "children play them naturally, without adult interference". Some respondents notice they are part of a culture of a given region or community, have a historical, local nature and are a continuation of earlier games. "They are associated with our tradition and culture" and playing them equals "passing on traditions and certain traditional behaviours". The PE teachers enumerated many qualities that overlap with the criteria found in academic sources.

2. Respondents enumerated 3–10 names of traditional games each, in total 234 activities. However, not all entries fit the assumed definition. Among the traditional games listed by a highest number of respondents were: “*berek /tag/*”, “*ciuciubabka /blind’s man buff/*”, “*skakanie przez gumę /jumping over a rubber band/*”, “*dwa ognie /dodgeball/*” and “*w chowanego /hide-and-seek/*”. The examples of physical games accompanied by local folklore songs (e.g.: “*Godziniorz*”, “*Uciekej myszko do dziury!*”, “*Trzeciok*”, “*Jaworowi ludzie*”, “*Moja Ulijanko*”, “*Piekła placki*”, “*Rolnik sam w dolinie*”, “*Stoi różyczka*”) were named only by the employees of Polish schools in Czechia. It is worth mentioning that the game names were also written in the Cieszyn Silesian dialect (“*Godziniorz*”, “*Uciekej myszko do dziury!*”, “*Trzeciok*” – underlined by the author).
3. The purpose of the third question was to determine which games played during physical education classes were not “traditional” by the teachers’ standards. This also provided a list of other examples of playful exercises juxtaposed with the ones enumerated by the respondents earlier. The recorded cases of some games being at one point categorized as “traditional” and at other as “non-traditional” can mean that the respondents consider the distinction unimportant or find the classification difficult.
4. More than 75% of respondents does not recall ever analyzing (theoretical and/or analytical) notions associated with the use of traditional games in PE classes while in college⁴.
5. More than 70% of respondents confirmed that they implement in their PE lessons competitive forms that are examples of traditional games. However, most did not answer the question fully, failing to categorize the games into their respective heritage areas: of Czechia, Poland or another country. Several responses contained the names of traditional games never mentioned before, such as: “*palant*” /rounders/”, “*przeciąganie liny /tug-of-war/*” and “*chodzenie na szrudłach /walking on stilts/*”.
6. The majority of the respondents admitted their lack of knowledge of past, traditional Cieszyn Silesian games or the ones originating from the cultural traditions of the closest neighbours – Poland and Czechia. The question regarding the implementation of such games in PE les-

⁴ The differences between the college programmes for future physical education teachers in Poland and Czechia are not referred to at this point.

sons was met mostly with negative responses. The most common justification was the lack of knowledge, time or formal recommendations of such activities. Respondents claimed unfamiliarity with the subject and admitted to doubts regarding which games – even out of the examples given – can be considered cultural heritage of the Cieszyn Silesian borderland.

7. The answers to the seventh question have shown that 80% of respondents – professionally active PE teachers – have never been to workshops or other classes associated with the introduction of traditional games into school practices. Only few of them confirmed their participation in such courses, organized by the University of Physical Education in Warsaw or Jerzy Kukuczka Academy of Physical Education in Katowice.
8. An assumption was made that PE teachers' interest in implementing elements of traditional ludic forms into their class programs (and their knowledge) is also influenced by the familiarity with didactic materials that facilitate the task. Most respondents could not enumerate any examples. The rest listed several of the same publications. Polish PE teachers remembered the works of Roman Trzeźniowski, while Czech teachers recalled a book by Ferdinand Mazal⁵. Many of them pointed out that nowadays they would simply use the internet to obtain information on the subject.
9. More than 70% of teachers agreed with the statement that introducing traditional games associated with the regional culture into PE classes is a good idea. Some emphasised that the solution mostly works with the younger primary school students. No answers questioned the sense of such implementation.
10. The question about the teachers' own propositions for expanding their lessons by so far unused forms of activities was omitted by nearly half of the respondents. Others either had no opinion or marked the answer that their current curriculum is sufficient. Few listed exercises that require special resources or mostly English-named activities that

⁵ The respondents often gave only the last name of a given author. Most likely the works in question were: Mazal, F. 2007. *Hry a hraní pohledem ŠVP*. Olomouc: Vydalo nakladatelství Hanex and the books by Roman Trzeźniowski with the words for "game" in their titles (e.g.: Trzeźniowski, R. 1966. *Gry i zabawy ruchowe: podręcznik metodyczny dla nauczycieli, wychowawców i instruktorów*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo "Sport i Turystyka", 5th, supplemented edition.).

are promoted in the media and are familiar to the younger generations. None of them mentioned the possibility of using traditional games to enhance their lessons.

