

**UNIVERSITATEA TEHNICĂ CLUJ-NAPOCA**  
**DEPARTAMENTUL DE SPECIALITATE CU PROFIL**  
**PSIHOPEDAGOGIC**

# **BULETIN**

# **ȘTIINȚIFIC**

**seria A \* Vol. XXVI**

**Fascicula**

**PEDAGOGIE • PSIHOLOGIE • METODICĂ**

**2026**

Buletinul Științific. Seria A. Fascicula  
Pedagogie • Psihologie • Didactică  
Vol. XXVI  
<https://dspp.utcluj.ro/buletin-stiintific.html>  
ISSN online: 3061-4058

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**BULETIN ȘTIINȚIFIC**  
**SERIA A**

**Fascicula Pedagogie-Psihologie-Metodică**  
**VOL. XXVI**

**BAIA MARE**

**2026**

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## **LOCUL ȘI ROLUL ORGANIZAȚIILOR NON-GUVERNAMENTALE ÎN DEZVOLTAREA COMPETENȚELOR TRANSVERSALE ALE ADULȚILOR PRIN INTERMEDIUL STRATEGIILOR SPECIFICE EDUCAȚIEI NON-FORMALE**

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### ***Abstract***

The article analyses the role and position of non-governmental organizations in the development of adults' transversal skills through strategies specific to non-formal education. The non-governmental sector, as part of civil society and distinct from the public and business sectors, includes NGOs, associations, foundations, and other non-profit organizations that address diverse social and community needs, promote common interests, provide services, disseminate information, and encourage citizens' involvement. Its importance is particularly evident in the context of the increasing complexity of contemporary societal challenges and the need for communities to become actively involved in addressing them. In adult education, non-governmental organizations contribute to lifelong learning through flexible, participatory programmes adapted to actual community needs, creating opportunities for the development of critical thinking, digital, civic, social, and professional skills. Community programmes, volunteering, courses, educational projects, and initiatives such as Erasmus+ facilitate the practical application of knowledge, collaboration, critical reflection, and civic participation, thereby contributing to the enhancement of adults' cultural and social capital. One of the main objectives of the article is to analyse the role of the community and of the educational structures within it in developing transversal skills among the adult population, with particular emphasis on the contribution of NGOs and on examples of good practice in Romania. The analysis highlights the fact that the development of adults' transversal skills cannot be confined exclusively to formal education, but requires the coherent mobilisation of community resources through non-formal education. Thus, NGOs and community-based educational programmes represent an important pillar in supporting lifelong learning, social inclusion, professional development, and responsible civic participation.

*Key-concepts: Adult education, Civil society, Lifelong learning, Non-governmental organizations, transferable skills.*

### **Introducere**

Este un lucru bine-cunoscut acela că problemele cu care se confruntă societatea contemporană sunt din ce în ce mai numeroase și complexe, însă rezolvarea lor nu mai poate reveni în sarcina exclusivă a autorităților statului. Cu toate acestea, multă lume are tendința de a le

blama pentru nerezolvarea unor probleme importante pentru comunitate, dar care ar putea fi soluționate cu un minim de implicare, chiar decătore cetățenii direct vizați. Este suficient să amintim, de exemplu, sor- tarea selectivă a deșeurilor menajere, curățarea trotuarului din fața propriei locuințe, administrarea responsabilă a resurselor existente, sprijinirea, după posibilități, a persoanelor aflate în dificultate, implicarea înacțiuni de voluntariat ș.a.m.d. În fapt, fiecare comunitate își cunoaște cel mai bine problemele cu care se confruntă, iar implicarea membrilor săi în rezolvarea acestora este cel puțin la fel de importantă ca cea a autorităților publice cu responsabilități în domeniu (W. scott și s. Gough, 2008, pp. 83–85).

### ***Caracteristici generale ale societății civile / sectorului non-guvernamental***

Privită dintr-o perspectivă generală, societatea reprezintă un ansamblu de instituții și organizații care determină viața socială dintr-o țară. Dimensiunile și ponderile fiecărui sector sunt variabile, de la o țară la alta sau de la o perioadă istorică la alta, fiind determinate de mai mulți factori (Coita et. al, 2022, p. 9). Potrivit autorilor citați, societatea este alcătuită din 3 sectoare majore:

- a. Sectorul public (guvernamental) - cuprinde statul și instituțiile sale, respectiv autoritățile publice centrale și locale, cu rol executiv, legislativ sau judecătoresc;
- b. **Sectorul de afaceri** - cuprinde acele organizații sau entități (în general, private) care urmăresc realizarea profitului și distribuirea sa către proprietari sub formă de dividende. Organizațiile din sectorul de afaceri poartă denumirea generică de firme, companii, întreprinderi sau corporații multinaționale;
- c. Sectorul non-profit – are un caracter privat și non-guvernamental, în sensul în care resursele utilizate, respectiv finanțarea lui se realizează din fonduri private, entitățile care îl compun sunt independente în raport cu autoritățile publice, în vreme ce persoanele care lucrează în acest domeniu nu sunt angajați ai statului.

Sectorul nonprofit răspunde unor nevoi sociale diverse, de la ajutorarea persoanelor aflate în nevoie la redistribuirea bunăstării, de la satisfacerea nevoilor sociale ale indivizilor la cele ale grupurilor, organizațiilor, comunităților și societății. Sectorul cuprinde organizațiile care se bazează în mare parte pe voluntariat cum ar fi ONG-urile- asociații, fundații și alte organizații ale societății civile, organizații ale economiei sociale- cooperative și organizații de ajutor reciproc precum și alte forme și tipuri de organizații ca, de exemplu, asociații de proprietari, syndicate, partide politice, unități de cult, biserici și organizații religioase, cluburi și asociații sportive, camere de comerț și organizații patronale, societăți agricole bazate pe asociere etc. (Coita et. al, 2022, p. 8).

Activitățile din acest sector desfășurate de entitățile și organizațiile neguvernamentale/ nonprofit din România urmăresc (Coita et. al., 2022, p. 12):

- Dezvoltarea comunităților, a coeziunii locuitorilor și a formelor de acțiune colectivă locale;

- Apărarea și promovarea interesului comun al membrilor.);
- Furnizarea de servicii de interes public acreditate de stat sau de instituțiile publice (educație, sănătate, supravegherea unei arii protejate) sau servicii de interes public care nu necesită acreditare (de tineret, culturale);
- Activități sportive, de entertainment, de loisir și de petrecere în mod plăcut a timpului liber;
- Furnizarea de servicii specializate către beneficiari plători sau neplătitori;
- Informarea cetățenilor, campanii sau activități de conștientizare (în engleză, *awareness*), cercetare, *advocacy* (adică pledoarie), supravegherea și monitorizarea instituțiilor și politicilor publice;
- Auto-susținerea sectorului nonprofit prin dezvoltarea capacității organizațiilor înseși de a se auto-susține, prin dezvoltarea de centre de resurse sau organizații-umbrelă;
- Finanțarea sectorului și organizațiilor nonprofit prin asigurarea cu resurse financiare necesare funcționării și derulării de proiecte și prin furnizarea diferitelor modalități de ajutor financiar pentru organizații și persoane (rețele de sprijin, burse, microcredite);
- Facilitarea accesului cetățenilor la servicii sau alte beneficii, caritate, ajutor umanitar etc.

Ca parte componentă a societății, Comunitatea reprezintă un grup structurat de oameni caracterizat de un spațiu comun. Cu toate acestea, comunitatea nu este doar locul în care trăiește și relaționează un grup de persoane; aceasta include scopuri, resurse, norme, credințe, experiențe comune și sentimentul de apartenență la grup, legăturile și relațiile economice, politice, sociale și culturale bazate pe încredere, sprijin reciproc ș.a.m.d.

Potrivit Nataliei Coroi (2024), comunitatea reprezintă un ansamblu dinamic care se formează atunci când se întâlnesc următoarele caracteristici la un grup de persoane:

- oamenii participă în comun la diferite practici sociale;
- membrii grupului depind unii de alții;
- persoanele iau decizii împreună;
- relațiile interindividuale angajează persoanele pe termen lung în demersul de creștere abundărilor comune.

Educația pentru construirea și dezvoltarea comunității vizează impactul pe care îl are școala sau alți agenți educaționali în dezvoltarea unor programe pentru educația adulților, sprijinul persoanelor aflate în dificultate, prin acțiuni comune, specifice centrelor de învățare (Benavot et.al., 2022). În acest context, Natalia Coroi (2024) propune o serie de Programe Comunitare a căror finalitate ar putea fi reprezentată de formarea și dezvoltarea competențelor transversale la diferitele categorii de populație:

- ❖ *Programe pentru copii și tineri:* Cursuri pe tema educației timpurii, Ateliere de stimulare a creativității, Activități extrașcolare (excursii, tabere etc.), Cluburi de vacanță, Schimburi interculturale, Activități de învățare și dezvoltare personală, Servicii caritabile;

- ❖ *Programe pentru adulți:* Continuarea studiilor, Evenimente speciale organizate pentru adulți cu diverse dizabilități (plantarea florilor, decorarea vaselor etc.), Alfabetizarea în domeniul noilor tehnologii informaționale, Voluntariatul în școli (sprijinirea elevilor cu dificultăți, atragerea de fonduri etc.), Includerea șomerilor în viața comunității;
- ❖ *Programe pentru familii:* Cursuri pe diverse teme, cum ar fi: educația părinților, sprijinirea familiilor cu dificultăți, activități specifice familiei, sesiuni de comunicări privind statutul familiei în actualitate, implicarea părinților în viața școlii ș.a.;
- ❖ *Programe pentru persoanele de vârstă a treia:* Integrarea în activități sociale utile, Implicarea în activitatea anumitor organizații (ca, de exemplu, cele cu profil medical religios, social, cultural etc.), Voluntariatul în diverse sectoare, domenii din viața comunității, Servicii caritabile, Activități recreative, de divertisment ș.a.;
- ❖ *Programe pentru comunitate, în ansamblul ei:* Parteneriate (între școală și instituțiile culturale, școală și biserică, școală și oamenii de afaceri), Emisiuni radio și TV (teme de interes local, regional, zonal).

Mariana Marinescu (2013) a realizat o analiză SWOT extrem de pertinentă a organizațiilor non-guvernamentale (ONG) și a vieții asociative din România, rezultând următoarele elemente:

*A. Puncte tari:*

- performanțe cel puțin satisfăcătoare ale ONG-urilor în implemen- tarea diverselor programe/proiecte;
- număr mare de ONG-uri cu activitate în diverse domenii;
- expertiză profesională bogată a mai multor lucrători din ONG;
- afilierea internațională a unor ONG-uri și participarea acestora la proiecte/programe comunitare;
- cooperarea foarte bună între diferite ONG-uri din țară și străinătate;
- implicarea unor persoane în rezolvarea problemelor comunității prin intermediul ONG-urilor;
- orientarea tinerilor către valorile europene.

*B. Puncte slabe:*

- capacitatea scăzută a unor ONG-uri de a rezolva o serie de probleme din domeniul lor de activitate;
- participarea civică și politică redusă a mai multor persoane;
- scăderea încrederii în instituțiile statului;
- percepția negativă asupra clasei politice;
- satisfacția redusă față de viața politică.

*C. Oportunități:*

- posibilitatea de a interveni și rezolva probleme din domeniul educației, culturii, socialului etc.;
- colaborarea dintre ONG-uri și autoritățile publice locale;
- sprijin în vederea consolidării integrării europene a României;

- îmbunătățirea accesului statului la fondurile europene.

*D. Amenințări:*

- nu toți tinerii percep utilitatea personală a asocierii;
- interes scăzut pentru asumarea responsabilității;
- monopolizarea fondurilor europene de către un număr relativ restrâns de ONG-uri.

Pentru o implicare cât mai eficientă a societății civile în realizarea educației non-formale, se impun a fi urmate câteva recomandări (Bontaș, 2001, OECD, 2023):

- ❖ elaborarea unor programe naționale și locale de acțiune concepute pe domenii de interes, având obiective specifice, acțiuni clare, rezultate măsurabile, termene exacte și responsabilități precise pentru fiecare persoană implicată;
- ❖ formarea unui corp de experți în atragerea de fonduri, susținerea de activități specifice educației non-formale, implementarea unor activități specifice etc.;
- ❖ crearea unei baze materiale, financiare și educative (clădiri, săli de conferințe, biblioteci etc.) în care să se poată desfășura activitățile specifice educației non-formale;

Ne putem da seama din cele expuse că societatea civilă, prin componentele sale, are un rol foarte important în realizarea atât a educației non-formale, cât și a cele informale. Cursurile adresate diferitelor categorii socio-profesionale, activitățile organizate, campaniile de sprijinire a celor aflați în dificultate etc. sunt doar câteva exemple de practici specifice educației non-formale menite să rezolve problemele punctuale cu care se confruntă comunitățile locale. Pe de altă parte, în cadrul societății civile, ONG-urile par a avea rolul cel mai important, acestea fiind structuri asociative liber consimțite între oameni uniți de aceleași valori și interese. În concluzie, suntem de părere că cea mai importantă schimbare vine de jos în sus și că cea mai eficientă modalitate de rezolvare a problemelor comunității o reprezintă implicarea activă și după posibilități a fiecărei persoane, respectiv participarea ei la viața asociativă a societății în care trăiește (Vaculíková et. al., 2024).

***Importanța organizațiilor non-guvernamentale în formarea competențelor transversale la adulți***

Referitor la necesitatea dezvoltării competențelor transversale la adulți, se pune problema structurilor ce ar avea ca responsabilități îndeplinirea acestui obiectiv (Biti, 2023). Educația formală ar putea juca un rol deosebit de important în acest sens, în condițiile în care, prin programele specifice de formare profesională continuă, școlile și universitățile ar putea contribui la dezvoltarea gândirii critice a adulților. Problema este că majoritatea indivizilor finalizează studiile formale cel târziu până pe la 25-30 de ani, urmând ca mai apoi educația lor permanentă să intre în responsabilitatea altor structuri cu atribuții în zona educației non-formale. Generic, aceste structuri constituie „comunitatea” și pot cuprinde diverse sectoare de activitate în care, formarea competențelor transversale la adulți să fie o necesitate (UNESCO, 2022). În cele ce urmează, vom încerca să realizăm o analiză a rolului comunității (și a structurilor educaționale care o compun) în dezvoltarea competențelor transversale la populația adultă (Ratiu et. al., 2023).

Una dintre cele mai importante componente ale procesului de formare a competențelor transversale la adulți prin Programe comunitare o reprezintă informarea și formarea, respectiv continuarea și completarea studiilor prin cursuri formale și non-formale. Un asemenea demers se poate realiza la nivelul comunității prin diferite forme organizatorice. Așa de exemplu, privite ca instituții de cultură generală, Universitățile populare se adresează tuturor persoanelor, nivelul și metodele cursurilor fiind adaptate posibilităților intelectuale ale auditoriului. Majoritatea acestor Universități sunt deținute și administrate de organizații și fundații private, funcționând ca structuri de interes public. Tot adulților li se adresează, în esență, Cursurile prin corespondență, Cursurile profesionale și Cursurile de vară. Tematica ce poate fi abordată în cadrul acestor Programe Comunitare este extrem de generoasă, opțiunea putând fi formulată după o minuțioasă analiză de nevoi prealabilă (Coroi, 2024).

La Nivelul Comisiei Europene, educația pentru dezvoltarea comunitară are în centru o serie de programe și activități adresate membrilor comunității, oferă șanse egale tuturor cetățenilor, îi aduce în centrul atenției pe toți actorii sociali și contribuie la creșterea calității vieții indivizilor. În acest context, unul dintre cele mai importante Programe Comunitare destinate formării competențelor transversale în rândul adulților este cel cunoscut sub marca „Erasmus+”. Pentru exercițiul financiar curent, programul își propune: îmbunătățirea învățării limbilor străine, creșterea gradului de alfabetizare a populației, ridicarea nivelului de atractivitate a științei, susținerea antreprenoriatului, consolidarea creativității și inovației ș.a. (European Commission, 2021). Se poate aprecia că toți cetățenii implicați în astfel de proiecte finanțate prin „Erasmus+” au putut dobândi o viziune care să le permită abordarea problemelor societății contemporane dintr-o perspectivă a diversității fundamentată pe raționamente argumentate critic și reflexiv (Câmpean et. al., 2024).

### ***Modele de bună practică în implementarea programelor comunitare de formare a competențelor transversale la adulți în România***

Cu privire la situația din România, există o multitudine de entități care au printre responsabilități dezvoltarea competențelor transversale în rândul adulților. Dintre acestea, un rol important revine organizațiilor non-guvernamentale care, prin intermediul unor programe comunitare specifice educației non-formale, pot aborda o serie de subiecte de larg interes pentru populația adultă. În acest context, una dintre cele mai importante organizații non-profit care acționează la nivelul comunității educaționale din țară este *Asociația pentru Educație și Formare „TopFormalis” din Oradea*. Aceasta s-a înființat în octombrie 2013, având ca misiune creșterea calității actului educațional și a serviciilor oferite în domeniu. Principalele obiective ale Asociației au fost următoarele: creșterea nivelului de pregătire școlară și profesională a elevilor și studenților; dezvoltarea competențelor științifice, metodice și psihopedagogice ale cadrelor didactice care predau în învățământul preuniversitar și superior; sprijinirea agenților educaționali (elevi, părinți, profesori) aflați în situații de criză educațională; promovarea învățării pe tot parcursul vieții,

inclusiv prin intermediul mediilor neconvenționale (e-learning, m-learning ș.a.), dezvoltarea managementului educațional; dezvoltarea unei comunități academice bazate pe valorile educației non-formale; implementarea unor activități de cercetare în domeniul educației; conceperea și managementul unor proiecte în domeniul educației (Blândul, 2022).

Potrivit celui mai recent Raport de Activitate al Asociației pentru Educație și Formare „TopFormalis” din Oradea publicat în septembrie 2025, cele mai importante Proiecte de formare a competențelor transversale desfășurate în intervalul 1 septembrie 2024 – 31 august 2025 la nivelul comunității academice locale și regionale au fost următoarele:

Proiectul „Școala altfel – Campionii!” ajuns la cea de-a X-a ediție a început în luna ianuarie 2025 la Oradea (România) și și-a propus recompensarea cu premii a celor mai reușite acțiuni organizate în cadrul Programelor „Școala altfel!” și „Școala Verde” implementate în anul școlar în curs. Grupul-țintă a fost reprezentat de cadre didactice care predau în învățământul preuniversitar din toate județele țării. În acest sens, au fost încheiate mai multe parteneriate cu Inspectoratele Școlare Județene, respectiv cu unele unități de învățământ din Alba, Bihor, Bistrița-Năsăud, Caraș-Severin, Cluj, Hunedoara Satu Mare, Sălaj și Suceava (România). Principala activitate care s-a desfășurat în cadrul acestui proiect a fost reprezentată de Concursul cu același nume. La acest Concurs au fost înregistrate 40 de activități extracurriculare desfășurate în cadrul Programelor „Școala altfel!” și „Școala verde”. În urma definitivării procesului de evaluare realizat de o comisie de specialiști de la Oradea (și în care s-a ținut cont de aspecte precum originalitatea activității, corectitudinea proiectării și realizării activității din punct de vedere metodic, relevanța documentelor justificative prezentate, impactul asupra grupului-țintă etc.) au fost acordate 9 premii, constând în carduri-cadou pentru cumpărături on-line în contravaloare de aproximativ 2100 lei. Decernarea tuturor premiilor a avut loc cu ocazia „Galei Premiilor TopFormalis”, ediția a X-a și a Simpozionului Național „Promovarea educației non-formale prin intermediul proiectelor educaționale și al activităților extracurriculare”. Rezultatele proiectului au fost reprezentate de numărul persoanelor implicate în realizarea celor 40 de activități înscrise în proiect, cantitatea și calitatea acestora, numărul de participanți la Simpozionul Național și la gala Premiilor TopFormalis, precum și Volumul comun de rezumate intitulat „Formal și non-formal în Științele Educației”.

Proiectul „Clubul Prietenilor TopFormalis” aflat la a IX-a ediție s-a desfășurat în perioada octombrie 2024 – mai 2025 și și-a propus creșterea calității actului educațional ca efect al unei mai bune pregătiri a cadrelor didactice, a elevilor și studenților în domeniul educației non-formale. Concret, proiectul și-a propus organizarea în fiecare lună în intervalul menționat a unor activități specifice educației non-formale pe diferite teme de interes general, iar grupul-țintă a fost reprezentat de elevi, studenți interesați în cariera didactică și profesori care predau în învățământul preuniversitar și superior și care doresc să se dezvolte atât în plan personal, cât și profesional.

Principalele activități desfășurate în cadrul acestui proiect au fost următoarele:

- Dincolo de expunere: există viață dincolo de muzeu (octombrie 2024);

- Viitorul pieței muncii și pregătirea tinerilor pentru meserii (noiembrie 2024);
- Educația pentru media literacy (decembrie 2024);
- Perspective ale IQ: explorând inteligența umană (ianuarie 2025);
- Strategii de formare a convingerilor morale (februarie 2025);
- Suportul Vital de Bază – acordarea primului ajutor medical în situații de urgență (martie 2025);
- Lecturiada-Cinci personaje în căutarea unor cititori (aprilie 2025);
- Omul, ca o carte deschisă – întâlnire cu Pr. Francisc Doboș (aprilie 2025);
- KAIZEN-filosofia îmbunătățirii continue (mai 2025);
- Conferința de diseminare a proiectului. Motivarea elevilor prin proiecte (mai 2025).

Rezultatele activității au fost reprezentate de participarea a 422 de cadre didactice ce au beneficiat on-site și on-line de formare profesională continuă, de suporturile de curs și celelalte materiale livrate (Tabelul 1), respectiv de cantitatea și calitatea ideilor vehiculate.

*Tabelul 1. Informații statistice cu privire la structura grupului de cadre didactice participante la acțiunile proiectului clubul prietenilor topformalis ediția a ix-a, 2024 / 2025*

| Data                               | S 1<br>(N=29) | W<br>(N=23) | WS<br>(N=26) | S 4<br>(N=21) | W<br>(N=36) | WS<br>(N=35) | 7<br>(N=189) | S 8<br>(N=34) | W<br>(N=29) |         |
|------------------------------------|---------------|-------------|--------------|---------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|-------------|---------|
| <b>Gen</b>                         |               |             |              |               |             |              |              |               |             |         |
| n                                  | Femini        | 9<br>3%     | 83<br>%      | 85<br>%       | 86<br>%     | 89<br>%      | 88<br>%      | 94<br>%       | 85<br>%     | 89<br>% |
| lin                                | Mascu         | 7<br>%      | 17<br>%      | 15<br>%       | 14<br>%     | 11<br>%      | 12<br>%      | 6%<br>%       | 15<br>%     | 11<br>% |
| <b>Mediul de proveniență</b>       |               |             |              |               |             |              |              |               |             |         |
|                                    | Urban         | 9<br>3%     | 87<br>%      | 88<br>%       | 86<br>%     | 92<br>%      | 83<br>%      | 83<br>%       | 79<br>%     | 89<br>% |
|                                    | Rural         | 7<br>%      | 13<br>%      | 12<br>%       | 14<br>%     | 8<br>%       | 17<br>%      | 17<br>%       | 21<br>%     | 11<br>% |
| <b>Ciclul școlar în care predă</b> |               |             |              |               |             |              |              |               |             |         |
| lar                                | Preșco        | 8<br>%      | 9%<br>%      | 7%<br>%       | -<br>%      | 9<br>%       | 5%<br>%      | 14<br>%       | 14<br>%     | 14<br>% |
|                                    | Primar        | 1<br>4%     | 22<br>%      | 31<br>%       | 24<br>%     | 33<br>%      | 45<br>%      | 18<br>%       | 32<br>%     | 24<br>% |
| zial                               | Gimna         | 2<br>4%     | 17<br>%      | 19<br>%       | 38<br>%     | 33<br>%      | 28<br>%      | 26<br>%       | 32<br>%     | 31<br>% |
|                                    | Liceal        | 5<br>1%     | 48<br>%      | 43<br>%       | 33<br>%     | 25<br>%      | 20<br>%      | 31<br>%       | 22<br>%     | 31<br>% |
| eal                                | Postlic       | 3<br>%      | 4%<br>%      | -<br>%        | 5<br>%      | -<br>%       | 2%<br>%      | -<br>%        | -<br>%      | -<br>%  |
| sitar                              | Univer        | -<br>%      | -<br>%       | -<br>%        | -<br>%      | -<br>%       | 10<br>%      | -<br>%        | -<br>%      | -<br>%  |

| Grad didactic obținut          |         |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |  |
|--------------------------------|---------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|--|
| ant                            | Debut   | 1  | -  | -  | -  | 3  | -  | 11 | 6  | 10 |  |
|                                |         | 0% |    |    |    | %  |    | %  | %  | %  |  |
| ivat                           | Definit | 8  | 9% | 12 | 14 | 9  | 14 | 11 | 12 | 3  |  |
|                                |         | %  |    | %  | %  | %  | %  | %  | %  | %  |  |
| II                             | Grad    | 1  | 17 | 8% | 9  | 14 | 11 | 6% | 12 | 3  |  |
|                                |         | 4% | %  |    | %  | %  | %  |    | %  | %  |  |
|                                | Grad I  | 6  | 74 | 76 | 71 | 72 | 75 | 61 | 70 | 84 |  |
|                                |         | 8% | %  | %  | %  | %  | %  | %  | %  | %  |  |
| at                             | Doctor  | -  | -  | 4% | 4  | 2  | -  | 11 | -  | -  |  |
|                                |         |    |    | %  | %  | %  |    | %  |    |    |  |
| Aria curriculară în care predă |         |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |  |
|                                | Limbă   | 3  | 26 | 26 | 14 | 22 | 20 | 23 | 20 | 24 |  |
|                                |         | 1% | %  | %  | %  | %  | %  | %  | %  | %  |  |
| atică                          | Matem   | 3  | 4% | 4% | 5  | 3  | 6% | 8% | 6  | 10 |  |
|                                |         | %  |    |    | %  | %  |    |    | %  | %  |  |
| soc.                           | Om și   | -  | 8% | 8% | 9  | 6  | 3% | 8% | 3  | 3  |  |
|                                |         |    |    |    | %  | %  |    |    | %  | %  |  |
|                                | Arte    | -  | -  | -  | -  | 3  | 6% | 1% | 3  | 7  |  |
|                                |         |    |    |    | %  | %  |    |    | %  | %  |  |
|                                | EFS     | 3  | 4% | 4% | 5  | 3  | 3% | 1% | 3  | 3  |  |
|                                |         | %  |    | %  | %  | %  |    |    | %  | %  |  |
| ogii                           | Tehno   | 1  | 13 | 8% | 14 | 8  | 3% | 6% | 6  | -  |  |
|                                |         | 0% | %  |    | %  | %  |    |    | %  |    |  |
| iere                           | Consil  | 2  | 17 | 8% | 14 | 11 | 9% | 4% | 9  | 3  |  |
|                                |         | 4% | %  |    | %  | %  |    |    | %  | %  |  |
| oare                           | Educat  | 8  | 9% | 7% | -  | 9  | 5% | 14 | 14 | 14 |  |
|                                |         | %  |    |    | %  | %  |    | %  | %  | %  |  |
| oare                           | Învățăt | 1  | 9% | 31 | 24 | 33 | 45 | 18 | 32 | 24 |  |
|                                |         | 4% | %  | %  | %  | %  | %  | %  | %  | %  |  |
|                                | Altele  | 7  | 10 | 4% | 15 | 2  | -  | 17 | 4  | 12 |  |
|                                |         | %  | %  | %  | %  | %  |    | %  | %  | %  |  |
| Vârsta                         |         |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |  |
| ani                            | Sub 25  | 8  | -  | 4% | -  | -  | 3% | 7% | 9  | -  |  |
|                                |         | %  |    |    |    |    |    |    | %  |    |  |
| ani                            | 26-35   | 3  | 4% | 4% | 5  | 8  | 9% | 9% | 6  | 10 |  |
|                                |         | 8% |    |    | %  | %  |    |    | %  | %  |  |
| ani                            | 36-45   | 4  | 39 | 42 | 43 | 39 | 31 | 26 | 20 | 24 |  |
|                                |         | 1% | %  | %  | %  | %  | %  | %  | %  | %  |  |
| ani                            | 46-55   | 1  | 48 | 50 | 43 | 42 | 48 | 42 | 50 | 58 |  |
|                                |         | 3% | %  | %  | %  | %  | %  | %  | %  | %  |  |
| 56                             | Peste   | -  | 9% | -  | 9  | 11 | 9% | 16 | 15 | 8  |  |
|                                |         |    |    | %  | %  | %  |    | %  | %  | %  |  |

**TOTAL = 422 participanți**

Structura grupului de 422 de cadre didactice participante la activitățile Asociației TopFormalis din Oradea evidențiază câteva tendințe semnificative în plan demografic, profesional și curricular (Tabelul 1). Din perspectiva distribuției pe gen, se remarcă o predominanță covârșitoare a cadrelor feminine (între 83% și 94% pe fiecare workshop), ceea ce confirmă feminizarea accentuată a profesiei didactice. În ceea ce privește mediul de proveniență, majoritatea participanților provin din urban (79–93%), cel rural fiind mai puțin reprezentat. Analiza pe cicluri școlare indică o distribuție echilibrată între gimnaziu și liceu (în medie între 24–48%), cu o participare semnificativă și din partea cadrelor de la nivelul primar (până la 45% în anumite serii), în timp ce preșcolarul și postlicealul sunt marginal reprezentate, iar mediul universitar apare izolat (10% într-un singur workshop). Din punct de vedere al gradului didactic, se conturează un profil al participanților cu un nivel ridicat de calificare profesională, peste două treimi deținând gradul I (61–84%), în timp ce debutanții și cadrele cu definitivat sunt slab reprezentați. Repartizarea pe arii curriculare este diversificată, dar cu ponderi mai mari în domeniul limbilor (20–31%), consilierii (4–24%) și învățământului primar, în timp ce matematică, arte și educație fizică se mențin la valori scăzute. Analiza vârstei confirmă prezența dominantă a cadrelor din intervalele 36–55 de ani (peste 70% cumulativ), în timp ce tinerii sub 25 de ani sau cadrele peste 56 de ani sunt slab reprezentate. În ansamblu, datele relevă o participare majoritar urbană, preponderent feminină, cu experiență consolidată (grad I și vârste medii), provenind în special din ciclurile gimnazial și liceal, fapt ce conturează profilul unui grup cu expertiză și stabilitate profesională, dar cu o reprezentare limitată a cadrelor debutante sau din mediul rural.

Analiza calitativă a motivațiilor exprimate de cadrele didactice participante la activitățile organizate de Asociația pentru Educație și Formare „TopFormalis” din Oradea relevă un profil complex în care dimensiunile dezvoltării personale și profesionale se împletesc cu interesele de natură practică și cotidiană. Principala motivație invocată este dorința de cunoaștere și perfecționare, exprimată prin accentul pus pe lărgirea ariei de cunoștințe și completarea formării continue, aspect ce corespunde culturii profesionale a unui corp didactic cu grad ridicat de calificare. În același timp, se observă un interes marcant pentru sănătate și implicațiile automedicației, participanții exprimându-și curiozitatea față de informațiile medicale de actualitate, dar și preocupări personale legate de propria stare de sănătate sau de rolurile sociale (părinți, profesori pentru elevi cu dizabilități). Tema workshopului, percepută ca relevantă, utilă și atractivă, alături de prestigiul mărcii TopFormalis și al formatorului, constituie factori suplimentari de atracție și credibilitate. Motivațiile individuale reflectă atât nevoia de a obține informații validate științific, cât și dorința de a dobândi competențe aplicabile în viața personală și profesională, precum acordarea primului ajutor sau adoptarea unor decizii informate privind tratamentele medicale. În concluzie, participarea la aceste activități este determinată de un ansamblu de factori intrinseci – curiozitate, dezvoltare personală, preocupare pentru starea de bine – și extrinseci – calitatea formatorului, relevanța temei, oportunitatea de perfecționare – ceea ce subliniază atât caracterul formativ, cât și cel pragmatic al implicării cadrelor didactice.

Casa Corpului didactic Gorj, cu sprijinul unor formatori ai Asociației pentru Educație și Formare „TopFormalis” din Oradea a organizat on-line în perioada 30 iunie-4 iulie 2025 Programul de Formare și Dezvoltare Profesională Continuă cu tema „*Tendențe și orientări în pedagogia contemporană. Surse de cunoaștere non-formale*”. Programul a fost inclus în Oferta Educațională a CCD Gorj avizată de Ministerul Educației din România. Scopul programului a fost reprezentat de optimizarea nivelului de pregătire a resurselor umane din învățământ prin implicarea profesorilor în activități de formare și dezvoltare profesională continuă și utilizarea unor surse de cunoaștere non-formale. La acest program au participat un număr de aproximativ 45 de profesori din mai multe județe ale țării (ca, de exemplu, Bihor, Bistrița-Năsăud, Caraș-Severin, Galați, Dâmbovița, Dolj,, Gorj, Suceava etc.), aceștia având posibilitatea de a-și forma o serie de competențe profesionale precum: Utilizarea adecvată a terminologiei de specialitate în contextul cunoașterii din surse non-formale în învățământ, analiza celor mai importante surse de cunoaștere neconvenționale ce pot fi utilizate de profesori în pregătirea și implementarea activităților curriculare și extracurriculare, identificarea strategiilor de diferențiere între sursele de cunoaștere valide și cele false din diversele domenii de activitate, argumentarea importanței deținerii de către profesori a unor competențe privind identificarea și valorificarea surselor de cunoaștere autentică în învățământ ș.a.m.d. .Programul a avut o durată de 24 de ore de formare (dintre care 12 ore de activități didactice sincrone, 10 ore activități de formare asincronă, respectiv două ore de evaluare sumativă). Programul de formare s-a încheiat cu o Școală de Vară, respectiv cu un Simpozion Național cu tema cursului propuse și organizate în parteneriat de cele două instituții menționate la Târgu Neamț. Cu acest prilej, toți participanții (deopotrivă formatori, cursanți sau alte cadre didactice interesate) au avut posibilitatea să prezinte modele de bună practică din experiența proprie în ceea ce privește utilizarea Resurselor Educaționale Deschise în contexte formale și non-formale.

## Concluzii

În concluzie, analiza cadrului teoretic și a datelor empirice prezentate evidențiază faptul că dezvoltarea competențelor transversale la adulți nu mai poate fi concepută exclusiv în interiorul sistemului formal de educație, ci presupune o mobilizare coerentă a resurselor comunitare prin intermediul educației non-formale (Blândul, 2015). În contextul vulnerabilităților semnalate la nivel național, programele comunitare devin instrumente strategice de reducere a analfabetismului funcțional, de consolidare a literației digitale, media, civice și economice și de susținere a incluziunii sociale. Inițiative precum cele derulate prin programul „Erasmus+” sau de către Asociația pentru Educație și Formare „TopFormalis” din Oradea, România, demonstrează că intervențiile non-formale, ancorate în nevoile reale ale comunității, pot genera contexte autentice de învățare, centrate pe reflecție critică, colaborare și aplicabilitate practică. Prin caracterul lor flexibil, participativ și contextualizat, aceste programe facilitează transferul competențelor în viața profesională și civică, contribuind la creșterea capitalului cultural și social al adulților. Totodată, ele stimulează motivația intrinsecă pentru învățarea pe tot parcursul vieții și reduc barierele

psihologice asociate reîntoarcerii la educație. Dimensiunea comunitară amplifică „efectul multiplu” al literației, generând impact nu doar la nivel individual, ci și familial și societal. Într-o societate caracterizată prin densitate informațională și transformări tehnologice accelerate, consolidarea parteneriatelor dintre sectorul public, mediul nonprofit și cel de afaceri devine esențială pentru formarea unor cetățeni autonomi, capabili de analiză critică și participare responsabilă. Prin urmare, programele comunitare de educație non-formală reprezintă un pilon fundamental în arhitectura dezvoltării competențelor transversale la adulți, constituind o condiție necesară pentru coeziune socială, competitivitate economică și sustenabilitate democratică (Vaculíková et.al, 2024).

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# **PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORKS FOR THE HIGH-APTITUDE STUDENTS: IMPLEMENTING INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATIONAL APPROACHES BASED ON CONTEMPORARY PSYCHOPEDAGOGICAL MODELS**

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## ***Abstract***

This paper addresses the imperative of implementing an individualized educational approach for highly able and gifted students, highlighting their status as an invaluable yet frequently underserved socio-educational resource. Utilizing a comprehensive theoretical framework, the study examines the evolution of intelligence paradigms, contrasting traditional psychometric measures with Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences and Daniel Goleman's model of emotional intelligence. Furthermore, the paper analyzes contemporary operational models, specifically J.S. Renzulli's Three-Ring Model of Giftedness and F. Mönks' Model of the Dynamics of Excellence in Adolescence, to emphasize the dynamic interplay between native potential, intrinsic motivation, creativity, and macro-environmental factors such as family, school, and peers.

Special attention is dedicated to identifying the unique cognitive and metacognitive characteristics of gifted children, alongside the psychobehavioral challenges arising from developmental heterochrony, including emotional hypersensitivity and social maladjustment. To mitigate problematic classroom behaviors and prevent academic disengagement, this study outlines evidence-based methodological benchmarks for educators. These strategies encompass qualitative curriculum enrichment, systematic differentiation, telescoping, and the creation of specialized peer groups to support holistic development. Ultimately, the paper argues that cultivating exceptional potential requires a rigorous, long-term national strategy, specialized teacher training, and a robust collaborative partnership between parents and formal educational institutions to ensure that every talented student can achieve self-actualization.

*Keywords: gifted students, individualized education, developmental heterochrony*

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## Introduction

According to estimates by the Gifted Edu Center, there are approximately 200,000 gifted children under the age of 15 in Romania—representing 6% of the total school-age population. They constitute an invaluable educational resource, endowed with above-average abilities that could enable them to develop into prominent figures in their fields of interest—future leaders or innovators capable of changing the course of society.

Social science experts explain that the term "gifted" is sometimes used inaccurately. In common parlance, a gifted child is understood to be one with above-average intelligence (IQ > 130) across all dimensions: fluid intelligence (logic), crystallized intelligence (linguistic), processing speed, and working memory.

Research over the last few decades has altered perceptions regarding gifted children. Psychologist Howard Gardner (1980, 1983) of Harvard University (USA) was the one who shattered stereotypes concerning the nature of intelligence, challenging the prevailing view that intelligence was unidimensional and measurable solely through IQ tests (such as the Stanford-Binet test). Gardner demonstrated that while these tests measure academic performance in linguistic, logical, and mathematical domains, intelligence is multifaceted and can manifest in other areas as well. His ideas—which quickly gained renown—are outlined in his "Theory of Multiple Intelligences" (Frames of Mind, 1983), in which he posits the existence of nine distinct forms of intelligence (1991, 1993, 2005): linguistic intelligence; logical-mathematical intelligence; musical/rhythmic intelligence, visual-spatial intelligence, naturalist intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligence, and existential intelligence. According to his theory, a person can be gifted with any of the listed types of intelligence without being exceptional in the others.

Another specialist, Daniel Goleman (1995), complements the previous theory by arguing that IQ is by no means the necessary and sufficient condition for social and professional success. Aspects related to emotional and relational intelligence are key factors for social success, complementing academic intelligence.

Therefore, to establish clear conceptual distinctions, we offer the following clarifications:

- "giftedness" is a restrictive concept, referring to individuals with high or above-average IQs (approximately the top 5% of the population);

- in line with new psycho-pedagogical theories, we prefer the more general terms "children with exceptional abilities," "children with high aptitudes," or "talented children." Indeed, the contemporary pedagogical terminology employs a multitude of terms to designate talent or exceptional aptitude displayed by a person at various ages: "capable of high performance," "child prodigy," "precocious," "gifted," and "genius."

- similarly, in Anglo-Saxon literature, the term "giftedness" is increasingly being replaced by "high ability" and "talent"—concepts that best align with contemporary theoretical models in psychology and pedagogy. The rationale for choosing these semantic distinctions is found in the following quote:

"The concepts of talent, excellence, high aptitudes, and above-average aptitudes have the advantage of designating the phenomenon of exceptionality as it manifests in any field of socially useful human endeavor. They capture the probabilistic, virtual dynamics of performance potentials that exceed the statistical average." (Crețu C., 2020)

### **Literature Review (Theoretical Foundation)**

Among the theoretical models explaining high aptitude, one model stands out as highly regarded by specialists worldwide: J.S. Renzulli's (1986) "Three-Ring Model of Giftedness." This model identifies the general and specific factors influencing high performance, concluding: "Gifted behavior consists of manifestations reflecting an interaction among three fundamental clusters of human traits: above-average general and/or specific aptitudes, high levels of task commitment, and high levels of creativity. Gifted and talented children possess—or are capable of developing—this composite of traits and applying them to any area of potential performance. Children who exhibit, or are capable of developing, an interaction among these three clusters of traits require a wide variety of educational opportunities and services not typically provided by current instructional programs" (Renzulli, 1986).