Solutions that could help PE teachers popularize traditional Cieszyn Silesian games

The conclusions of the previous chapter encourage discussion on finding solutions for helping teachers implement “small-scale sports” into PE classes while taking into account the conditions of the studied borderland region.

The teachers’ interest in traditional games and the positive approach of the majority towards introducing them into lessons shows the need for creating favourable conditions to deepen their knowledge on the subject and involve them in the popularization process. The options discussed below are based on the solutions found in expert literature and often already tested in practice, adapted to fit the Cieszyn Silesia region.

The first possibility is to apply the works of the Cieszyn ethnological centre – the unit of the Faculty of Arts and Educational Science of the University of Silesia in Katowice – in the study of the region and the ludic aspects of past and current cultures. The Institute of Culture Studies could organize a series of lectures for PE teachers, regarding the reintroduction of traditional games as well as the culture and history of Cieszyn Silesia, thus expanding their knowledge of the subject.

The next course of action would involve selecting the local, traditional games for reconstruction. Preparing programs for adapting the once popular Cieszyn Silesian games on the basis of the field research, available resources and assigning them understandable commentaries on the socio-cultural context would make it possible to recreate them and create audio-visual recordings of the course of the game with willing teachers.

Creating an electronic depository of regional instructional resources that record methods of organizing selected games is the third possibility. The materials could be used by all PE teachers in Cieszyn Silesia who attempt to introduce such games into their lessons. The platform could be successively developed by the teachers themselves and it can fulfil their need for easily accessible online teaching resources.

The last proposition involves including selected traditional game competitions in interschool sports competitions in the borderland area. Representatives of schools from the whole Cieszyn Silesia, both children and teenagers,

prepared by the PE teachers on the basis of the resources mentioned above, could participate in annual trans-border traditional game competitions.

The proposed solutions for the popularization of the disappearing forms of local ludic activities with the participation of PE teachers are not exhaustive. However, the four options given directly respond to the needs evident from repeated survey responses. Due to the linguistic conditions of Cieszyn Silesia, all resources should be prepared in both Polish and Czech. By designing the framework for the PE teachers' involvement in supplementing the standard school PE programs with regional games, the foundation for familiarizing the younger generations with various aspects of the past culture would be created, all in an attractive, ludic form. Moreover, a possibility effective only on a local level would open up – to create the fashion for learning native cultural traditions that correspond with the developmental and educational needs of the younger generations – and one that goes beyond the field of physical education.

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Reviewing Articles



**Intercultural competence in language education.
A reviewing article of a book by Freda Mishan
and Tamas Kiss: *Developing Intercultural Language
Materials*. New York 2024, Routledge, Taylor & Francis
Group, pp. 270, ISBN 978-10-3265-138-5**

In a modern world learning foreign languages, especially global ones such as English or Spanish, is a must – not only for work-related opportunities, but also for connecting with the world. However, a big part of every language is also the culture behind it, sometimes very different from one's own, which makes it difficult for one to understand some culture-specific behaviours and traditions. Therefore, when learning a language, getting to know its culture is just as important, yet this aspect of learning a language might sometimes be overlooked both by the teachers and the learners.

The publication *Developing Intercultural Language Materials* is included in Routledge's series *Research and Resources in Language Teaching* which aims to merge current research in language education with innovative classroom practices. It is published both in a traditional and digital form and comprises 270 pages divided into 4 parts (*From research to implications, From implications to application, From application to implementation, and From implementation to research*), conclusion, references and index.

The main objective of Part I is to explore the theoretical concepts of culture and intercultural competence as these notions are crucial for teachers working in an intercultural environment. 'It seeks to reach contemporary and practical conceptualizations that can be used in the pedagogical sections of the book' (Mishan and Kiss, 2024, p. 3). It consists of the *Introduction, Outline of the book, Intercultural competence in language teaching coursebooks, 'Localisation'*, and 3 sections: *Core concepts and influences, Analyzing intercultural materials, and Complex dynamic systems and intercultural learning*.