Building upon Renzulli's theory, the Dutch professor F. Mönks proposed the "Model of the Dynamics of Excellence in Adolescence." The proposed modifications include:

- task commitment was replaced by "motivation," a concept that—in addition to commitment—encompasses risk-taking, future perspective, anticipation, planning, and emotional factors;

- the criterion of above-average ability was replaced by "remarkable abilities in specific domains"; He asserts that giftedness involves aspects related to personality and environment, and that individual development during adolescence is interpreted holistically—as being determined by a dynamic network of biological, social, historical, and cultural circumstances—whereby any change to one component triggers a chain reaction affecting all others across multiple levels (see Fig. 1).

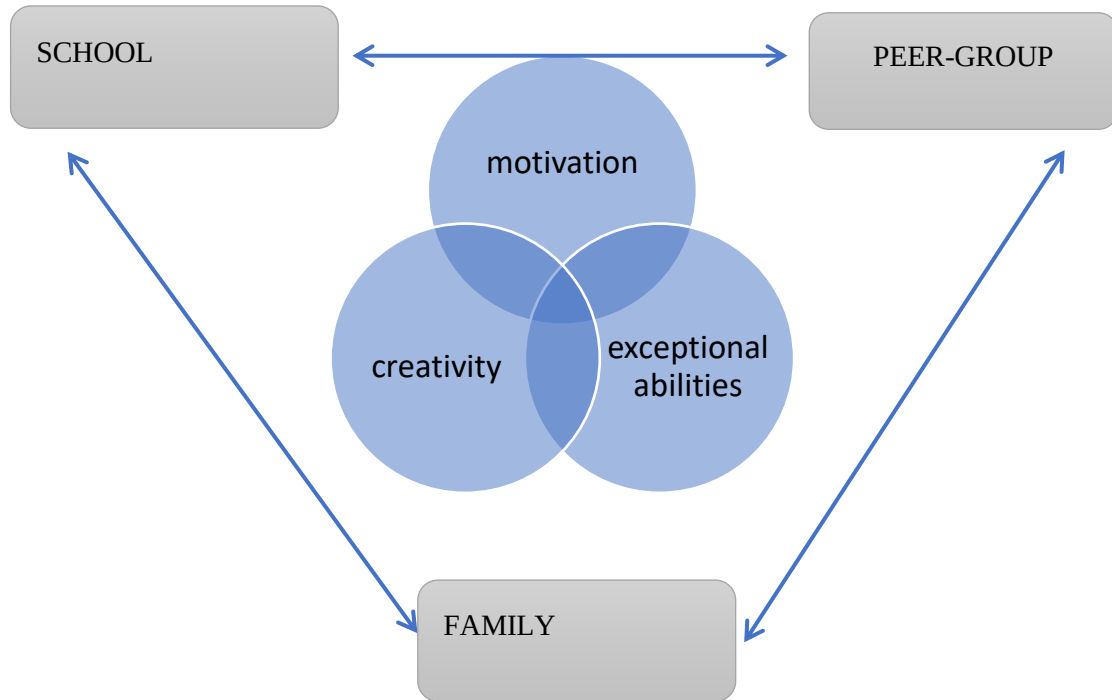


Figure 1. The model of the dynamics of excellence (F. Mönks)

Giftedness arises at the intersection of native potential, the child's intrinsic motivation (the engine that propels them to achieve their goals) and creativity (generated by relationships with children who have the same abilities). Only when the three factors coexist, then we can talk about giftedness leading to performance. Among the main factors that stimulate the full manifestation of children's intellectual potential are: the family (primary socialization framework), school and children of the same age. These factors make up the social environment in which children develop, being of crucial importance in achieving individual success.

### **The Role of Education and Educators in Developing the Potential of Students with Exceptional Abilities**

We will refer to the educational factor, out of the desire to raise awareness among teachers of the need to identify and support children with high abilities. If the school wants to be truly inclusive, a "school for all", we must all be aware that these children represent students with special educational needs. They can only evolve through the effort and involvement of teachers, who must prepare for them an adapted educational path that stimulates their development, in accordance with their potential and talents.

Currently, there are lists of typical characteristics of gifted children in most publications on giftedness (for example in Davis, Rimm, 1998; Davis, Rimm, Siegle, 2013; Porter, 1999; Leyden, 1985, Clark, 2013; Webb, 2002). These can be useful for teachers to carry out the diagnostic process and thus identify children with superior abilities: According to the study carried out at the European Union level (2016, p. 13) the intellectual characteristics that denote superior intelligence include:

- “Verbal competence: gifted children use an advanced vocabulary from the earliest years. They present a fluent, descriptive oral language, early mastery of the phonetic code and grammar. They use words or expressions from other languages assimilated alongside their mother tongue since preschool age.

- The power of abstraction, conceptualization, generalization: together with high creativity, this ability helps children produce original products and ideas. Children love to play with words, they enjoy word puzzles and science experiments.

- Metacognitive skills: Gifted children have their own knowledge about when and how to use learning or problem-solving strategies. Metacognitive skills help children plan, monitor and evaluate their thinking. They often use more advanced learning styles than their peers.

- Critical thinking: Gifted children tend to challenge teachers, adults, or “experts.” They are skeptical of the information they receive out of the box and seek out additional information.

- Early reading skills: Most highly intelligent children are interested in letters and numbers. Some experts (e.g., R. J. Sternberg) suggest that the ability to read before a child is four years old is a sign of exceptional giftedness.

- Quick and accurate memory: Gifted children are brilliant observers and have a keen eye for detail. They prefer to memorize logically, based on understanding.

- Abundance of advanced information on many subjects: Gifted children have deep knowledge in the subjects they are interested in. They easily recall information and assimilate an impressive amount of knowledge, which can make them experts in their fields of interest. On the other hand, they may fail in subjects that they do not find compelling.”

To these general characteristics, there are added the particular ones, specific to each child, which reflect his/her uniqueness.

Specialists warn that sometimes, children with superior abilities can represent a challenge for teachers. "To have the intelligence of an adult and the feelings of a child combined in a child's body means to experience certain difficulties," said Leta Stetter Hollingworth, the American psychologist who pioneered the study of giftedness, in 1942.

Winebrenner (2001) associates different qualities with problems that they can generate in the relationship with the teacher:

*Table 1. Problematic behavior examples of gifted students according to Winebrenner (2001)*

| <b>General characteristic</b>                                                    | <b>Problematic behavior examples</b>                                                                                                                                                                 |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Fast and high-quality learning process</b>                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- impatience;</li> <li>- nervousness towards the slower tempo of classmates;</li> <li>- dislike for repetitive exercises</li> </ul>                           |
| <b>Critical thinking, abstract conceptualization, high generalization skills</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- corrects the teacher;</li> <li>- challenges the rules;</li> <li>- defends their beliefs;</li> </ul>                                                         |
| <b>Creativity</b>                                                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- cannot stand routine and repetitive tasks, which require the application of algorithms;</li> <li>- refuses to follow the teacher's instructions;</li> </ul> |
| <b>Advanced cognitive processes</b>                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- prefers the company of adults;</li> <li>- are rejected by peers;</li> </ul>                                                                                 |
| <b>Curiosity</b>                                                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- interrupts the teacher often;</li> <li>- needs to be stimulated by new activities;</li> </ul>                                                               |
| <b>Perfectionism</b>                                                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- stubbornness;</li> <li>- lack of tolerance for imperfections;</li> <li>- gets discouraged when criticized;</li> <li>- overly sensitive;</li> </ul>          |

We can isolate three major psychobehavioral problems specific to gifted children and young people, direct effects of the heterochrony of development, described by Wallace (cited by Crețu, C., 1997):

- the feeling of being different from peers, through ideas in a certain field, through interests developed more deeply, more varied, more expressively;
- the burden of high sensitivity (“gifted children have extra survival problems, precisely because they are exceptional”);
- advancing mental levels for age, premature intellectuality are not accompanied by the same emotional and physiological precocity;

However, gifted children do not constitute a homogeneous population group. We cannot speak of a unique psychological profile in the case of gifted children, this being even risky. Only through adequate knowledge and through an examination of the most relevant differential characteristics, can the child be offered an adapted and individualized education.

Education is the central factor of development, the one that will stimulate the development of native potentialities and organize environmental influences to create a valuable personality for society. And the agents of formal education, the people specialized in education, are responsible for the quality and adequacy of the educational act to the individual and age peculiarities of the learners.

### **Highlights for teachers**

The duty of the teacher towards each child in the class is to offer him/her an individualized development path, which will allow him/her to reach his/her maximum potential and to value his/her uniqueness.

Given that we have gifted children in the classroom, it is imperative that we make efforts to adapt to their needs and particularities. Several effective strategies, tested globally, represent true models of good practices, providing methodological benchmarks for teachers:

- adjusting the curriculum for gifted students - will include both qualitative and quantitative modification of all parts of the educational program. Enriching the curriculum ("enriched curriculum") means qualitative (quantitative) modification of specific parts (content, process, product, environment, assessment). These modifications will respond to the needs of the gifted student. General characteristics of curriculum adjustment include (Davis, Rimm & Siegle 2011):

- Challenge - cognitive targets at a higher level;
- Choice - possibility of creative problem solving;
- Interest – offering interesting and motivating tasks;
- Engagement – supported by appropriate teaching methods;

- differentiation and individualization – teachers should design tasks appropriate to students' interests and talents, allowing for active learning and stimulating different learning styles. Gifted students need to be challenged, involved in decision-making, given projects that stimulate their interest and motivate them;

- telescoping – the ability to advance faster than their peers, for example, to condense two years into one. The mental age of gifted children can be 1-2 years older than their peers, and as they grow, the gap can reach 6-7 years. By forcing a child with superior abilities to follow the class level, we condemn them to boredom and disinterest.

- stimulation of cooperation – gifted students should be included in learning teams with typical students, in order to stimulate the development of social skills and a harmonious personality;

- creating groups of gifted students, at the school level or at the local level. The opportunity for them to meet other children like them will help them to balance emotionally and stimulate them

intellectually. In these groups, a curriculum can be adopted to achieve excellence, preparation for olympiads and competitions, projects, thematic circles, etc.

- valorization – teachers must provide them with opportunities to contribute to the success of lessons, to bring information from their field of interest, to present their projects.

- holistic development – if a student has a talent or an inclination, it is not necessary for them to excel in all areas. Remember that it is not enough to stimulate the cognitive development of students, we must develop their personality harmoniously. A good counter-example is that of students with high academic performance, but who are not emotionally balanced or are not accepted by their peers, situations that can negatively influence their school results.

## Conclusions

When we use the term “gifted” we refer to above-average intellectual abilities. Recent research shows that high, superior abilities can also manifest themselves on other levels, with people having multiple intelligences or “talents” in areas such as sports, arts, social, etc.

Children capable of high performance, gifted or talented need a stimulating educational environment and competent people to value their abilities. They need quality education, adapted to their particularities and interests, an adjusted curriculum and opportunities to test their abilities (such as projects or competitions).

At a societal level, it is necessary to establish a long-term strategy and allocate resources, to train competent teachers, to ensure that these talents are identified and valued.

It is said that it takes a whole village to raise a child. In the case of children gifted with exceptional talents, the greatest responsibility lies with parents and teachers, who must collaborate to give them the chance to reach their full potential.

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## TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVE TEACHING APPROACH FOR FRENCH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE: DIFFERENTIATION TO ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION

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### **Abstract**

This article explores an inclusive approach to teaching French as a Foreign Language (FLE), with particular attention to learners experiencing academic difficulties and, more specifically, to students with dyslexia. Drawing on research on inclusive education, differentiated instruction, scaffolding, and learner participation, the study examines how pedagogical differentiation can contribute to reducing barriers to learning and fostering more active engagement in the FLE classroom. Rather than conceptualising learning difficulties exclusively in terms of individual deficits, the article adopts a contextual perspective that considers the interaction between learners' needs, instructional practices, classroom environments, and access to learning opportunities. Particular attention is given to the adaptation of tasks, multimodal input, structured support, flexible grouping, and progressive scaffolding as strategies for facilitating participation and learner autonomy. The methodological approach combines a review of relevant theoretical perspectives with pedagogical observations and illustrative examples drawn from the teaching of French as a foreign language. The findings suggest that differentiated instruction can enhance accessibility, confidence, and participation while benefiting the learning process as a whole. The article argues that inclusive FLE teaching requires a shift from standardised instruction towards flexible pedagogical practices capable of responding to learner diversity without lowering academic expectations.

*Keywords: inclusive education; French as a Foreign Language (FLE); differentiated instruction; dyslexia; scaffolding; learner participation*

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## Introduction

The present study is situated within the broader paradigm shift towards inclusive education and the growing recognition of learner diversity as a central concern of contemporary educational policy and practice. Its rationale rests on three main considerations. First, inclusive education has become an increasingly prominent and rapidly evolving field of research, particularly in response to international educational frameworks and policy initiatives promoted by UNESCO and other major institutional actors (UNESCO, 1994, 2020). The growing emphasis on equity, accessibility, participation, and equal educational opportunities calls for a critical reconsideration of established pedagogical practices, including those employed in foreign language education.

Second, there is a pressing need to develop pedagogically grounded and practically applicable tools that can support teachers in addressing the diverse needs of learners with special educational needs (SEN) in the French as a Foreign Language (FLE) classroom. Teachers are increasingly confronted with heterogeneous learning profiles, which require them to reconsider conventional approaches to instruction, classroom interaction, task design, assessment, and learner support. In this context, inclusive education cannot be reduced to the physical integration of learners with SEN into mainstream classrooms; rather, it entails the systematic removal of barriers to learning and participation and the creation of learning environments in which all learners can meaningfully engage and progress.

Third, despite the growing body of research on inclusive education, comparatively limited attention has been devoted to the specific pedagogical strategies, techniques, and instructional approaches that can be effectively implemented in FLE classrooms characterized by learner diversity. This gap is particularly significant given the specific cognitive, linguistic, communicative, and affective demands associated with foreign language learning.

Against this background, the present study seeks to contribute to the ongoing debate on inclusive language education by examining the pedagogical conditions and practices that may facilitate the effective inclusion of learners with SEN in FLE contexts. At a time when educational reforms increasingly place inclusion, equity, and learner participation at the centre of educational agendas, identifying and critically examining pedagogical approaches capable of accommodating diverse learning profiles is of particular relevance. The study therefore focuses on inclusive FLE pedagogy, investigating the extent to which differentiated instruction, multimodal learning opportunities, adaptive teaching practices, and diversified forms of learner participation can contribute to more accessible, equitable, and pedagogically responsive foreign language education.

## Literature Review (Theoretical foundation)

### *Learners Experiencing Academic Difficulties: From a Deficit-Oriented Perspective to an Inclusive Approach*

Within the broader framework of inclusive education, the present study deliberately focuses on learners experiencing academic difficulties rather than exclusively on learners with disabilities. This distinction is theoretically significant, as academic difficulty cannot be reduced to disability, nor should it be understood solely as an individual deficit. Contemporary approaches to inclusive

education increasingly emphasize the interaction between learner characteristics and the barriers generated by educational environments, curricula, instructional practices, and assessment procedures. From this perspective, inclusion is concerned not only with whom learners are, but also with the extent to which educational systems enable them to access, participate in, and benefit from learning. *The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education*, for instance, places learner participation at the centre of inclusive education, highlighting the importance of learners' meaningful socio-emotional participation in educational settings.

The notion of *academic difficulty* remains deeply embedded in the everyday vocabulary of teachers, parents, and learners. In educational practice, it generally refers to a persistent discrepancy between the learner's current performance and the expectations established by the curriculum. However, such a discrepancy should not necessarily be interpreted as evidence of an intrinsic deficiency. The *social model of disability*, developed initially in disability studies and subsequently influential in inclusive education, has contributed to shifting attention from individual impairments towards the environmental and institutional barriers that restrict participation (Oliver, 1990). Although the present study does not equate academic difficulties with disability, this theoretical shift is particularly relevant because it invites us to question whether difficulties experienced by learners are partly produced or intensified by the organization of teaching itself.

This interactional understanding is consistent with the broader shift from an individual or medical model of educational difficulty towards a social and pedagogical model of inclusion. Rather than asking exclusively what is "wrong" with the learner, inclusive pedagogy raises a different question: what barriers within the learning environment may prevent the learner from accessing and participating in the learning process? This conceptual shift has important implications for foreign language teaching, since difficulties may be intensified when instructional practices rely predominantly on a single mode of presentation, a uniform pace of learning, extensive written processing, or narrowly defined forms of assessment.

The concept of *learner variability* provides an important theoretical basis for such an approach. Contemporary educational research increasingly challenges the assumption that learners constitute a homogeneous group who can be effectively taught through a single instructional pathway. Tomlinson (2014), in her work on differentiated instruction (*The differentiated classroom: Responding to the needs of all learners*), emphasizes the importance of adapting content, process, product, and learning environment in response to differences in learners' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. In the context of FLE, this means that the same communicative objective may be approached through different tasks, levels of scaffolding, interactional arrangements, or modes of linguistic production: "This may include timelines, rubrics, carefully delineated product assignments, varied working arrangements in the classroom, multiple resources, partnerships with instructional specialists, or small-group reteaching or extension". (Tomlinson, 2014: 33)

Multiple means of representation may involve presenting linguistic input through written texts, audio recordings, visual supports, diagrams, subtitles, demonstrations, or multimodal

resources. Multiple means of action and expression may allow learners to demonstrate their linguistic competence through different modalities, including oral production, written production, visual representations, digital tools, or collaborative tasks. The concept of *scaffolding*, initially theorized by Wood, Bruner, & Ross (1976) and grounded in the sociocultural perspective associated with Vygotsky (1978), provides a further theoretical foundation for inclusive language teaching: "More often than not, it involves a kind of «scaffolding» process that enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal which would be beyond his unassisted efforts. This scaffolding consists essentially of the adult «controlling» those elements of the task that are initially beyond the learner's capacity, thus permitting him to concentrate upon and complete only those elements that are within his range of competence." (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976: 90)

Learning occurs most effectively when learners receive appropriate temporary support that enables them to accomplish tasks beyond their current level of independent performance. In an FLE classroom, scaffolding may include modelling, explicit instructions, visual organizers, lexical banks, sentence starters, guided questions, partially completed examples, peer support, or additional processing time. Importantly, such support should be gradually withdrawn as learners develop greater independence..

This perspective is particularly pertinent to learners experiencing specific learning difficulties, including dyslexia. Historically, dyslexia has often been conceptualized through a deficit-based lens, with emphasis placed on the learner's difficulties in reading and written language. "The Everyman definition calls it a reading disorder in which people jumble letters, confusing dog with god, say, or box with pox." (Morris et al., 2002: 55). The historical account of dyslexia begins with W. Pringle Morgan's 1896 description of a young learner who experienced severe reading difficulties despite apparently preserved intellectual abilities. The INSERM expert report subsequently described Morgan's 1896 case as the first reported example of what would later be termed developmental dyslexia (INSERM, 2007). This historical development is important because it contributed to distinguishing specific difficulties in reading from generalized intellectual impairment. Let's take the following text as an example:

« Samedi matin, Léa est allée au marché avec sa **mère**. Elles ont acheté des pommes, du **pain** et un petit **gâteau** pour l'anniversaire de son **frère**. En rentrant à la maison, Léa a rencontré son voisin qui promenait son **chien** dans le parc. »

*Possible dyslexic reading and interpretation*

A learner with dyslexia might produce a reading such as:

« Samedi matin, Léa est allé au marché avec son **père**. Ils ont acheté des pommes, du **pin** et un petit **château** pour l'anniversaire de sa **sœur**. En retournant à la maison, Léa a rencontré son chien.

The following example is illustrative rather than diagnostic and should not be taken as representative of all dyslexic reading profiles:

Table 1.

| <i>Correct form</i>    | <i>Possible erroneous form</i> | <i>Type of error</i>                                | <i>Semantic consequence</i>                                                                                    |
|------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>sa mère</b>         | <i>son père</i>                | lexical substitution                                | The family relationship is changed: <i>mother</i> → <i>father</i> .                                            |
| <b>elles</b>           | <i>ils</i>                     | grammatical/gender confusion                        | The feminine plural subject is replaced by a masculine plural form.                                            |
| <b>du pain</b>         | <i>du pin</i>                  | phonological/orthographic confusion                 | <i>pain</i> (“bread”) is replaced by <i>pin</i> (“pine tree”).                                                 |
| <b>un petit gâteau</b> | <i>un petit château</i>        | graphemic/lexical substitution                      | <i>gâteau</i> (“cake”) becomes <i>château</i> (“castle”), changing the meaning considerably.                   |
| <b>son frère</b>       | <i>sa sœur</i>                 | lexical substitution                                | <i>brother</i> becomes <i>sister</i> , modifying the family context.                                           |
| <b>en rentrant</b>     | <i>en retournant</i>           | lexical substitution<br>/ paraphrastic substitution | The action is reformulated, slightly altering the narrative movement.                                          |
| <b>son chien</b>       | <i>son chat</i>                | lexical substitution                                | <i>dog</i> becomes <i>cat</i> , changing an important detail of the scene.                                     |
| <b>promenait</b>       | <i>promène</i>                 | tense/aspect alteration                             | The imperfect ( <i>was walking</i> ) becomes the present ( <i>walks</i> ), modifying the temporal perspective. |

The important point for a study of dyslexia in French is that a reading difficulty may ultimately interfere with text comprehension. The learner may decode some words inaccurately and subsequently construct a representation of the narrative that differs from the original. The educational significance of dyslexia becomes even more apparent in the context of foreign language learning. Difficulties affecting phonological processing, decoding, spelling, reading fluency, working memory, or the automatization of linguistic patterns may create additional obstacles when learners encounter a new phonological, orthographic, and grammatical system. Nevertheless, these difficulties should not be interpreted as an inability to learn a foreign language. Rather, they call for the reconsideration of instructional design, pacing, input modalities, task demands, and assessment procedures. In this respect, inclusive FLE pedagogy should seek to preserve the same fundamental learning objectives while diversifying the pathways through which learners can reach them. Lexical dyslexia “impairs the visual recognition of the forms involved in reading irregular words,” whereas phonological dyslexia “impairs the development of alphabetic

strategies and, consequently, the ability to read and spell unfamiliar words” (Perradeau, 2006: 130).

Young people experiencing this difficulty encounter significant challenges when faced with a text that they are required to decode. Since dyslexia is associated with difficulties in specific cognitive and linguistic processes involved in reading and written language, it may result in cognitive difficulties that are closely linked to academic failure and, subsequently, to difficulties in social integration. Dyslexia interferes with the acquisition of reading skills, but it is also closely associated with dysorthography, namely difficulties in written transcription and spelling.

### Results

Dyslexic disorders are diverse and may be classified into several categories:

a) *Dyslexic difficulties at the decoding level- these difficulties concern the accurate and efficient conversion of written symbols into linguistic units.*

- Auditory/phonological errors: confusion between or omission of phonologically similar sounds, such as /t/-/d/, /k/-/g/, /f/-/v/, etc. Ex: *table/ dable; gare/care; fille/ ville* etc.
- Visual/orthographic errors: confusion between visually similar or reversely oriented graphemes, such as b/p, b/d, u/n, m/n, E/F, G/C. Ex. *doigt/ boigt; mon/ nom; peur/ beur* etc.
- Syllabic errors: inversions, omissions or transpositions within syllables, such as ul/lu, pra/par. Ex. *parler / rapler ; pluie/ puile* etc.
- Letter and grapheme omissions or additions: letters, digraphs or syllabic units may be omitted, added or duplicated, particularly in longer or unfamiliar words.
- Sequencing errors: difficulties maintaining the correct order of letters, graphemes or syllables within a word.
- Word substitutions: replacement of the target word with a visually or phonologically similar word. Ex. *maison / maman; chat/ chaud; porte / poste; mer / mère* etc.
- Difficulty decoding unfamiliar words: particular difficulty may arise when the learner encounters new lexical items that cannot be recognized immediately through visual memory. Ex. *incompréhensible* – leght + morphological complexity.

b) *Difficulties affecting reading fluency*

- Slow reading rate: the learner reads significantly more slowly than expected for their age or proficiency level.
- Hesitations and frequent pauses: reading may be interrupted by prolonged attempts to identify or decode words.
- Laborious and fragmented reading: the learner may read word by word or syllable by syllable rather than in larger meaningful units.

c) *Lexical difficulties*

- Difficulty recognizing words automatically: familiar words may need to be decoded repeatedly rather than recognized instantly.

- Confusion between visually or phonologically similar words: for example, *pain/pin*, *beau/boa*, or *mer/mère*.
- Difficulty accessing lexical meaning: the learner may decode a word but experience difficulty rapidly connecting its written form to its meaning.
- Difficulty acquiring and retaining new vocabulary: this may be particularly apparent in foreign-language learning.

d) *Difficulties affecting reading comprehension*

- Difficulty identifying the main idea of a text.
- Difficulty establishing relationships between sentences and integrating information across the text.
- Difficulty making inferences: the learner may understand individual words or sentences but struggle to derive information that is implicit.
- Difficulty maintaining information in working memory: previously read information may be forgotten before it can be integrated with subsequent information.
- Difficulty distinguishing essential from secondary information.
- Difficulty constructing a coherent mental representation of the text.

e) *Morphosyntactic difficulties*

The learner may experience difficulties in processing grammatical information during reading, including:

- confusion between grammatical forms- Ex. Les enfants *jouent* dans le jardin. / Les enfants *joue* dans le jardin. (orthographically distinct, but phonologically barely perceptible);
- difficulty identifying verb tenses – Ex. *Je suis allée* au supermarché / *J'allais* au supermarché. (difficulty in identifying time value);
- difficulty recognizing grammatical markers;
- confusion between singular and plural forms;
- difficulties with gender and agreement – Ex. *Une petite fille* est arrivée en classe. / *Un petit garçon* ... *un/ une* ; *petit/petite* ;
- difficulties interpreting pronoun reference- Ex. *Paul a donné son livre à Marc parce qu'il en avait besoin* (The learner must identify the referent of “il” and integrate the relationship between the sentences.).

These difficulties can become particularly significant in French because grammatical information is frequently expressed through orthographic markers that are not fully represented phonologically, such as plural or gender markers.

f) *Difficulties specific to the orthographic system of French*

French presents additional challenges because the relationship between spelling and pronunciation is relatively complex. Learners with dyslexia may experience difficulties with:

- silent final letters: *petit, grand, parlent*;
- homophones: *a/à, et/est, son/sont*;
- grapheme combinations: *eau, ai, ei, ou, oi, ill*;
- liaison phenomena: *les\_enfants, des\_amis*;

- morphological markers that are not pronounced: *ils parlent, elles arrivent*;
- irregular or unpredictable spelling patterns.

*g) Written-language difficulties associated with dyslexia*

Dyslexia is frequently associated with dysorthography, which may involve:

- spelling errors;
- phonologically based spelling –*faim/ femme/ fame/ fam*;
- omissions and additions of letters;
- letter reversals or transpositions;
- incorrect segmentation of words – *aujourd’hui → au jour d’hui/ peut-être → peut être/ tout à fait → toutafait/ parce qu’il → parcequ’il/ quelqu’un → quel qu’un*;
- difficulties with grammatical agreement;
- inconsistent representation of the same word.

*h) Metacognitive and strategic difficulties*

Some learners may also experience difficulties in monitoring their own reading process. They may:

- fail to notice that they have misread a word;
- continue reading despite an incoherent interpretation;
- have difficulty identifying when comprehension has broken down;
- make limited use of contextual clues;
- experience difficulty selecting appropriate reading strategies.

Consequently, dyslexia may affect not only the decoding of written language, but also the learner's ability to monitor, regulate and repair their comprehension.

### **Discussions and conclusions**

The issue is particularly relevant in the Romanian educational context. Romanian media reports have cited a figure of approximately 250,000 children requiring specific educational support in relation to dyslexia (Euronews Romania, 2023). In our country, recent public discussions have drawn attention to the significant number of children affected by dyslexia and to the challenges they face within the education system (Mocanu, 2024). Nevertheless, the figure draws attention to the educational visibility of specific learning difficulties and to the need for more systematic pedagogical responses. The challenge is therefore not simply to identify learners who experience difficulties, but to determine how educational practices can be reorganized in order to reduce the barriers they encounter.

Another theoretical pillar of the present study is consequently differentiated instruction. Differentiation implies that the teacher may vary the content, process, learning supports, interactional arrangements, task complexity, time allocation, and forms of assessment according to learners' needs, while maintaining meaningful and appropriately challenging learning objectives. In an FLE classroom, differentiation may involve, for example, adapting the length and complexity of texts, providing explicit vocabulary support, pre-teaching phonological patterns, using visual organizers, allowing additional processing time, offering graduated scaffolding, organizing peer collaboration, or permitting alternative forms of linguistic production.

The concept of scaffolding is particularly useful in this context. Drawing on the sociocultural tradition associated with Vygotsky and subsequently developed in educational research, scaffolding refers to temporary and adjustable support that enables learners to accomplish tasks that they could not yet perform independently. In FLE, scaffolding may take the form of modelling, sentence frames, guided questions, lexical banks, graphic organizers, partially completed examples, peer support, or progressive removal of assistance. Such practices are particularly relevant for learners experiencing difficulties because they transform the pedagogical objective from merely completing a task into progressively developing the learner's autonomy.

The principle of participation must also occupy a central position in an inclusive approach to language education. Inclusion cannot be considered fully achieved merely because learners with difficulties are physically present in mainstream classrooms. Genuine inclusion requires meaningful opportunities to participate in classroom interaction, to express ideas, to collaborate with peers, to make choices, to receive feedback, and to demonstrate learning. The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education explicitly identifies learner participation as a key dimension of genuinely inclusive education. In the FLE classroom, this principle is particularly important because language acquisition is inherently interactional: learners develop communicative competence through opportunities to understand, negotiate meaning, produce language, and interact with others.

Finally, the present study adopts a strengths-based rather than deficit-based perspective. Learners experiencing academic difficulties should not be defined exclusively through what they cannot do. An inclusive pedagogy also seeks to identify their existing linguistic, cognitive, social, creative, and metacognitive resources and to mobilize these resources in the learning process. This orientation is compatible with UDL's emphasis on learner agency, autonomy, meaningful engagement, and multiple forms of communication and expression.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives suggest that inclusive FLE teaching should not be conceived as a set of remedial techniques applied retrospectively to learners who fail to meet predetermined expectations. It should instead be understood as a proactive pedagogical approach in which learner variability is anticipated at the stage of instructional design. Differentiation, scaffolding, multimodality, flexible assessment, collaborative learning, and diversified forms of participation consequently become not merely compensatory measures, but constitutive dimensions of an inclusive pedagogy of French as a Foreign Language.

The theoretical framework adopted in this study therefore rests on a fundamental proposition: the objective of inclusive FLE pedagogy is not to lower linguistic expectations, but to diversify the pathways through which learners can access, practise, demonstrate, and progressively master the target language. Such an approach makes it possible to reconcile curricular requirements with learner diversity and to conceptualize inclusion as a question of pedagogical accessibility, participation, and equity rather than simply as the placement of learners with difficulties within mainstream educational settings.

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## NO-CODE ARCHITECTURES AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD AND PRIMARY EDUCATION (I): FUNCTIONAL TAXONOMY AND STRUCTURAL MODELS

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### Abstract

This study investigates integrating no-code architectures, specifically cloud-based platforms such as Google AppSheet®, within Early Childhood and Primary Education (ECPE). To meet the urgent need for flexible digital transformation in educational environments, the research establishes a multidimensional functional taxonomy to transform mobile relational databases into robust psychopedagogical tools. By analyzing the structural dichotomy between administrative backend control panels and interactive child-facing frontends, the study bridges the gap between software development and educational design. The proposed methodological framework evaluates technical affordances against developmental, cognitive, and organizational constraints. The findings provide educators, instructional designers, and researchers with a systematic approach to repurposing productivity-oriented cloud platforms into secure, scalable, and pedagogically aligned digital ecosystems for modern classrooms.

**Keywords:** No-code architectures; Google AppSheet; functional taxonomy; early childhood and primary education (ECPE); pedagogical engineering;

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## 1. Introduction

The contemporary educational landscape is undergoing a profound digital transformation, driven by the need to adapt teaching and administrative practices to the realities of the information age. Within Early Childhood and Primary Education (ECPE), this transition brings both opportunities and significant challenges (Goswami & Chauhan, 2025). While educational technology (EdTech) offers vast potential for personalizing learning and optimizing classroom management (Halim, 2023; Losdo & Cerna, 2026), educators frequently face a double bind: commercial software solutions are either too rigid to fit specific curricular needs or too complex to be customized without advanced programming skills. In recent years, the emergence of no-code platforms - such as Google AppSheet® - has fundamentally altered this paradigm.

By allowing non-technical users to build secure, cloud-connected mobile applications through visual interfaces and relational databases, no-code technology bridges the gap between technical capability and pedagogical practice (as presented in Fig. 1). However, despite the exponential growth of practical implementations, academic literature lacks a structured, conceptual framework to classify and evaluate these tools within early and primary education.



Figure 1. Digital transformation in ECPE - bridging administrative challenges and pedagogical practices via Google AppSheet® platform  
(source: image generated with Google Gemini, v. 3.1 Pro)

This study addresses this theoretical and practical gap by proposing the first comprehensive functional taxonomy of Google AppSheet® solutions in a pedagogical context. By analyzing applications through a multidimensional framework - encompassing pedagogical purpose, data architecture complexity, and human-computer interaction (Parveen et. al, 2026) - this research

establishes a conceptual foundation for designing, evaluating, and implementing mobile solutions in ECPE. Furthermore, the study explores the profound implications of these architectures on teacher agency, the reduction of administrative burnout, and the alignment with constructivist learning principles.

## **2. Literature review and research gap**

### *2.1. The evolution of digital technologies in ECPE*

In recent decades, the integration of digital technologies into educational environments has evolved significantly. While initial approaches focused predominantly on computer labs and desktop software, contemporary paradigms highlight mobile learning (m-learning) and the ubiquity of smart devices. In ECPE, this integration must be approached with pedagogical caution, ensuring that technology serves as a cognitive scaffold rather than a distractor - a significant transformation characterized by a pedagogical approach that is child-centered, inclusive, and technology-supported (Rahman & Moh, 2025). Constructivist theories and the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) suggest that digital tools are most effective when they support active learning (Adamah & Gariba, 2026), collaboration, and the personalization of educational experiences according to each child's developmental rhythm.

### *2.2. The emergence of no-code platforms in educational settings*

Against the backdrop of the need for digital flexibility, no-code platforms have emerged as a revolutionary solution for educators and academic institutions. Unlike traditional software development - which requires advanced programming skills - no-code platforms (such as Google AppSheet®) empower non-technical users to build functional mobile and web applications through visual interfaces, automated workflows, and centralized cloud databases (Giraldo & Laso, 2025). In educational contexts, this technological democratization allows teachers to design custom digital solutions tailored directly to their classroom needs, by passing the rigid limitations of commercial off-the-shelf software and significantly reducing institutional dependency on external IT specialists.

### *2.3. Literature gaps and the need for a dedicated taxonomy*

Despite clear practical advantages, current academic literature dedicated to no-code technologies in education presents a major limitation: most existing studies are predominantly descriptive, oriented toward isolated cases of digitization for attendance or general administrative tasks, lacking a unified conceptual framework.

Specifically, there is a critical gap between:

- The native technical capabilities of no-code platforms (database architecture, relational structures, automation logic).

- The strict psycho-pedagogical requirements of early childhood and primary education (the need for adapted ergonomic design, protection of minors' data, support for formative assessment, and the reduction of the educator's bureaucratic burnout syndrome).

The absence of a functional taxonomic framework causes teachers and researchers to operate without a common language. Without a rigorous classification showing what type of no-code solution serves what pedagogical purpose and with what structural complexity, digital innovation risks remaining a fragmented endeavor. This study aims to bridge this literature gap by establishing the first functional taxonomy for Google AppSheet® solutions in a pedagogical context.

### **3. Methodology and conceptual design**

To develop a rigorous and applicable taxonomic framework in educational sciences, the methodological approach adopts a structural, functional, and comparative analysis perspective. This method is not limited to a simple inventory of buttons or technical functions within a no-code platform (Google AppSheet®) but rather correlates the native capabilities of data architecture with the specific requirements of pedagogical design in ECPE. The construction of the taxonomy starts from the premise that a mobile educational application is not an isolated element, but rather a functional node within a hybrid learning ecosystem. Consequently, the methodology utilizes a multidimensional classification model, evaluating solutions through the lens of three fundamental axes: pedagogical purpose, data architecture complexity, and human interaction dimension.

#### *3.1. Methodological approach and conceptual design*

To systematically investigate the integration of no-code architectures - specifically leveraging cloud-based platforms such as Google AppSheet® - within ECPE, this study adopts a rigorous mixed methodological approach combining structural taxonomy development, comparative architectural analysis, and pedagogical alignment. The research moves beyond traditional software development paradigms by evaluating how flexible, cloud-native database environments can be repurposed to serve as robust pedagogical infrastructures.

The core methodological premise rests on the dual operational nature inherent in educational no-code deployments. Specifically, the framework analyzes the structural dichotomy between:

- The interactive frontend environment, configured for direct, safe, and engaging utilization by young learners under pedagogical guidance.
- To operationalize this dual analysis, the research framework establishes a multidimensional taxonomy built upon three foundational analytical pillars: structural relational data modeling, workflow automation capabilities, and platform-native interface constraints. This tripartite model enables a systematic mapping between the technical affordances of Google AppSheet® and the specific developmental, cognitive, and organizational demands of educational settings.

### 3.2. Multidimensional classification criteria

The functional taxonomy proposed is structured based on the following three major criteria:

- **Pedagogical purpose dimension** classifies applications according to their direct utility in educational practice, dividing them into three essential subcategories:
  - **Solutions oriented towards classroom management and administrative efficiency** (tools designed to reduce the teacher's bureaucracy);
  - **Solutions oriented toward formative assessment and behavioral observation** (tools for tracking children's achievements);
  - **Solutions oriented towards interactive environments and learning resources** (tools centered on the student's learning experience).
- Data architecture complexity dimension evaluates the technical complexity of how the Google AppSheet® platform organizes information:
  - **Level 1 (single flat tables)** - simple tabular structures suitable for quick attendance lists or resource inventories.
  - **Level 2 (binary relational databases)** - parent-child type relations (e.g., *the direct link between a student's file and their activity portfolio*).
  - **Level 3 (complex relational architectures)** - multi-table systems interconnecting the preschooler's profile, curricular objectives, formative assessments, and reports generated for parents.
- **Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) dimension** analyzes who the primary user of the mobile interface is during classroom interaction:
  - **Exclusive use by the educator** (backend-type interfaces or discreet teacher control tools).
  - **Guided or assisted interactive use** (friendly interfaces with intuitive elements used by preschoolers or young students under the educator's guidance).

### 3.3. Taxonomy validation cycle

To guarantee construct validity, the proposed taxonomic framework follows an iterative cycle of literature analysis in pedagogical design and an evaluation of technical feasibility by simulating real usage scenarios in kindergartens and primary schools. This methodology ensures that the taxonomy does not remain a mere theoretical abstraction, but becomes a robust operational framework, prepared to underpin the detailed categories presented in the subsequent section of the current dedicated study.

#### 4. Functional taxonomy of Google AppSheet® solutions in a pedagogical context

Based on the multidimensional methodological criteria established previously, this study proposes a functional taxonomy structured around 3 major categories of solutions developed on the Google AppSheet® platform. This classification provides a clear conceptual map for digital design in ECPE, correlating the native capabilities of the no-code platform with specific didactic requirements.

##### 4.1. Category A. Classroom management and administrative optimization solutions

The first category of taxonomy targets solutions designed to reduce the "invisible burden" (bureaucracy and resource management) that consumes a significant portion of educators' time, leaving less space for direct interaction with children.

- Data architecture: Primarily relies on level 1 and level 2 structures (flat tabular sheets and simple list-event binary relations).
- Indirect pedagogical function: Although they do not directly interact with preschoolers or young students, these applications create an orderly, safe, and predictable educational environment.
- Functional examples in Google AppSheet®:
  - **Digital attendance and safety registers** - mobile drop-off and pick-up systems that automatically log the time and authorized people, ensuring institutional security.
  - **Dynamic learning center inventories** - applications through which the educator monitors the availability of teaching materials, role-play games, or educational toys in the classroom.
  - **Scheduling and communication systems for family partnerships** - mobile solutions dedicated to the flexible organization of parent-teacher conferences or pedagogical consultation hours, optimizing the external administrative workflow of the class.

##### 4.2. Category B. Formative assessment and progress monitoring solutions

The second category groups tools dedicated to measuring and recording individual student progress. In early childhood and primary education, assessment is not based on rigid standardized testing, but on systematic observation, progress logs, and behavioral grids.

- Data architecture: Utilizes level 2 and level 3 structures (relational databases linking the individual child's profile to specific curricular indicators).
- Direct pedagogical function: Supports the teacher in conducting rapid, non-intrusive formative assessment based on longitudinal evidence.

- Functional examples in Google AppSheet®:
  - **Behavioral and cognitive observation journals** - mobile tools through which the educator quickly checks off the preschooler's achievements across developmental domains, optionally attaching voice notes or images as evidence of progress.
  - **Individual digital portfolios** - solutions that centralize the young student's evolution throughout the entire school year, facilitating transparent and secure communication with parents.
  - **Multi-criteria curricular progress matrices** - complex relational databases tracking the achievement of specific objectives from the school curriculum (across experiential domains or subjects), automatically generating individualized evolution reports for each student.