The authors argue that although multiculturalism is widespread, genuine intercultural understanding remains limited due to tensions and discrimination, making intercultural competence crucial. Yet, current language learning materials that foster it are scarce and often inadequate. Then the authors examine how language teaching coursebooks have evolved to include cultural contexts, noting that global coursebooks often fail to address local needs and may present culturally inappropriate or inaccurate worldviews. They then assess how effectively modern coursebooks follow Karen Risager's (2018, p. 219) guidelines to promote cultural representation while avoiding negative biases. In the next subpart, the authors explore the notion of localization, a practice that would seem to avoid abuses in the coursebooks explored in the previous section, along with its traps.

Section 1: Core concepts and influences outlines key concepts and influences on intercultural competence, tracing its history, unpacking the complex relationship between culture, language, and identity, and examining models of multiculturalism, interculturalism, and nationalism, alongside the impact of globalization and digitalization on education, before moving towards defining intercultural competence and the cognitive-affective factors shaping it.

In *Section 2: Analyzing intercultural materials* the authors analyze whether the concepts discussed above support the materials used in the language classroom and then describe the basic techniques a teacher may use to analyze and evaluate their materials in context of interculturalism. They then discuss different methodologies that may be used for such evaluation: content analysis, critical discourse analysis, and semiotic analysis.

Section 3: Complex dynamic systems and intercultural learning situates intercultural learning within the framework of complex dynamic systems. The authors first clarify the concept, outlining four system types: simple, complicated, complex, and chaotic, and then they examine the specific features of complex dynamic learning systems (Larsen-Freeman, 1997, pp. 141–165; 2012, pp. 202–214) and their relevance to intercultural learning. This discussion lays the foundation for the framework they propose for designing intercultural learning materials.

Part II serves as the practical core of the book, offering a 'toolkit' that translates the research explored in Part I into classroom practice. It guides teachers through cultural awareness-raising journey before introducing classroom activities for learners by offering them four sets of activities with a total of 50 different tasks, which together move step by step from critical awareness to classroom practice, equipping teachers with practical tools for

fostering intercultural competence. It concludes with principles for designing and adapting intercultural materials.

In my opinion, Part III is the most interesting, as it examines how intercultural activities provided in Part II are integrated within curricula of foreign language and cultural studies in different international contexts. Therefore, this part will be focused on the most in this article.

Mishan and Kiss (2024, pp. 160–161) point out that the way intercultural competence is integrated into the curriculum varies from country to country depending on factors such as its importance in national education curricula or teacher training. The authors cite the EU report noting that in Europe curricula often prioritize linguistic competence over intercultural skills, a tension also reflected in the author's international survey findings, even in multilingual and multicultural countries such as Pakistan or Singapore. However, as the authors point out that this is largely because students are assessed primarily on language proficiency which, at least in Europe, is most often based on CEFR (*Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*), and intercultural competence is not highly developed in the CEFR book, but only referred to briefly (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 31).

The authors highlight the difficulty of integrating intercultural communication into rigid curricula, noting its absence as a formal subject, the challenges of cross-disciplinary scope and assessment, and its reliance on individual learners' cognitive and affective growth. As a result, intercultural learning is often treated as a marginal addition, leading to inconsistent practices across levels and sectors of education.

To capture classroom realities, the authors conducted two international surveys (2020–2021) that revealed diverse practices in teaching and integrating intercultural skills, later illustrated through global case studies. Drawing on these findings alongside the theory from Part I and practice from Part II, they distinguished fourteen guiding principles for embedding intercultural competence into curricula.

The first principle is *Prepare*: it emphasises gradually building learners' intercultural awareness, starting with 'relatively undemanding activities in terms of personal investment' and progressing to more personalized, emotionally engaging tasks, while monitoring students' motivation and readiness. This kind of approach is crucial as it involves building up learners' trust and confidence. What is more, it also helps to prepare the learners for 'the realities of language use' (Tomlinson, 2013, p. 7).

The second principle, *Integrate intercultural learning*, is rather self-explanatory, as it is best to blend it with other language development goals or skills in the classroom. Mishan and Kiss (2024, p. 166) suggest either making intercultural learning the primary focus while other skills develop in the background or keeping it in the background so that learners can notice and reflect on aspects of intercultural communication. The next principle is to *Introduce cultural content* of the target language.