#### 4.3. Category C. Interactive environment and learning resource solutions

The third category represents the most advanced level from an architectural standpoint and the closest to direct student interaction. In this case, the Google AppSheet® platform is used to create digital resource centers or guided learning interfaces aligned with the principles of UDL.

- Data architecture: Involves level 3 complex relational architectures, integrating media databases (images, audio files, accessible texts) and conditional navigation logic.
- Direct pedagogical function: Stimulates active student engagement, supporting learning through discovery, guided practice, and cognitive accessibility.
- Functional examples in Google AppSheet®:
  - **Digital literacy and numeracy centers** - user-friendly applications featuring large buttons and intuitive visual elements, used on classroom tablets under the educator's guidance for matching, recognition, and logic games.
  - **Interactive environmental exploration guides** - mobile resources used in extracurricular or outdoor activities, where children (assisted by the teacher) discover natural elements and record structured observations within the application.
  - **Multimedia digital centers for arts and creative expression** - interactive solutions providing visual and auditory support for musical activities, visual arts education, or guided role-playing games, facilitating the personalization of the learning experience according to each student's pace.

## 5. Discussions and conclusions. Pedagogical and architectural implications

The functional taxonomy of Google AppSheet® solutions proposed in this study goes beyond a mere technical classification (see Fig. 2), generating profound implications for pedagogical design, daily educational practice, and the professional development of educators in ECPE.

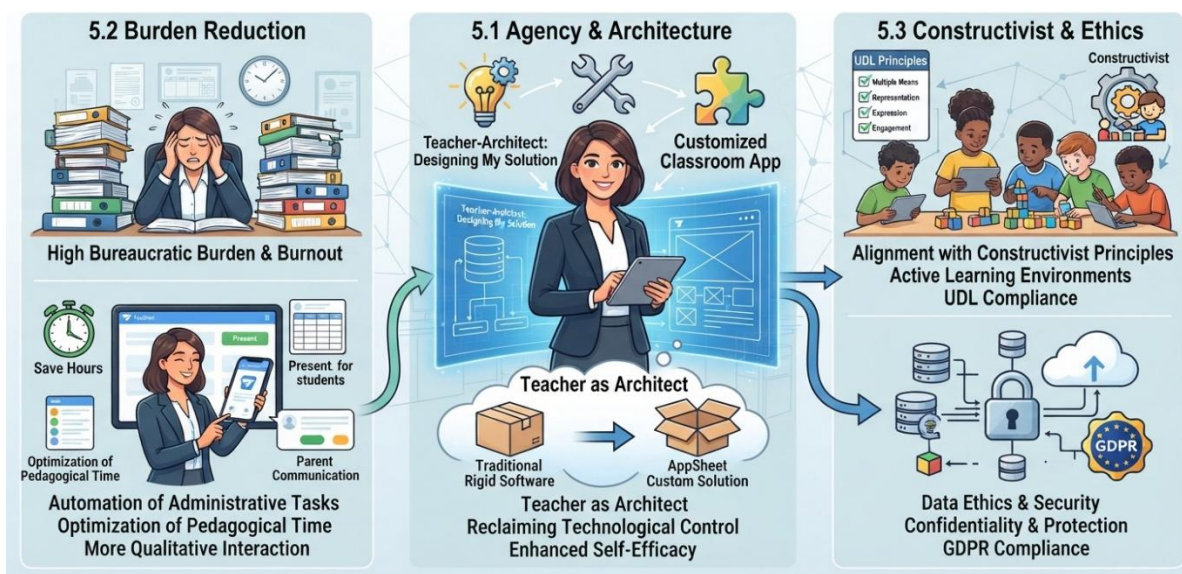


Figure 2. Pedagogical and architectural implications of Google AppSheet® solutions in ECPE  
 (source: image generated with Google Gemini, v. 3.1 Pro)

### 5.1. The reconfiguration of the teachers role

One of the most significant effects of adopting no-code architectures in the classroom is the reclamation of technological control by the teacher. Traditionally, educators have been captive users of rigid commercial educational platforms designed by engineers without a deep understanding of classroom realities. By utilizing tools such as Google AppSheet®, the educator becomes an architect of their own digital solutions. The teacher can model the database and interface precisely according to the specific traits of their group or class, adapting the pace of evaluation or observation tools to precise curricular objectives. This autonomy enhances the educator's sense of personal efficacy and considerably reduces resistance to digital change.

### 5.2. Reduction of bureaucratic burden and optimization of pedagogical time

Time dedicated to administrative and bureaucratic tasks represents one of the main sources of professional burnout among educators in preschool and primary education. Categories A and B of the proposed taxonomy demonstrate that intelligent automation of attendance, reports to parents, or formative observation sheets can save precious hours weekly. By transferring these tasks to a

mobile architecture based on centralized data, cognitive and physical time is freed up, which the teacher can reinvest in qualitative and affective interaction with preschoolers and young students.

### 5.3. *Alignment with constructivist principles and data ethics*

From a constructivist perspective, category C of the taxonomy validates the use of technology as an active learning environment rather than a means for the passive transmission of information. Interactive applications designed in a no-code regime can comply with the principles of UDL, offering multiple alternatives of representation and expression for children with different learning paces. At the same time, the flexibility offered by cloud platforms imposes a major ethical responsibility: data architecture developed in the preschool and primary environment must strictly comply with regulations regarding the confidentiality and protection of minors' data (GDPR). The proposed taxonomic framework serves precisely as an awareness tool, helping educational designers implement the correct level of data security starting from the application design phase.

## 6. Conclusions and future directions

This study has addressed a pressing need in contemporary educational technology literature: the necessity to move beyond the empirical and fragmented adoption of digital tools by providing a rigorous conceptual and structural framework for utilizing no-code platforms. By establishing a functional taxonomy of Google AppSheet® solutions within a pedagogical context, this research has demonstrated how the technical capabilities of mobile databases can be transformed into psycho-pedagogical instruments tailored to the specific needs of ECPE.

The major contribution of this endeavor lies in the creation of a zero milestone - a multidimensional structure that classifies applications according to pedagogical purpose (e.g., *administrative management, formative assessment, interactive environments*), data relational complexity, and the degree of human interaction. Through this classification, the study validates the shift of the educator from the passive role of software consumer to the active role of architect of their digital learning environment, while simultaneously supporting the reduction of bureaucratic burden and the optimization of constructivist practices in the classroom.

While the limitations of this study are theoretical and taxonomic in nature, they open ample opportunities for future research. The conceptual framework developed herein serves as an indispensable foundation for the entire series of planned investigations. Thus, article 2 in the series will build upon these taxonomic categories to analyze in depth the ergonomics of mobile interfaces, UX/UI design dedicated to children and educators, and the concrete impact of these architectures on cognitive accessibility in hybrid learning environments.

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## **NO-CODE ARCHITECTURES AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD AND PRIMARY EDUCATION (II): MOBILE INTERFACE DESIGN AND DIGITAL ERGONOMICS**

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### **Abstract**

Continuing the functional taxonomy established in the first stage of this research series, this study investigates the ergonomic, user experience (UX/UI), and cognitive accessibility dimensions of no-code mobile applications (Google AppSheet®) in early childhood and primary education (ECPE). While the first article focused on structural and pedagogical classification, the second addresses the micro-level design challenges of human-computer interaction within hybrid learning environments. The research evaluates how interface ergonomics, visual hierarchy, touch-target sizing, and multimedia integration impact young learners (preschoolers and early graders) and educators. Applying the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Cognitive Load Theory, the study proposes an evidence-based set of design guidelines for mobile interfaces that minimizes cognitive friction, ensures digital inclusion, and safeguards the engagement of young users. The findings provide developers, educational designers, and teachers with a practical guide for creating intuitive, child-friendly, and teacher-centric no-code digital environments.

*Keywords: No-code architectures; Google AppSheet; UX/UI design; digital ergonomics; cognitive accessibility; Universal Design for Learning (UDL);*

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## 1. Introduction

The recent evolution of no-code technologies, exemplified by cloud-based platforms such as Google AppSheet®, has opened new perspectives across multiple fields of activity, including the flexible digitalization of educational environments (Jitendra, 2025; Cioruța et. al, 2026a, 2026b). As demonstrated in the first stage of this research series, the introduction of a multidimensional functional taxonomy provides the structural framework necessary to transform mobile databases into psychopedagogical tools tailored for Early Childhood and Primary Education (ECPE).

The transition from structural and administrative validation to direct classroom interaction (as a promise of faster development cycles, reduced costs, and greater accessibility) - especially within category C interactive learning environments - brings to the forefront a critical new challenge: interface ergonomics, cognitive accessibility, and digital mediation (Gomathy, 2025).

While specialized literature has frequently focused on the technical feasibility of educational applications or the acquisition of rigid commercial software, the micro-ergonomic aspects of UX/UI design dedicated to preschool and early school-age children often remain superficially addressed. Developing interfaces on no-code platforms - by democratizing machine learning - entails utilizing pre-defined templates that require rigorous adaptation to prevent extraneous cognitive load (Giraldo & Laso, 2025). Children in preschool and primary education possess developing fine motor skills and visual processing abilities, rendering elements such as touch-target sizing, visual hierarchy, and multimedia feedback critical determinants for the pedagogical success or, conversely, failure of the application. Furthermore, within these hybrid environments, digital interaction does not replace but must be pedagogically mediated by the educator, requiring control panels to minimize the bureaucratic and cognitive effort of the teacher.

This study aims to bridge this gap by investigating the ergonomic dimensions, interface design models, and cognitive accessibility of no-code applications developed for ECPE. Grounded in the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Cognitive Load Theory, and the constructivist paradigms of mediated learning (Adamah & Gariba, 2026), this research analyzes how the constraints and opportunities of mobile interfaces associated with the Google AppSheet® platform can be optimized to create inclusive, secure, and intuitive digital environments (Halim, 2023; Goswami & Chauhan, 2025). By establishing an evidence-based best-practice framework for UX/UI design, the paper provides teachers - in their new role as educational architects - and designers with the tools necessary to configure digital experiences that support children's attention, motivation, and cognitive progress, while maximizing the pedagogical agency of educators through seamless interaction.

## 2. Literature review and UX/UI challenges in ECPE

### 2.1. Digital ergonomics and UX/UI dedicated to preschoolers and early graders

The integration of mobile technology in ECPE cannot be achieved by simply adopting or scaling down interfaces designed for adults or experienced users. Preschool and early school-age children are in a dynamic stage of neuro-motor and cognitive development, characterized by developing fine motor control, emerging hand-eye coordination, and a limited duration of sustained attention.

In the specialized literature dedicated to Human-Computer Interaction (HCI), the principles of Child-Computer Interaction (CCI) impose strict ergonomic and visual requirements:

- **Generous dimensions and error-tolerant touch targets** to compensate for fine motor imprecision;
- **The elimination of complex gestures** (such as multiple swipes, drag-and-drop sequences, or pinch-to-zoom), which generate cognitive roadblocks and frustration;
- **The use of an intuitive visual hierarchy** based on concrete iconography, contrasting color codes, and stimulating graphic elements, rather than dense tables or heavy text.

However, no-code platforms (such as Google AppSheet®) are natively built on standardized display patterns and workflows oriented toward business productivity and relational databases. This commercial lineage/native limitation generates a major challenge within contemporary educational architecture: translating a pedagogical data structure into an accessible and child-friendly/inclusive interface (Parveen et. al, 2026) requires rigorous micro-ergonomic calibration of visuals, step-by-step navigation flows, and direct interaction elements.

### 2.2. Cognitive load and accessibility in hybrid environments

Another essential pillar in the analysis of educational mobile interfaces is Cognitive Load Theory. In the process of digitally mediated learning, children are exposed to - and are particularly vulnerable to - extraneous cognitive load: a form of overload that does not derive from the intrinsic complexity of the educational content, but is instead generated by confusing interface design, redundant visual elements, or non-intuitive/cumbersome navigation within the application.

Within the context of category C of the taxonomy established in the first stage of the research (interactive learning environments), no-code applications must not consume the child's attentional resources through technical complexity; rather, they must function as a dynamic cognitive scaffold, reducing digital friction and preventing distraction (Rahman & Moh, 2025). From this perspective, cognitive accessibility becomes inextricably linked to adhering to the principles of UDL. The micro-ergonomic design of interfaces must provide multiple and flexible pathways for content representation and expression (visual, auditory, kinesthetic), thereby responding to diverse

developmental and learning rhythms, as well as to special educational needs, while guaranteeing an inclusive experience within hybrid educational environments.

Although a vast corpus of research exists regarding the general effects of screen exposure on children, the current specialized literature presents a significant and persistent gap: the scarcity of investigations dedicated to the micro-ergonomic optimization of no-code applications configured directly by educators. Most empirical studies analyze either rigid, closed commercial educational software or complex applications developed by dedicated teams of professional programmers, which unfortunately fail to reflect actual classroom realities and constraints.

Against this backdrop, there is an acute lack of methodological frameworks and structural guidelines indicating how the teacher - in their new posture as a no-code architect - can overcome the native constraints of cloud-based platforms to reduce cognitive friction and ensure an inclusive, safe, and ergonomic experience for preschoolers and early graders. The present study aims to precisely address this critical gap, substantiating the theoretical and practical transition from the mere technical functionality of databases to the excellence of UX and digital ergonomics in ECPE.

### 3. Methodology and heuristic evaluation models for mobile interfaces

#### 3.1. Methodological approach and analytical framework design

To investigate and optimize how no-code platforms (exemplified by the Google AppSheet® ecosystem) can support ergonomic interaction and cognitive accessibility, this study adopts a mixed methodological approach grounded in structural analysis, heuristic design, and psychopedagogical alignment. The research is not limited to isolated empirical prototype testing; rather, it constructs a systematic analytical framework that maps native platform design constraints onto the developmental requirements of preschool and early school-age children (ECPE), as well as onto educators' workflows. The methodological design stems from the fundamental premise of the dual role that a mobile educational application must fulfill within a hybrid environment:

- On the one hand, ***a simplified, highly intuitive, and secure interface for direct utilization by the child*** (frontend);
- On the other hand, ***a complex yet ergonomic and rapid control panel intended for administrative and formative management by the teacher*** (backend).

To evaluate this duality, the methodology employs a multidimensional model structured around three interconnected axes:

- ***Physical and tactile interface ergonomics*** (touch-target ergonomics);
- ***Optimization of cognitive load and visual hierarchy*** (cognitive load mitigation);
- ***Universal accessibility and compliance with UDL principles.***

### 3.2. Major UX/UI evaluation criteria for no-code platforms

The proposed analytical framework evaluates interfaces generated via no-code platforms based on three fundamental criteria, specifically operationalized for the educational environment:

A. **Touch-target ergonomics and control** analyze the adaptation of native visual templates to preschoolers' fine motor development:

- **Minimum touch-target dimensions** - evaluates adherence to ergonomic standards (the recommendation of a minimum of 48x48 dp for active surfaces) to prevent operational errors caused by developing hand-eye coordination.
- **Physical spacing (whitespace)** - analyzes the distance between buttons to eliminate accidental touches during touchscreen navigation.
- **Elimination of complex gestures** - restricts actions requiring advanced precision (multiple swipes, drag-and-drop gestures, or pinch-to-zoom), substituting them with large, single-action buttons (one-touch action).

B. **Visual hierarchy and cognitive friction reduction** targets the screen's informational architecture to protect the child's attentional resources:

- **Screen information density** - strictly limits the number of simultaneously active elements to prevent extraneous cognitive load.
- **Intuitive iconography** - utilizes concrete visual symbols consistently associated with specific actions, replacing dense text labels.
- **Instant multimodal feedback** - integrates immediate visual, chromatic, or auditory responses that clearly confirm the success of the student's interaction.

C. **Universal accessibility and multimedia integration** analyzes interface flexibility in supporting learning diversity:

- **Multiple means of representation** - the capability to convert or accompany textual elements with audio or visual support, essential for pre-literate children.
- **Adaptability for special needs** - support for high visual contrast and interface scaling options for students with special educational needs.
- **Structural separation of roles** - visual and functional isolation between student-dedicated screens and teacher administration panels, guaranteeing data integrity.

To ensure the practical validity of the methodological framework, the established criteria are integrated into an iterative cycle of real didactic scenario simulations. This method enables the identification of optimal configuration solutions within the Google AppSheet® platform, transforming the structural limitations of a commercial productivity-oriented tool into an inclusive, secure digital environment perfectly tailored to educational micro-ergonomics.

#### 4. UX/UI design taxonomy and ergonomic solutions applied in Google AppSheet®

Building directly upon the established methodological criteria and confronting them with the native constraints of the Google AppSheet® platform, this section details an operational design taxonomy oriented toward micro-interaction. The solutions are structured into three essential categories of ergonomic configuration and cognitive accessibility for ECPE.

##### 4.1. Category A. Visual architecture for teachers

Although educators possess developed digital competencies, the dynamic and often tense classroom working environment requires administrative interfaces to minimize visual fatigue and operational time. UX/UI challenge - native dense data tables in Google AppSheet® are designed for the business environment and become difficult to navigate rapidly on mobile devices during teaching activities.

Design solutions applied in Google AppSheet®:

- **Modular view grouping (card and dashboard views)** - replacing long textual lists with large visual cards, color-coded according to priority level or activity status (e.g., *attendance status* or *progress alerts*);
- **Simplified scrolling forms (column grouping)** - organizing long data-entry fields into restricted, expandable sections, minimizing the visual load of the mobile screen;
- **Single-action button automation (action buttons)** - configuring large "one-touch" buttons for frequent administrative tasks (e.g., *marking collective attendance* or *automatically generating a daily report*), eliminating multi-step menu navigation.

##### 4.2. Category B. Interfaces for formative assessment and observation logs

This category targets applications frequently utilized by the educator directly in the presence of students, where speed, discretion, and recording accuracy are vital. UX/UI challenge - the necessity to record behavioral observations or learning evidence in real-time without the interface distracting the educator's attention away from the group.

Design solutions applied in Google AppSheet®:

- **Icon-based visual grading systems** - utilizing intuitive graphic buttons (expressive symbols, color-coded progress indicators) instead of abstract numerical scales or cumbersome dropdown menus that are difficult to operate on the fly.
- **Integrated multimedia fields** - optimizing evidence-attachment buttons (e.g., *photographs of practical work* or *short voice notes by the teacher*) via a single touch, directly within the student's individual file.

- **Adaptive contextual menus** - hiding elements irrelevant to the current evaluation moment, dynamically displaying on the screen only the options strictly necessary for the evaluated group or student.

#### 4.3. Category C. Guided interactive environments for preschoolers and early graders

This is the most sensitive category of the taxonomy, where the application is utilized directly by children on tablets under the guidance or mediation of the educator. UX/UI challenge - adapting a relational database platform to respect the motor and cognitive limits of pre-literate children or those at the beginning of the primary cycle.

Design solutions applied in Google AppSheet®:

- **Maximizing touch targets** - configuring interactive elements to generous dimensions (minimum 48x48 dp), appropriately spaced to eliminate operational errors caused by incomplete fine motor control.
- **Minimizing text and utilizing rich iconography** - replacing textual labels with explicit visual elements, large image buttons, and contrasting color codes to guide navigation.
- **Step-by-step guided interfaces** - structuring digital content so that only a single interactive task is visible on the screen at any given time, preventing cognitive overload and channeling the child's attention.

### 5. Pedagogical implications and UX/UI best practice guidelines in no-code environments

The transformation of no-code platforms (such as the Google AppSheet® ecosystem) from simple administrative and data-storage tools into ergonomic, secure, and inclusive educational environments generates major implications for pedagogical practice in ECPE. This section synthesizes the impact of UX/UI design decisions on the educator's role, instructional efficiency, and compliance with digital ethics principles.

#### 5.1. Redefining the teacher's role - from user to ergonomic designer

Implementing user-centered design in custom applications radically alters the educator's position within the edtech landscape. The teacher is no longer viewed as a passive consumer of rigid commercial software, but becomes an architect of the digital experience (micro-level UX designer). Understanding the principles of tactile ergonomics, visual hierarchy, and database structuring enables educators to customize their applications according to the neuro-motor and cognitive specificities of their student groups. This functional autonomy enhances teachers' confidence in technology, stimulates classroom innovation, and considerably reduces resistance to digitalization, transforming design into a creative pedagogical endeavor.

### 5.2. *Maximizing inclusion and accessibility through UDL*

From a constructivist perspective, ergonomically optimized no-code applications become powerful tools for the effective implementation of the principles of UDL. Providing multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement - such as pairing intuitive visual elements with audio feedback and generously spaced buttons - directly supports children with diverse learning rhythms or special educational needs. By lowering physical and cognitive interaction barriers, mobile technology ceases to be a source of exclusion or frustration, becoming a genuine cognitive scaffold throughout discovery-based learning.

### 5.3. *Essential best practice guidelines for no-code educational architects*

To ensure a secure bridge between theoretical rigor and practical classroom application, the research synthesizes an evidence-based set of guidelines recommended for both educators and educational developers:

- ***The one-touch rule*** - eliminate nested menus and multi-step navigation in sections dedicated/intended for children; every essential interaction must be accessible through a single, clear touch.
- ***Strict interface separation (backend vs. frontend)*** - visually and structurally isolate the teacher's complex administrative panels from the minimalist interactive screens used by students, thereby protecting data integrity and visual clarity.
- ***Minimizing cognitive load through iconography*** - replace long, dense texts with explicit/intuitive graphic symbols, contrasting color codes, and multimedia elements that support the pre-literacy or early reading stage.
- ***Privacy by design*** - configure access rights and cloud security so that minors' sensitive data is strictly protected and anonymized, complying with GDPR standards even within simplified classroom applications.

## 6. Conclusions and Future Directions

The present study has completed the conceptual framework established in the first stage of this research series, transitioning from a structural and pedagogical taxonomy to an in-depth analysis of mobile interface design models, micro-ergonomics, and cognitive accessibility in no-code applications (the Google AppSheet® ecosystem) designed for ECPE. By investigating how mobile interfaces can be optimized to respect the neuro-motor and cognitive limits of preschool and early school-age children, the research has demonstrated that cloud-based platforms can successfully overcome native commercial constraints (oriented toward the business environment) to become flexible and inclusive educational environments.

The main theoretical and practical contributions of this study are reflected in:

- The development of ***an analytical framework for UX/UI design and digital ergonomics***, which directly correlates touch-target ergonomics and visual hierarchy with the principles of UDL and Cognitive Load Theory.
- The ***redefinition of the educator's role***, transformed from a simple passive consumer of commercial software into a novel architect of the digital experience (micro-level UX Designer), capable of configuring adapted and secure learning environments.
- The establishment of ***evidence-based practical guidelines***, designed to support teachers and educational developers in creating intuitive interfaces that are structurally separated between administrative panels (backend) and interactive student-dedicated screens (frontend).

Although this study provides a solid structural and functional guide for designing no-code interfaces in education, it simultaneously opens new directions for empirical exploration essential to the development of our field of interest:

- ***Field experimental validation*** - the implementation and testing of application prototypes configured according to these criteria in real kindergarten and primary school classrooms, measuring the direct impact on children's sustained attention, retention, and cognitive progress.
- ***Integration of advanced automations and AI*** - investigating how native automation functions and AI-based generative tools within no-code platforms can facilitate the real-time generation of personalized formative assessment reports for each child.
- ***Longitudinal study of ergonomic efficiency and professional resilience*** - long-term evaluation of how reducing digital friction and increasing design autonomy influence stress levels, job satisfaction, and burnout among educators.

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## **FOTBALUL CA RESURSA PEDAGOGICĂ ÎN LECȚIA DE EDUCAȚIE FIZICĂ LA GIMNAZIU: IMPLICAȚII PENTRU ELEVII DIN CLASELE V–VI**

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### **Abstract**

Football represents an accessible and dynamic sport that can be effectively integrated into physical education lessons at the lower secondary level. This article discusses the pedagogical value of football as an educational resource for students aged 10–12 years, corresponding to grades V–VI in the Romanian school system. The bio-psycho-motor characteristics of this age group are analyzed, emphasizing the relevance of football-based activities for developing speed, coordination, agility, decision-making capacity and social competencies. The article presents methodological considerations regarding the progressive integration of football elements into physical education lessons, including ball control exercises, passing, shooting, opposition situations and small-sided games (1v1, 2v2, 3v3). Adapted rules, reduced field dimensions and short-duration matches are recommended to ensure safety, accessibility and high participation rates. The discussion highlights the importance of structuring activities gradually, from simple technical tasks to game contexts, while considering individual differences in physical development and skill level. Football can contribute not only to motor development but also to the formation of cooperative behaviors, discipline, fair play and positive attitudes toward physical activity. The article concludes that the effective use of football in physical education requires purposeful planning, age-appropriate progression and pedagogical adaptation to the specific characteristics of lower secondary school students.

*Keywords: physical education; football; pedagogical resource; lower secondary school; small-sided games; methodological progression; students aged 10–12;*

## 1. Introducere

Educația fizică reprezintă o componentă esențială a procesului instructiv-educativ, contribuind la dezvoltarea armonioasă a personalității elevilor și la formarea unui stil de viață sănătos. În contextul actual, caracterizat prin reducerea nivelului de activitate fizică și creșterea timpului petrecut în fața dispozitivelor digitale, identificarea unor metode atractive și eficiente de organizare a activităților motrice devine o necesitate.

Dintre disciplinele sportive practicate în mediul școlar, fotbalul ocupă un loc important datorită accesibilității, caracterului dinamic și impactului pozitiv asupra dezvoltării motrice și sociale a elevilor. Integrarea elementelor specifice jocului de fotbal în lecțiile de educație fizică poate contribui la creșterea interesului pentru participarea activă, precum și la dezvoltarea coordonării, vitezei, îndemânării și spiritului de cooperare.

Necesitatea abordării sistematice a dezvoltării vitezei și a deprinderilor tehnice prin mijloacele specifice fotbalului se explică prin particularitățile bio-psiho-motrice ale copiilor de 10–12 ani, perioadă de vârf pentru formarea calităților motrice de bază, în special viteza de reacție și viteza de execuție. La această vârstă, adaptările neuromusculare sunt favorabile învățării schemelor motrice complexe, iar integrarea lor în contexte ludice menține un grad ridicat de implicare și motivație (Monea, 2017). În plus, caracterul dinamic al exercițiilor din fotbal solicită coordonarea intersegmentară, atenția distributivă și capacitatea decizională rapidă, ceea ce conduce la o influență pozitivă asupra dezvoltării cognitive (Xia, 2024).

Utilizarea jocurilor reduse (1v1, 2v2, 3v3) apare ca o opțiune pedagogică evident relevantă pentru ciclul gimnazial inferior. Aceste forme simplificate de joc sporesc numărul contactelor cu mingea per elev și intensitatea fizică raportată la durata activității (Drăgan, 2012). Prin suprafețe reduse și reguli adaptate, se crește densitatea acțiunilor tehnice – conducere a mingii printre jaloane, pase rapide, șuturi la poartă – ceea ce accelerează progresul individual. Impactul pe termen lung al aportului fotbalului asupra sănătății nu este limitat doar la componenta fizică. Practica regulată dezvoltă deprinderi sociale importante precum cooperarea, disciplina și asumarea responsabilității în cadru colectiv.

Aceste competențe contribuie la formarea unui profil motivațional pozitiv față de activitatea sportivă școlară și sporesc participarea efectivă în orele de educație fizică. Din perspectivă metodologică, integrarea acestor obiective corespunde cerințelor din Programa școlară pentru educație fizică și sport, privind competențele generale și specifice.

Conform curriculumului național, educația fizică vizează dezvoltarea capacităților psiho-motrice, formarea deprinderilor sănătoase de viață, întărirea stării de sănătate, dezvoltarea fizică armonioasă și educarea unor trăsături de caracter esențiale pentru integrarea socială. Astfel, optimizarea procesului instructiv-educativ prin utilizarea unor metode și mijloace atractive, adaptate specificului de vârstă, devine o prioritate pentru cadre didactice implicate în acest domeniu.

Evoluțiile recente din fotbalul modern subliniază necesitatea inițierii timpurii a elevilor într-un proces de instruire tehnico-tactică eficientă. Aceasta se poate realiza prin utilizarea

mijloacelor specifice fotbalului, adaptate particularităților psiho-motorii ale elevilor de gimnaziu, ceea ce va valorifica potențialul jocului și va îmbunătăți calitatea actului educațional. Acest demers nu doar că stimulează dezvoltarea fizică a elevilor, dar contribuie și la un mediu educațional mai dinamic și interactiv.

Fotbalul solicită simultan sistemul nervos central și cel periferic prin succesiuni rapide de decizii tactice și execuții motrice variate (Vișan, 2020a).

În practica didactică zilnică, fotbalul are valoare ca instrument educațional pentru optimizarea condiției fizice generale. Eforturile depuse pe parcursul jocului contribuie la îmbunătățirea compoziției corporale prin consum energetic ridicat și intensitate susținută (Cheng, 2023). Participanții prezintă după câteva săptămâni atât creșteri ale rezistenței cardiovasculare cât și ameliorări ale tonusului muscular. Aceste aspecte servesc scopului principal al educației fizice: formarea unui stil de viață sănătos. Se observă însă că diferențierea metodelor contează foarte mult.

Scenariului didactic trebuie să fie bine structurat –astfel că fiecare secvență trebuie să pregătească logic următoarea etapă tehnică. Fotbalul contribuie și la dezvoltarea inteligenței emoționale. Sentimentul de apartenență la echipă și susținerea reciprocă amplifică coeziunea grupului. Elevii care comunică eficient pe teren transferă această capacitate în contexte școlare non-sportive (Ormenișan et al., 2024). În plus, reacțiile afective pozitive provenind din reușite sportive cresc dorința de participare repetată.

## **2. Particularitățile elevilor de 10-12 ani și implicațiile lor în lecția de educație fizică**

Perioada de vârstă cuprinsă între 10 și 12 ani, specifică elevilor din clasele V-VI, este caracterizată printr-o interacțiune complexă între dezvoltarea biologică, modificările psihologice și evoluția competențelor motrice, ceea ce impune o abordare pedagogică diferențiată în cadrul lecțiilor de educație fizică. Această etapă coincide cu începutul pubertății, moment în care se produc transformări fiziologice și psihologice semnificative, ce impun o abordare didactică specializată în cadrul lecțiilor de educație fizică. Din punct de vedere somatic, se observă o creștere continuă a înălțimii și masei corporale, însă nu uniformă între băieți și fete. Începând cu aproximativ 10 ani, diferențele antropometrice devin suficient de marcate pentru a necesita adaptări ale cerințelor motrice, mai ales în privința forței, vitezei și rezistenței (Marian, M. G., 2014). Organismul prezintă parametri funcționali favorabili dezvoltării capacității aerobe până la 11–12 ani, ceea ce permite includerea eforturilor prelungite în tempou uniform fără risc de supraîncărcare. Totuși, primele semne ale pubertății pot determina variații semnificative în răspunsul la efort și toleranța psihică. La nivel neuromotor, coordonarea generală și cea sub presiune temporală se află într-un stadiu optim de consolidare. Simțul ritmului și al tempoului se dezvoltă foarte bine între 7–9 ani și se menține eficient dacă este stimulat cu mijloace variate până spre 12 ani; orientarea spațială atinge un nivel superior în intervalul 12–14 ani (Dragnea et al., 2006). Aceste procese condiționează direct calitatea execuțiilor tehnice din fotbal: conducerea mingii printre jaloane solicită simultan ritmicitate și control direcțional, pasele precise cer sincronizare cu deplasarea coechipierului, iar șuturile plasate impun o coordonare fină între

mișcările membrelor inferioare și evaluarea rapidă a poziției porții. Structura psihologică a copiilor din această grupă de vârstă se află într-un echilibru fragil. Maturizarea fiziologică mai rapidă decât cea cognitiv-emoțională îi poate face să se perceapă ca „adulți” din punct de vedere corporal, dar să rămână incomplet dezvoltati emoțional.(Guan & Cheng, 2022)

Punerea în valoare a aptitudinilor fizice și intelectuale ale copiilor, precum și intensitatea, cantitatea și ritmul de lucru asupra acestor calități, trebuie să țină cont de trei principii elementare (Epuran, 2002).

- Respectarea vârstei copilului cu care se lucrează deoarece deprinderile și aptitudinile se formează, se consolidează și se perfecționează la vârste diferite;
- În timpul lucrului se încearcă să se atingă limitele superioare ale fiecărui copil;

Aptitudinile individuale trebuie valorificate, respectând componentele fizice, psiho-comportamentale și sociale ale copiilor, în concordanță cu fiecare etapă de dezvoltare

Din punct de vedere biologic, dezvoltarea copiilor de vârstă școlară mică se realizează neuniform, marcând perioade de dezvoltare mai rapidă și perioade de dezvoltare mai lentă. Statura elevilor prezintă o evoluție ascendentă neuniformă, marcând salturile cele mai ridicate, aproximativ în clasa a treia. La fete, acest nivel de creștere apare mai devreme, începând din clasa a doua și se realizează în general, pe seama membrelor inferioare. Greutatea prezintă și ea o evoluție ascendentă, neuniformă, înregistrând cele mai ridicate creșteri în clasa a treia. Oasele se dezvoltă mult mai rapid decât țesutul muscular, având în structura lor o apreciabilă cantitate de țesut cartilaginos, fapt care determină slaba rezistență a acestora la solicitări mari, intense și chiar deformarea lor dacă intervin factori favorizanți în acest sens (Tudor & POPOVICI, 1999)

### *2.1 Caracteristici fizice și fiziologice ale elevilor de gimnaziu (clasele V–VI)*

#### *1) Creștere rapidă și variabilă în înălțime și greutate*

Perioada 10-12 ani este marcată de o creștere accelerată, diferențiată în funcție de sex și factori ereditari. Conform cercetărilor actuale, variații individuale sunt semnificative: fetele prezintă o creștere accelerată în jurul vârstei de 9-10 ani, iar băieții în jurul vârstei de 10-12 ani. Creșterea nu este uniformă, producând uneori dezechilibre temporare între înălțime și greutate, aspect care se va armoniza treptat către sfârșitul acestei etape (Malina et al., 2004). Implicații pedagogice: aceste variații necesită individualizare în cadrul lecțiilor de educație fizică, cu exerciții și sarcini adaptate la nivelul fiecărui elev.

#### *2) Dezvoltare accelerată a masei musculare, dar musculatura nu este complet matură . Masa musculară și forța cresc pe măsură ce copiii intră în pubertate, fiind esențiale pentru activitățile fizice. (Dragnea, A. & Bota, A., 1999)*

#### *3) Capacitatea aerobă crește treptat până la 12 ani iar intervențiile în dezvoltarea acestor calități motrice sunt eficiente în stadiul inițial al pubertății (Valach et al., 2017).*

- 4) Precizia și rezistența la efort prelungit sunt încă limitate, însă există o creștere considerabilă a vitezei mișcărilor și a capacității de efort.

În intervalul vârstei de 10-12 ani, sistemul neuromotor trece prin etape de maturizare care permit creșterea vitezei de reacție și a deplasării, însă capacitatea de menținere a efortului ridicat pe durată lungă rămâne sub optim, deoarece apar încă limitări la nivelul controlului motric, al metabolismului aerob și al adaptărilor musculare. De exemplu, un studiu evidențiază că perioadele critice de dezvoltare a rezistenței implică o sensibilitate la supra-oboseală dacă volumul de efort este excesiv sau neadaptat.

- 5) Coordonarea și agilitatea se îmbunătățesc treptat

Studiile recente au demonstrat că între vârstele de 9-10 ani și până la 12 ani, plasticitatea sistemului nervos central facilitează acumularea de informații motrice, ceea ce face ca această perioadă să fie favorabilă pentru învățarea deprinderilor motrice complexe (Behringer et al., 2011).

## 2.2 Caracteristici psihosociale:

- 1) Dezvoltarea cognitivă și gândirea logică.

Stadiul operațiilor concrete: Conform teoriei dezvoltării cognitive a lui Jean Piaget, perioada 10-12 ani corespunde stadiului operațiilor concrete (7/8-11/12 ani), care include și începuturile stadiului operațiilor formale (11/12-15/16 ani). La acest nivel, gândirea elevului capătă un caracter logic, organizat și bazat pe realitatea imediată, copilul fiind capabil să analizeze situațiile din perspective diferite și să ofere explicații rezonabile. Memoria devine mai stabilă și mai bine structurată, iar capacitatea de reținere intenționată a informațiilor crește, elevul fiind capabil să acumuleze și să gestioneze volume din ce în ce mai mari de cunoștințe cu rigoare și acuratețe. Atenția se menține mai constantă și mai susținută, în special atunci când activitățile implică interes personal, spirit ludic sau competiție. În aceeași măsură, se dezvoltă și gândirea critică, copilul devenind capabil să formuleze comparații, să analizeze situații, să anticipeze consecințe și să manifeste forme incipiente de raționament abstract. Imaginația rămâne activă și creativă, reflectându-se în activități de inventare, compunere, modelare sau în crearea unor scenarii simbolice.

Aceste transformări cognitive au implicații pedagogice directe asupra modului de organizare a lecțiilor de educație fizică și sport.

- 2) Dezvoltarea emoțională și inteligența emoțională

În intervalul 10–12 ani, dezvoltarea emoțională este puternic influențată de schimbările fiziologice rapide și de modificările hormonale caracteristice vârstei. Copilul poate manifesta uneori stări de apatie, iritabilitate, neatenție sau oboseală accentuată, însoțite de dureri de cap ori disconfort muscular, reacții care sunt considerate normale pentru această etapă de creștere.

Înțelegerea și susținerea din partea adulților devin esențiale, întrucât aceste manifestări nu semnalează lipsa de interes, ci reprezintă răspunsuri firești ale organismului într-o perioadă de transformări intense.

Tot în această etapă, copilul începe să devină mai conștient de propriile emoții și de emoțiile celor din jur, ceea ce favorizează dezvoltarea capacității de auto-reflecție. Treptat, își formează abilități mai complexe de interpretare, exprimare și gestionare a trăirilor afective, proces care contribuie la conturarea unei identități personale stabile și echilibrate.

Activitățile fizice desfășurate în grup, precum jocurile sportive, au un rol deosebit de important în acest sens, oferind oportunități pentru descărcarea tensiunilor, gestionarea conflictelor, trăirea emoțiilor într-un cadru controlat și exersarea cooperării și autocontrolului. Astfel, prin participarea la activități sportive, copilul nu doar se dezvoltă motric, ci își consolidează treptat și inteligența emoțională (Bal et al., 2010).

### 3) Motivație, interese și orientare școlară

În perioada 10–12 ani, motivația elevilor începe să fie tot mai mult influențată de dimensiunea intrinsecă a activităților, copilul fiind animat de plăcerea de a învăța, de curiozitate și de satisfacția personală generată de reușită. În același timp, motivația extrinsecă nu dispare, ci continuă să aibă un rol important, recunoașterea socială, încurajările profesorilor și aprecierea colegilor contribuind la susținerea implicării și la dorința de progres.

## 3. Jocul de fotbal – caracteristici, beneficii și aplicabilitate în școală

Jocul de fotbal, ca disciplină sportivă integrată în educația fizică școlară, poate fi definit ca o activitate motrică complexă, derulată între două echipe aflate în opoziție directă, fiecare având obiectivul de a introduce mingea în poarta adversarului și de a o apăra pe propria, respectând un set de reguli predefinite. În context școlar, aceste reguli sunt adaptate dimensiunilor terenului, numărului de jucători și nivelului de pregătire al elevilor astfel încât accesibilitatea și siguranța să fie optimizate (Balint, 2017).

Formatul standard – două echipe a câte 11 jucători pe teren mare – este rareori folosit la ciclul gimnazial inferior; se preferă forme simplificate precum minifotbalul sau jocurile reduse (1v1, 2v2, 3v3), care mențin structura competițională dar reduc complexitatea tactic-strategică pentru a permite un grad mai mare de implicare individuală (Gheorghe Dumitrescu, 2011)

Caracteristica esențială a fotbalului constă în îmbinarea elementelor tehnice (lovirea, conducerea, preluarea și pasa) cu cerințe tactice și cognitive, într-un cadru dinamic marcat de modificări rapide ale situației de joc. Această combinație îl face un mijloc util pentru dezvoltarea simultană a vitezei motrice și capacității decizionale rapide – aspecte relevante pentru vârsta 10–12 ani. Elevii din această categorie prezintă particularități bio-psiho-motrice favorabile: sistemul neuromuscular răspunde bine la solicitări scurte și intense, coordonarea intersegmentară se află într-o etapă optimă de consolidare iar adaptările cardio-respiratorii susțin eforturi intermitente (Marian, M. G., 2014).