The fourth principle is *Start with the learners*, that means creating a foundation for developing new insights and understanding by drawing on learners' prior experiences and world knowledge, as it may vary from learner to learner.

The fifth principle, *Understand the context*, highlights the need for teachers to consider learners' sociocultural and educational backgrounds, expectations, motivations, and experiences to effectively integrate intercultural learning into the curriculum. It is also stressed by Tomlinson (2013, pp. 408, 421), as all materials should be culture-specific and developed with the learners in mind. However, understanding the context is not enough and teachers need to adapt methods and materials to the realities of their classrooms, ensuring relevance, safety, and meaningful learning rather than rigidity following preset approaches.

This is the essence of the sixth principle: *Be flexible*. This principle is widely recognized in all materials design, as the notion of flexibility is discussed widely by Tomlinson (2013, pp. 57, 421). As a teacher, one needs to ask oneself whether the materials one developed are 'flexible enough to serve more than one type of learning style, proficiency, maturity and interest'.

The seventh principle, *Be creative and develop learner's creativity*, underscores the importance of fostering creativity in both teachers and students as a means to design intercultural learning materials, reimagine perspectives, build connections, and navigate cultural divides. Tomlinson pointed out that 'creativity is at the heart of learning. But it is not usually at the heart of the education'. Therefore, this principle is very important.

The eighth principle, *Encourage translanguaging*, promotes allowing learners to draw on all their linguistic and semiotic resources to express identity and construct meaning. Building on this principle the next one, *Focus on process not product*, emphasizes that intercultural competence is an ongoing process of skills development and awareness-raising rather than the acquisition of fixed cultural knowledge, and is therefore better supported through formative assessment.

The value of activities without fixed answers is highlighted by the tenth principle, *Use open-ended tasks*, as they enable learners to co-construct knowledge, express diverse perspectives, and negotiate meaning with peers in ways that foster intercultural learning.

I believe that the eleventh principle is important also for teachers who do not teach in multicultural environments: *Create an environment based on openness and trust*. It stresses the need to establish a safe space where sensitive issues can be discussed openly, and students, abandoning their egocentric views, feel free to share their views without fear or ridicule.

The twelfth principle, *Address the affective, not only the cognitive*, emphasizes that developing intercultural competence requires attention to learners' emotions, attitudes, and trust, as these influence openness to otherness and meaningful engagement, with materials such as literature-based tasks helping to foster this affective dimension.

As not every student is able to travel, it is important to *Bring the world into the classroom* by using real-life materials, multimedia, online exchanges, and students' own experiences to broaden intercultural understanding.

The last, fourteenth principle, *Move learning beyond the classroom*, encourages extending intercultural learning through projects and digital resources that allow students to explore, research, and share ideas outside class, fostering autonomy, engagement, and deeper understanding.

After clarifying the above principles, the authors present selected vignettes showcasing a variety of approaches, strategies, and techniques used by practitioners to teach intercultural skills, organized by educational contexts – from primary and tertiary one to teacher training – and highlighting how principles, learner characteristics, curricula, and materials shape the integration of intercultural learning in real classroom settings. This section highlights that while intercultural competence is valued, its emphasis and assessment in language curricula vary widely, leading to a shortage of resources and reliance on motivated teachers to develop their own materials.

Part IV acts as both a conclusion and a new beginning, turning towards research on intercultural competence. The authors stress the importance of practitioner-led inquiry, especially action research, to explore how intercultural materials are used and experienced in classrooms. They outline research methods (e.g. observation, surveys, interviews, content and discourse analysis) and propose practical projects around themes such as materials in use, cultural sensitivity, critical pedagogy, learner-generated materials, and assessment of intercultural competence. This section positions teachers not

just as users of materials but as researchers who can shape and advance the field.

With this study, Mishan and Kiss make a significant contribution to the field of language education by addressing the problem of teaching intercultural competence, which, as they note, is often neglected in curricula and materials. Importantly, they combine theoretical discussion with a practical toolkit that supports the implementation of principles in the classroom, ultimately helping to prepare learners for interaction across cultures. Parts II and III will be of particular interest to all language teachers, whether or not they prepare their own materials, as they offer both a wide range of activities and clear guidance on how to implement teaching intercultural competence into teaching practice.

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