Tactica elementară aplicată în fotbalul școlar pentru clasele V–VI presupune introducerea unor principii simplificate, adaptate nivelului bio-psiho-motric al elevilor de 10–12 ani. La această vârstă, antrenarea gândirii tactice nu trebuie suprasolicitată prin concepte complexe, ci orientată spre acțiuni clare: marcajul direct, demarcarea pentru primirea mingii, ocuparea inteligentă a spațiului raportată la minge și adversar (Balint, 2017). Elevii sunt capabili să perceapă relația dintre poziția lor pe teren și evoluția fazei de joc dacă aceasta este prezentată concret, cu repere vizuale și sarcini bine delimitate în timp și spațiu. Folosirea formatelor reduse (1v1, 2v2, 3v3) este un mediu ideal pentru exersarea tacticii elementare deoarece densitatea situațiilor de joc crește semnificativ și permite repetarea rapidă a acțiunilor. Astfel, un copil care joacă 2v2 va fi implicat constant atât în atac cât și în apărare, fiind forțat să ia decizii simplificate privind marcajul adversarului sau demarcarea pentru pas (Gheorghe, 2011). Progresia metodologică stabilită, conducerea mingii printre jaloane → pas scurt precis → șut plasat → joc integrat cu opoziție, facilitează construirea unui cadru tactic gradual.

Conducerea printre jaloane dezvoltă controlul individual al balonului sub presiune direcțională; partea tactică intervine când se adaugă un adversar pasiv ce limitează libertatea de deplasare. Pasul precis către coechipier antrenează percepția deschiderii traseului de joc și alegerea momentului optim, iar șutul plasat presupune recunoașterea oportunității imediate în raport cu poziția portarului (Vișan, 2020).

În ultima etapă – jocul integrat redus – copiii aplică secvențele tehnice în contexte tactice simple dar reale: schimbări rapide între rolurile de atacant și apărător, revenire după pierderea posesiei sau deplasări sincronizate pentru susținerea coechipierului. Regulile adaptate la fotbalul școlar sunt esențiale pentru menținerea siguranței fizice și a clarității procesului didactic. Dimensiunea terenului este redusă la aproximativ 15–20 metri lățime și 25–30 metri lungime pentru jocurile colective mici, astfel încât viteza execuțiilor să fie mare dar controlabilă (Balint, 2007). Durata partidelor este fragmentată, două reprize scurte de 5–8 minute, cu pauze suficiente între ele, prevenind oboseala excesivă. Regulamentul limitativ impune interdicția intrării dure sau a contactelor necontrolate; se acordă repuneri rapide din afara terenului prin aruncare sau lovitură ușoară din colțuri ori din apropierea porții când mingea depășește liniile limitative (Vișan, 2020b). Regulile adaptate includ și facilitări pentru progres tehnic: spre exemplu, în faza inițială se poate restricționa numărul atingerilor la trei înaintea pasei sau șutului, stimulând reacția rapidă și orientarea anticipativă (Marian, M. G., 2014); altfel spus, se formează simultan deprinderi tehnice consolidate și reflexe tactice fundamentale. În alte momente se poate impune limitarea zonelor permise jucătorului activ – lucrând astfel plasamentul defensiv sau ofensiv conform poziției mingii.

Beneficiile motrice obținute prin utilizarea mijloacelor specifice jocului de fotbal în clasele V–VI se manifestă pe mai multe niveluri funcțional-organice și coordonativ-tehnice. Formatele reduse precum 1v1, 2v2 sau 3v3, prezentate anterior, oferă un cadru optim pentru stimularea vitezei de deplasare și vitezei de execuție datorită intensității ridicate și frecvenței contactului cu mingea (Gheorghe, 2011). Sprinturile scurte, alternanța rapidă între atac și apărare și schimbările bruște de direcție activează sistemul neuromuscular într-un regim adaptat particularităților vârstei 10–12 ani, unde capacitatea anaerobă lactată este în plin proces de consolidare (Marian, 2014). Exercițiile

secvențiale – conducere printre jaloane pentru control ritmic și direcțional → pas precis pe traiectorii scurte → șut plasat sau puternic → joc integrat cu opoziție – permit o progresie naturală a deprinderilor tehnice concomitent cu îmbunătățirea parametrilor de viteză. Beneficiul motric se observă nu doar în creșterea valorilor funcționale (viteza maximă cu mingea, rata succesului la execuții), ci și în rafinarea calităților coordonative. Conducerea mingii pe trasee variabile dezvoltă controlul intersegmentar fin și capacitatea de adaptare instantanee la stimuli tactici; pasele precise întăresc simțul distanței și sincronizarea cu mișcarea colegului; șuturile plasate exersează poziționarea corectă și exploatarea spațiului liber (Vișan, 2020).

#### 4. Direcții viitoare

Analiza teoretică și metodologică realizată subliniază faptul că fotbalul, prin valențele sale dinamice și formative, reprezintă o resursă pedagogică de un real folos în optimizarea lecției de educație fizică la ciclul gimnazial inferior (clasele V–VI). Adaptat la particularitățile bio-psiho-motrice ale vârstei de 10–12 ani, acest sport depășește sfera simplă a recreerii sau a pregătirii fizice utilitare, devenind un vector complex de dezvoltare armonioasă. Prin utilizarea structurilor progresive și a jocurilor reduse (1v1, 2v2, 3v3), elevii își îmbunătățesc nu doar parametrii motrici (viteza, coordonarea, agilitatea), ci și capacitățile cognitive legate de orientarea spațială, anticipare și luarea rapidă a deciziilor. Totodată, cadrul interactiv al jocului favorizează socializarea, respectarea normelor de fair-play, coeziunea colectivă și gestionarea emoțiilor, contribuind activ la conturarea unui profil motivațional pozitiv față de activitatea fizică de durată.

Cu toate acestea, valorificarea optimă a acestui potențial pedagogic depinde în mod direct de competența cadrului didactic în proiectarea curriculară, dozarea efortului și diferențierea sarcinilor de învățare, evitând uniformizarea excesivă sau suprasolicitarea specifică perioadei pubertare.

În perspectiva cercetărilor viitoare, se impun câteva direcții de dezvoltare și aprofundare:

- **Studii longitudinale și experimentale:** Realizarea unor cercetări de tip intervenție pe parcursul întregului ciclu gimnazial (clasele V–VIII), care să monitorizeze comparativ efectele implementării sistematice a jocurilor reduse asupra dezvoltării motrice și a performanței școlare generale.
- **Analiza comparativă urban-rural:** Evaluarea modului în care diferențele de infrastructură sportivă și de resurse materiale dintre mediul urban și cel rural din România influențează eficiența predării fotbalului școlar și identificarea de soluții alternative pentru școlile cu spații limitate.

- **Abordarea incluzivă și egalitatea de gen:** Extinderea cercetărilor privind participarea și motivația elevidelor (fete) în lecțiile de educație fizică bazate pe elemente de fotbal, în concordanță cu noile tendințe europene de promovare a fotbalului feminin de masă.
- **Integrarea instrumentelor digitale de evaluare:** Explorarea modului în care tehnologiile accesibile (cum ar fi aplicațiile de monitorizare a mișcării sau grilele digitale de evaluare formativă) pot sprijini profesorul de educație fizică în măsurarea obiectivă a progresului tehnic și tactic al elevilor.

## 5. Concluzii

Fotbalul poate constitui o resursă pedagogică valoroasă în lecția de educație fizică la nivelul claselor V–VI, datorită caracterului său accesibil, dinamic și atractiv pentru elevii cu vârste cuprinse între 10 și 12 ani. Valorificarea sa în cadrul procesului instructiv-educativ depășește dimensiunea formării deprinderilor tehnice, contribuind la dezvoltarea armonioasă a capacităților motrice, cognitive, afective și sociale ale elevilor.

Particularitățile bio-psiho-motrice ale elevilor din această etapă de vârstă impun o organizare diferențiată și progresivă a activităților. Exercițiile și situațiile de joc trebuie adaptate nivelului de dezvoltare, ritmului individual de învățare și capacității de efort a fiecărui elev. În acest sens, trecerea graduală de la conducerea mingii și pasa simplă la șut, situații de opoziție și jocuri reduse permite formarea și consolidarea deprinderilor motrice într-un cadru accesibil și motivant.

Jocurile reduse, de tip 1v1, 2v2 și 3v3, oferă elevilor mai multe oportunități de contact cu mingea, de luare a deciziilor și de participare activă. Prin reguli simplificate, dimensiuni reduse ale terenului și durate adaptate, acestea facilitează înțelegerea elementelor tactice fundamentale, precum marcajul, demarcarea, ocuparea spațiului și cooperarea cu partenerii. În același timp, jocurile reduse contribuie la dezvoltarea vitezei de reacție, a coordonării, a orientării spațiale și a capacității de adaptare la situațiile variabile ale jocului.

Integrarea fotbalului în lecțiile de educație fizică favorizează, de asemenea, formarea unor comportamente sociale și afective importante. Respectarea regulilor, asumarea rolurilor, comunicarea, sprijinul reciproc, disciplina și fair play-ul sunt valori care pot fi dezvoltate prin participarea la activități sportive organizate. Caracterul ludic și competitiv al fotbalului poate crește motivația elevilor și poate contribui la formarea unei atitudini pozitive față de mișcare și față de practicarea regulată a activităților fizice.

Prin urmare, fotbalul nu trebuie utilizat exclusiv ca activitate recreativă sau ca joc liber în partea finală a lecției, ci integrat într-un demers didactic planificat, coerent și adaptat particularităților elevilor. Rolul profesorului este esențial în selectarea conținuturilor, dozarea efortului, diferențierea sarcinilor și asigurarea unui climat educațional sigur și motivant.

În concluzie, utilizarea fotbalului ca resursă pedagogică în lecția de educație fizică la clasele V–VI poate susține dezvoltarea deprinderilor tehnico-motrice, stimularea participării active și formarea competențelor de cooperare și responsabilitate. Eficiența acestei abordări depinde de modul în care activitățile sunt proiectate, progresiv organizate și raportate la nivelul real de dezvoltare al elevilor.

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## **FLEXIBLE METACOGNITION: FROM DIRECT ENGAGEMENT AND DISTANCING TO REGULATION AND REINTEGRATION**

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### ***Abstract***

Metacognition supports learning, decision-making, and self-regulation; however, increased self-monitoring is not intrinsically adaptive. Monitoring may be inaccurate, cognitively costly, or rigid, and may thereby interfere with skilled performance, effective action, and interpersonal functioning. This critical integrative narrative review synthesises research on metacognitive monitoring and control, automatic and deliberate processing, skilled performance, rumination, perfectionism, and overcontrol. A purposively assembled corpus of 128 potentially relevant publications was examined, of which 56 formed the core conceptual synthesis; a targeted update through 1 July 2026 was used to refine construct boundaries and incorporate recent evidence. The review distinguishes metacognitive distancing—a temporary shift from direct engagement to observing and, where relevant, evaluating one’s own mental activity—from flexible metacognition, defined as the context-sensitive regulation of the initiation, intensity, function, and termination of such monitoring. The proposed cycle comprises direct engagement, distancing, regulation, and reintegration. Reintegration denotes the incorporation of selected metacognitive information into ongoing action while explicit self-monitoring recedes. The framework is positioned in relation to metareasoning, cognitive flexibility, psychological flexibility, and regulatory flexibility. Its adaptive value is hypothesised to depend on cue relevance, judgement calibration, proportionality of control, and successful return to the primary activity. The model is theoretical and heuristic rather than neuroanatomical or clinical, and its proposed dimensions require empirical validation.

*Keywords: flexible metacognition; metacognitive distancing; metacognitive monitoring; regulation; reintegration; rumination; overcontrol*

## 1. Introduction

Metacognition encompasses knowledge and processes directed towards one's own cognitive activity, including the monitoring of ongoing performance and the control of subsequent processing (Flavell, 1979; Nelson & Narens, 1990). It can facilitate learning, error detection, confidence calibration, strategy selection, and help-seeking. Its adaptive value, however, does not increase monotonically with the amount of self-observation. Monitoring can consume cognitive resources, amplify negative self-evaluation, or disrupt an automatised skill; reflection may clarify a problem or become repetitive processing; and self-control may support goal pursuit or become rigid when it is insufficiently responsive to changing circumstances (Norman, 2020). The central issue is therefore not whether metacognition is present, but whether it is sufficiently accurate, proportionate, and appropriately timed.

This article uses the term metacognitive distancing to denote a temporary shift from direct engagement in a cognitive or affective process to observing and, where relevant, evaluating that process. Distancing separates the occurrence of a thought, feeling, or judgement from its presumed validity or usefulness: subjective certainty is not treated as proof, emotional intensity is not equated with objective danger, and an initial strategy remains open to revision. Yet distancing is not intrinsically adaptive. It may support evidence checking, confidence recalibration, strategic change, tolerance of uncertainty, and a return to effective action, but it may also sustain repetitive checking, indecision, rumination, and overcontrol.

Flexible metacognition is defined here as the capacity to initiate, modulate, and terminate metacognitive distancing, monitoring, and control in accordance with purpose, context, and informational value. Distancing describes the process by which mental activity becomes an object of observation; flexibility concerns the regulation of that process. The present account does not claim that flexibility, monitoring, or stopping are novel topics in themselves. Its proposed contribution lies in integrating the timing, intensity, function, and termination of monitoring within a single regulatory cycle and in specifying how this configuration differs from neighbouring constructs, particularly metareasoning, cognitive flexibility, psychological flexibility, and regulatory flexibility.

Several research traditions converge on this problem from different explanatory levels. Experimental metacognition examines confidence, calibration, and monitoring-control relations; research on automaticity and skilled performance shows that explicit attention may facilitate acquisition yet disrupt expert execution; and clinical traditions examine metacognitive awareness, decentring, defusion, rumination, perfectionism, and overcontrol. Metareasoning addresses the allocation and termination of cognitive effort during reasoning, whereas regulatory-flexibility models emphasise the fit between strategies, context, and feedback (Aldao et al., 2015; Ball & Richardson, 2025; Bonanno & Burton, 2013; Frieze et al., 2024). These literatures overlap substantially, but they do not address the same functional question.

Accordingly, the review asks when metacognitive distancing should be initiated, how the information it produces should influence regulation, and when explicit monitoring should recede.

It further examines how ostensibly adaptive self-observation can become cognitively costly or behaviourally rigid across learning, decision-making, skilled performance, emotional processing, and interpersonal functioning. The purpose is not to reduce these domains to a single mechanism, but to identify functional convergences while preserving differences in constructs, methods, and levels of explanation.

The resulting framework organises these questions into a cycle of direct engagement, metacognitive distancing, regulation, and reintegration. Reintegration is conceptualised as more than the mere cessation of monitoring: selected metacognitive information is retained in subsequent action while explicit self-evaluation recedes and attention returns to the task, experience, or relationship. This component, together with the broader architecture of the model, is advanced as a falsifiable theoretical proposal requiring empirical validation rather than as an established clinical or neurocognitive fact.

## **2. Methodology**

An integrative narrative review was selected because the relevant literature spans heterogeneous constructs, methodologies, and levels of explanation. The review was designed to clarify concepts, compare competing accounts, identify convergences and tensions, and develop testable propositions rather than to estimate a single pooled effect or claim the exhaustiveness of a systematic review. Its design was informed by integrative-review methodology, guidance on literature reviews as research methodology, and the SANRA criteria for narrative reviews (Baethge et al., 2019; Snyder, 2019; Whittemore & Knafl, 2005).

Source selection was organised around four guiding questions: under what conditions do monitoring and distancing support learning, decision-making, and regulation; when do they become costly, inaccurate, or rigid; how does metacognitive distancing relate to metacognitive awareness, decentring, cognitive defusion, self-distancing, mindfulness, and reflection; and how should flexible metacognition be differentiated from metareasoning, cognitive flexibility, psychological flexibility, and regulatory flexibility? Clinical and performance literatures were included to examine rumination, perfectionism, overcontrol, automaticity, and performance under pressure.

Core searches were conducted in PubMed, PsycINFO, Scopus, and Web of Science, with Google Scholar used selectively to identify theoretical works, books, difficult-to-index sources, and later citations of seminal contributions. The main search was completed on 14 June 2026. A targeted update on 1 July 2026 examined recent work on metareasoning, regulatory flexibility, metacognitive monitoring across cognitive and emotional domains, and the relationship between cognitive flexibility and metacognitive regulation. Reference-list screening and forward-citation tracing complemented the electronic searches.

Search terms were adapted to the indexing conventions of each database and combined using AND and OR. They covered metacognition, monitoring, control, confidence, calibration, metareasoning, distancing, decentring, cognitive defusion, self-distancing, mindfulness, cognitive flexibility, psychological flexibility, regulatory flexibility, automatic and deliberate processing,

skilled performance, performance under pressure, rumination, perfectionism, and overcontrol. Terms related to lateralisation were used only to evaluate the limited heuristic claim concerning contextual experience and explicit representation.

A purposively assembled working corpus of 128 potentially relevant publications was examined at title-and-abstract or full-text level. This figure denotes publications brought forward for substantive consideration through iterative database searching, reference screening, and citation tracing; it is not the total database yield and should not be interpreted as a PRISMA flow count. Fifty-six publications formed the core conceptual synthesis. Publications identified in the July 2026 update were used to test construct boundaries and update the discussion and were therefore not included in the original count of 56 core sources. References were managed in Mendeley, and apparent duplicates were checked against title, authorship, publication year, and DOI.

English- and Romanian-language publications were eligible, with no lower date limit. Priority was given to construct-defining works, empirical studies relevant to monitoring, confidence, control, and performance, meta-analyses, systematic or critical reviews, and theoretical contributions that enabled mechanisms to be compared across domains. Sources were appraised qualitatively with respect to conceptual clarity, methodological appropriateness, measurement validity, sample characteristics, treatment of alternative explanations, causal inference, and convergence with other findings. Simplistic hemispheric typologies, merely metaphorical uses of central concepts, marginally relevant studies, and substantively redundant sources were excluded or treated cautiously.

The synthesis proceeded through conceptual mapping, analysis of adaptive functions, examination of costs and maladaptive forms, comparison with neighbouring flexibility constructs, and theoretical integration. Findings directly supported by the literature were distinguished from interpretive inferences advanced in this review and from novel hypotheses generated by the proposed model. Evidence was not transferred uncritically across perceptual tasks, everyday functioning, and psychopathology, and predominantly cross-sectional associations were not treated as evidence of unidirectional causality.

### **3. Conceptual clarifications**

The conceptual framework is organised around two constructs positioned at different explanatory levels: metacognitive distancing and flexible metacognition. The former denotes the process by which a person temporarily alters their stance towards their own mental activity; the latter denotes the regulatory capacity governing the initiation, intensity, function, and termination of that process. Clarifying this distinction requires situating both constructs within metacognition more broadly and differentiating them from introspection, metacognitive awareness, decentring, cognitive defusion, self-distancing, mindfulness, self-reflection, rumination, and overcontrol.

#### ***3.1. Metacognition and metacognitive distancing***

Flavell (1979) conceptualised metacognition in terms of knowledge and cognitive processes directed towards one's own cognitive activity. On this account, metacognition is not a

unitary ability: it encompasses knowledge about cognitive functioning, subjective experiences associated with processing, evaluations of performance, and the use of such information to regulate subsequent activity.

Nelson and Narens (1990) formulated one of the field's most influential functional distinctions by differentiating the object level, at which primary cognitive activity occurs, from the meta-level, at which that activity is represented and evaluated. Monitoring conveys information from the object level to the meta-level, whereas control allows meta-level information to modify subsequent processing. Monitoring thus concerns questions such as 'How well do I understand?' or 'How certain am I?', while control concerns whether to continue, verify a response, reallocate effort, or change strategy.

Fleming and Dolan (2012) distinguish primary task performance from metacognitive accuracy. A person may perform correctly while evaluating that performance inaccurately; conversely, strong subjective certainty does not guarantee a correct response. Metacognition should therefore be characterised not by the frequency or intensity of reflection alone, or by confidence level in isolation, but by the relation among metacognitive judgement, first-order performance, and subsequent regulatory behaviour.

In the experimental literature, metacognitive calibration, sensitivity and efficiency describe distinct properties. Calibration concerns the overall agreement between the level of confidence and the correctness of performance; metacognitive sensitivity refers to the ability of confidence judgements to distinguish correct responses from incorrect ones; and metacognitive efficiency relates this sensitivity to first-order performance. In this article, the term 'metacognitive accuracy' is used as a general term when the distinction between these indicators is not central, while the specific terms are retained where the interpretation of the results requires it.

In ordinary cognition, individuals are directly engaged in perception, thought, emotion, and action. Metacognitive distancing occurs when some aspect of this ongoing activity temporarily becomes an object of observation and, where useful, evaluation. It is defined here as a shift from direct engagement in a cognitive or affective process towards a stance that permits verification, regulation, or modification of the response. This definition entails four propositions: distancing alters one's relationship to experience rather than eliminating it; it is temporary rather than a permanent mode of self-observation; it may involve either simple observation or explicit epistemic and strategic evaluation; and its principal function is to create an opportunity for regulation rather than to transform analysis into an end in itself.

The shift from 'I will fail' to 'I notice that I am expecting to fail' illustrates this change in perspective. The first formulation presents the anticipation as a fact, whereas the second distinguishes the emergence of the thought from its validity. Similarly, moving from 'I cannot understand' to 'I notice that I do not yet understand and need to identify the source of the difficulty' transforms a sweeping conclusion about the self into information that can guide regulation.

Depending on context, metacognitive distancing may lead to evidence checking, confidence recalibration, strategic change, consultation of an external perspective, tolerance of residual uncertainty, deliberate termination of further analysis, or a return to the original course of

action. Its adaptive value therefore depends not simply on gaining perspective on experience, but on the informational quality of the resulting appraisal and on how that appraisal is translated into regulation.

Metacognitive distancing should not be conflated with emotional detachment, suppression, or avoidance. Detachment may reduce experiential access, whereas distancing retains the experience as an object of observation. Suppression seeks to inhibit or eliminate mental content; distancing instead modifies the person's relation to that content. Avoidance removes the person from the experience or relevant situation, whereas adaptive distancing can facilitate a more flexible re-engagement with it.

### *3.2. Related constructs and conceptual distinctions*

The term 'metacognitive distancing' is employed here as an integrative working construct. It neither replaces existing constructs nor presupposes their equivalence. Rather, it identifies a shared functional property—the temporary alteration of a person's relationship to a mental content or process—that appears in different forms and serves different purposes across metacognitive awareness, decentring, cognitive defusion, self-distancing, and mindfulness.

Teasdale et al. (2002) describe metacognitive awareness as the capacity to experience thoughts and emotions as mental events, rather than as elements identical to the self or as necessarily true representations of reality. The emphasis lies on changing one's relationship with experience, not on disputing the truth of every thought or emotion. Within the conceptual framework adopted here, metacognitive awareness is considered to overlap partly with metacognitive distancing, without presupposing the existence of an already validated taxonomic hierarchy. Distancing, however, has a broader scope, as it may also include evaluations regarding the accuracy, reliability and effectiveness of strategies.

A closely related construct is decentring. Fresco et al. (2007) define it as the ability to observe thoughts and emotions as temporary events of the mind, thereby reducing identification with and reactivity towards them. The concept is used predominantly in clinical literature and in research on mindfulness. Metacognitive distancing overlaps with the dimension of disidentification specific to decentring, but may also have an explicit epistemic function. The individual can examine not only whether they are able to observe a thought without identifying with it, but also how well-founded it is or what effect it has on the strategy being used.

Cognitive defusion, described by Hayes et al. (2006) within the psychological flexibility model, aims to reduce the rigid control that the literal meaning of a thought exerts over behaviour. The shift from the statement 'I am incapable' to 'I have the thought that I am incapable' does not prove that the thought is false, but alters its behavioural function. Defusion and metacognitive distancing overlap by creating a separation between the emergence of the thought and the immediate response to it. However, defusion does not necessarily involve evaluating the truth of the thought, while distancing may include epistemic verification.

Self-distancing, according to Ayduk and Kross (2010), refers to adopting a less immersive perspective on a personal experience. A person may analyse the situation from an observer's

perspective or use their own name in inner speech rather than reliving the experience exclusively from a first-person perspective. Self-distancing mainly concerns autobiographical and emotional experiences, whereas metacognitive distancing has a broader scope that includes memory, learning, perceptual judgements, confidence and cognitive strategies.

Mindfulness is another related concept. Bishop et al. (2004) describe it as directing attention to the present experience and adopting an attitude characterised by curiosity, openness and acceptance. Mindfulness practices can facilitate the observation of thoughts and emotions without automatic reaction, but do not necessarily involve assessing their accuracy or modifying a strategy. Mindfulness and metacognitive distancing overlap in that they both reduce immediate identification with experience, but they differ in that some forms of distancing are explicitly evaluative, while mindfulness often aims to reduce evaluation and maintain a non-reactive presence.

Metacognitive distancing must also be distinguished from introspection and self-reflection. Introspection directs attention towards one's own mental states and contents, but a person may observe a thought, emotion, or sensation without adopting a different stance towards it or attempting to regulate the process. Self-reflection is broader and may serve metacognitive, narrative, moral, or existential functions through deliberate examination of one's experiences, motives, decisions, or behaviour. By contrast, metacognitive distancing specifically concerns a change of stance towards a mental process that creates the possibility of using the resulting information for regulation.

Carruthers (2011) argues that access to the causes of one's own mental states is not fully transparent. Introspective explanations may therefore constitute plausible reconstructions rather than direct read-outs of the processes that generated behaviour. Distancing consequently creates an opportunity for evaluation but does not guarantee accuracy; the resulting interpretation may remain partial, biased, or erroneous.

### *3.3. Flexible metacognition, control and repetitive processing*

Metacognitive distancing describes a change of stance towards one's own mental activity, but it does not determine whether that stance is activated at an appropriate moment, whether monitoring remains proportionate to situational demands, or whether it can be terminated once its informational value has been exhausted. Flexible metacognition is therefore defined as the capacity to regulate the initiation, intensity, function, and termination of distancing, monitoring, and control according to purpose, context, and informational value. Its proposed dimensions are temporal, contextual, functional, and relational.

The closest established framework in reasoning is metareasoning, which concerns the monitoring and control of ongoing reasoning, including decisions to allocate effort, change strategy or stop processing (Ball & Richardson, 2025). Flexible metacognition overlaps substantially with metareasoning but is intended to cover a broader range of object-level activities, including affective experience, skilled action and interpersonal engagement. Its distinctive

hypothesis is that adaptive regulation may require reintegration after monitoring has served its function.

Flexible metacognition is also distinct from cognitive flexibility. Cognitive flexibility primarily concerns shifting rules, task sets, perspectives or strategies when demands change. Such shifting can occur without explicit metacognitive monitoring, and recent evidence suggests that cognitive flexibility and self-reported regulation of cognition can make independent contributions to academic performance (Musullulu et al., 2025). The constructs may support one another, but neither can be inferred from the other.

Regulatory-flexibility models provide the closest general conceptual neighbour because they define adaptation in terms of context sensitivity, access to a repertoire of strategies, and responsiveness to feedback rather than the universal superiority of any single response (Aldao et al., 2015; Bonanno & Burton, 2013; Friese et al., 2024). Flexible metacognition adopts this contextual logic but applies it specifically to meta-level operations: whether monitoring should begin, which cues warrant epistemic weight, how control should be scaled, and when explicit self-monitoring should recede. Psychological flexibility is broader, emphasising open contact with internal experience in the service of values-guided action.

Metacognition can inform self-control without being identical to it. Distancing may create a pause before action and permit a response to be revised, but the same capacity may contribute to overcontrol when thoughts, feelings, gestures and social impressions are continuously scrutinised. Lynch (2018) defines maladaptive overcontrol not as high discipline in itself, but as difficulty relaxing or revising control when its costs exceed its benefits.

The distinction is equally important for separating productive reflection from rumination. Productive reflection yields information that can support a decision, strategy change, or acceptance of a limit; rumination repeatedly revisits the same themes without commensurate informational gain and can interfere with action or emotional regulation (Watkins, 2008; Wells, 2009). Adaptive distancing creates a functional interval between experience and response; rumination can convert that interval into a self-perpetuating loop in which evaluation becomes the rationale for further evaluation.

### *3.4. The status of concepts in the proposed model*

Metacognitive distancing and flexible metacognition occupy distinct explanatory levels within the proposed framework. Distancing denotes the process through which ongoing mental activity becomes an object of observation and evaluation, whereas flexible metacognition denotes the regulatory property that governs when, how intensively, for what purpose, and for how long that process is deployed. Table 1 summarises this distinction.

**Table 1.** *The status of key concepts in the proposed model*

| Concept                  | Explanatory level | Main question                                                             |
|--------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Metacognitive distancing | Process           | How does mental activity become the object of observation and evaluation? |

| Concept                | Explanatory level   | Main question                                                                      |
|------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Flexible metacognition | Regulatory property | When, to what extent, for what purpose and for how long should distancing be used? |

The distinction between process and regulatory property is consequential rather than merely terminological. The occurrence of distancing does not, in itself, warrant an inference of metacognitive flexibility. A person may successfully adopt an observational stance towards a thought, feeling, judgement, or strategy while nevertheless relying on poorly calibrated cues, escalating control beyond what the situation requires, or continuing to monitor after further analysis has ceased to be informative. Conversely, flexible regulation need not entail prolonged or highly explicit self-observation: in familiar contexts, a brief metacognitive signal may be sufficient to trigger an appropriate adjustment and a rapid return to the primary activity. The construct of flexible metacognition therefore concerns the organisation of metacognitive engagement over time, not simply the presence or intensity of reflective awareness.

This distinction also specifies the level at which the present framework makes its principal theoretical claim. Established monitoring–control models explain how information about object-level cognition can inform subsequent control, whereas metareasoning and regulatory-flexibility accounts provide important principles concerning effort allocation, strategy revision, stopping, and context sensitivity (Nelson & Narens, 1990; Ball & Richardson, 2025; Aldao et al., 2015; Bonanno & Burton, 2013). The proposed framework does not replace these accounts. Rather, it hypothesises that adaptive metacognitive functioning depends on the fit among the trigger for distancing, the diagnostic value of the information obtained, the proportionality of the control response, and the capacity to terminate explicit monitoring and reintegrate the selected information into ongoing activity. In this formulation, flexibility is expressed in the regulation of entry, use, and exit from a metacognitive stance.

The distinction further has implications for construct validation. Measures that assess decentring, self-reflection, confidence accuracy, cognitive shifting, or psychological flexibility may capture components that are relevant to the proposed model, but none can be assumed to operationalise flexible metacognition in its entirety. Demonstrating the utility of the construct would therefore require evidence that its proposed dimensions account for meaningful variation beyond established measures and that reintegration contributes explanatory value rather than simply renaming attentional disengagement, task completion, or strategy switching. The comparison that follows is consequently intended as a boundary analysis rather than as a claim of taxonomic superiority: it identifies the explanatory domain of neighbouring constructs, the role they assign to stopping or return, and the specific point at which the present framework extends their logic.

Against this conceptual background, Table 2 locates flexible metacognition in relation to the principal neighbouring frameworks.

**Table 2.** Construct boundaries and the distinctive contribution of flexible metacognition

| Construct                                | Main focus and adaptive criterion                                                                                    | Stopping or return                                                      | Distinctive relation to the present framework                                                                          |
|------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Metacognitive monitoring and control     | One's own cognitive processing; informative monitoring and effective control.                                        | Usually task- or model-specific.                                        | Foundational architecture; does not by itself specify flexible entry, intensity and exit across domains.               |
| Metareasoning                            | Ongoing reasoning; appropriate effort, strategy change and stopping.                                                 | Explicitly includes cessation of reasoning.                             | Closest overlap in reasoning; the present framework extends to affect, action and relationship and adds reintegration. |
| Decentring, defusion and self-distancing | Relationship to thoughts or feelings; reduced identification, reactivity or literal behavioural control.             | Return is often implicit rather than separately modelled.               | Provide forms of distancing whose timing and duration are regulated in the proposed cycle.                             |
| Cognitive flexibility                    | Rules, task sets, perspectives or strategies; effective shifting as demands change.                                  | Completion of the shift or task.                                        | Can occur without explicit self-monitoring and is not equivalent to metacognitive accuracy or flexibility.             |
| Psychological flexibility                | Internal experience and values-guided behaviour; open contact while pursuing valued action.                          | Re-engagement with valued behaviour.                                    | Broader clinical construct; flexible metacognition is a narrower account of monitoring and return.                     |
| Regulatory flexibility                   | Coping, emotion-regulation or self-control strategies; context, repertoire and feedback fit.                         | Strategy revision as conditions change.                                 | Provides the contextual logic; the present framework applies it to meta-level observation and control.                 |
| Flexible metacognition                   | Initiation, use and termination of metacognitive distancing and control; relevant cues and proportionate regulation. | Explicit monitoring recedes while useful information remains in action. | Integrates entry, interpretation, control, exit and return across cognitive, affective and interpersonal contexts.     |

*Note.* The comparison identifies functional overlaps and boundaries; it does not imply that the constructs are interchangeable or that flexible metacognition has already demonstrated incremental validity.

#### **4. Critical analysis of the literature**

The literature is examined through two related questions: under what conditions does making mental activity an object of observation improve cognition and regulation, and how should the timing, intensity, and duration of that observation be calibrated to situational demands? Evidence is drawn from metacognitive monitoring, learning, decision-making, automaticity, performance under pressure, repetitive thought, and overcontrol, while maintaining distinctions among constructs and explanatory levels.

##### *4.1. Neurocognitive and conceptual foundations of the relationship between experience and representation*

Research on cerebral lateralisation supports relative functional specialisation alongside extensive interhemispheric and network-level integration. Split-brain findings vary with modality, task demands, response requirements, and compensatory pathways, and contemporary accounts do not support either two autonomous minds or global ‘left-brain/right-brain’ cognitive styles (De Haan et al., 2020; Hartwigsen et al., 2021). Metacognitive judgements recruit distributed prefrontal, parietal, and cingulate systems whose configuration varies across domains (Fleming & Frith, 2014).

McGilchrist’s (2009) contrast between contextual engagement and explicit representation is therefore retained only as a limited functional analogy. It draws attention to the possibility that explicit representations may become detached from the contexts they are intended to serve, but it does not provide a neural localisation of distancing, regulation, or reintegration. Historical and cultural extrapolations require evidence beyond neuropsychological findings (Spezio, 2019), and documented hemispheric asymmetries do not justify unitary cognitive styles (Corballis, 2014).

The proposed model does not depend on lateralisation. Its neurocognitive commitment is deliberately modest: adaptive metacognition requires coordination among object-level activity, meta-level information, and context-sensitive control within distributed systems. The empirical questions concern when observation is informative and when explicit representation should recede, not which hemisphere implements a given functional component.

##### *4.2. Adaptive functions and the limits of metacognitive monitoring*

Research on metamemory, comprehension and applied metacognition shows that monitoring can guide study time, strategy choice and allocation of effort (Dunlosky & Metcalfe, 2009; Metcalfe & Shimamura, 1994; Perfect & Schwartz, 2002). Feelings of familiarity, difficulty and fluency are useful only when interpreted against performance. Rereading may feel fluent without producing durable learning, whereas retrieval practice provides more diagnostic feedback. The benefit lies not in increased reflection by itself, but in the quality of the cue and the control decision that follows.

Confidence represents uncertainty and can guide checking, response revision, help-seeking or postponement when it is sufficiently calibrated to accuracy (Fleming, 2024). Confidence incorporates pre-response evidence as well as response time, effort, action information and post-decision cues (Wokke et al., 2020). Low confidence may promote adaptive cognitive offloading through reminders, but miscalibration can produce unnecessary dependence or refusal of useful support (Boldt & Gilbert, 2019).

At the group level, communicating confidence can improve collective decisions when initial judgements retain sufficient independence, confidence scales are broadly comparable, and disagreement remains possible (Bahrami et al., 2012; Bang & Frith, 2017). Poor calibration or differences in expressive style can instead allow the most assertive participant to dominate. Metacognitive information therefore contributes to interpersonal coordination only insofar as it remains contestable and open to revision.

Recent work reinforces the need to separate related capacities. In university students, cognitive flexibility and self-reported regulation of cognition independently predicted academic performance, indicating that executive shifting and metacognitive regulation should not be collapsed into one ability (Musullulu et al., 2025). Objective metacognitive monitoring has also been linked to emotion-management knowledge, and eliciting confidence judgements improved performance on an emotion-management task (Leckie et al., 2026). Better perceptual metacognitive ability was associated with lower self-reported emotion suppression, although not with reappraisal (Double, 2026). These findings support cautious cross-domain extension but do not make laboratory confidence tasks interchangeable with everyday emotional or interpersonal regulation.

Monitoring remains inferential rather than transparently introspective. Individuals may generate coherent explanations that do not accurately identify the processes underlying their decisions (Carruthers, 2011), while confidence can be systematically influenced by fluency, response speed, effort, familiarity, and post-decisional information (Fleming, 2024). Distancing therefore creates an opportunity for epistemic evaluation rather than a guarantee of veridical self-knowledge.

Experimentally measured metacognitive sensitivity is not uniformly related to psychopathology. Hohendorf and Bauer (2023) found reduced sensitivity in relation to psychotic symptoms but no comparable general effect for non-psychotic symptoms, although the evidence base was smaller. Intense self-scrutiny, maladaptive beliefs and rumination should therefore not be treated as proof of a global objective deficit in metacognitive sensitivity.

A further limitation concerns construct breadth. Laboratory confidence tasks provide precise measures of calibration, sensitivity and efficiency, but capture only part of metacognition, which also includes knowledge, experience and control in everyday settings (Katyal & Fleming, 2024). Flexible metacognition cannot be inferred from confidence accuracy alone because accurate information may still be used rigidly or monitoring may persist after the information has become sufficient.

Monitoring also consumes attentional and, in some circumstances, working-memory resources. Such costs are justified when additional information can prevent a consequential error or materially alter strategy, but they may be disproportionate in simple, familiar, reversible, or highly automatised activities. The relevant comparison is therefore between expected informational benefit and the costs of effort, delay, and interference. Importantly, these costs are conditional rather than universal: perceptual performance can deteriorate under dual-task conditions even when metacognitive efficiency remains comparatively resilient (Konishi et al., 2020).

#### *4.3. Metacognitive distancing in automatic processing, deliberate control and skilled performance*

The functional value of monitoring changes with expertise. Explicit attention to rules and component processes can support early learning, whereas conscious control of well-practised microcomponents may disrupt automatised coordination. Work on performance under pressure has shown that heightened self-focus can impair skilled execution, although the literature does not support a single explanatory mechanism (Baumeister, 1984; Beilock, 2010).

The explicit-monitoring account proposes that performers bring automatised components back under conscious control, whereas distraction accounts propose that anxiety and information about performance stakes consume limited working-memory resources. The relative explanatory value of these accounts varies with task, expertise, and the form of pressure involved (Yu, 2015). Stress can also alter attentional allocation, visual control, and sensorimotor coordination, making the target of attention more consequential than awareness per se (Vine et al., 2016). Global monitoring of goals and outcomes may therefore remain adaptive even when component-level monitoring becomes disruptive.

Flow is characterised by intense concentration, reduced evaluative self-concern and close integration of action and awareness, although no single neural explanation is established (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Harris et al., 2017). Metacognition need not disappear during flow: feedback-sensitive regulation may continue implicitly within the task rather than as a parallel commentary on performance.

Dual-process theories distinguish relatively automatic processing from working-memory-dependent analytic processing without mapping them onto unitary brain systems (Evans & Stanovich, 2013; Kahneman, 2011). Distancing can support decoupling from an initial response, but direct engagement is not identical to Type 1 processing and distancing is not synonymous with Type 2 processing. Sophisticated expertise may operate through direct engagement, while a feeling of error can trigger monitoring rapidly.

Metareasoning renders the stopping problem explicit: monitoring evaluates whether reasoning is progressing, while control allocates effort, changes strategy, or terminates processing when a satisfactory outcome has been reached or further work is unlikely to improve it (Ball & Richardson, 2025). This is a major point of overlap with flexible metacognition. The proposed extension is to examine whether analogous entry and exit decisions operate in affective,

behavioural, and interpersonal domains and whether useful meta-level information is retained when attention returns to ongoing activity.

Deliberation is most warranted when novelty, ambiguity, stakes, and expected information value are high and when additional evidence can materially alter the choice. It is less useful when the task is well learned, consequences are readily reversible, delay is costly, or further analysis no longer discriminates among alternatives. Flexible metacognition therefore concerns the calibration of the level and duration of monitoring rather than the permanent dominance of either automaticity or analysis.

#### *4.4. Maladaptive forms and clinical limits of monitoring*

Clinical research illustrates how monitoring may become maladaptive not merely because it is frequent, but because of the function it serves. Rumination can intensify negative thinking, impair problem solving and instrumental action, and erode social support (Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 2008). Repetitive thought is not intrinsically dysfunctional; its consequences depend on level of abstraction, problem-solving orientation, and its relation to subsequent action (Watkins, 2008).

Metacognitive beliefs can maintain repetitive processing by assigning instrumental value to continued analysis. Rumination and worry may be sustained by beliefs that further thinking prevents danger, produces complete understanding, or controls unwanted mental content (Wells, 2009). Dysfunctional metacognitive beliefs are associated with emotion dysregulation through rumination, worry, and suppression, although the predominantly cross-sectional evidence constrains causal interpretation (Mansueto et al., 2024). From the present perspective, monitoring becomes rigid when each attempt at control generates a new object of evaluation.

Perfectionism illustrates how accurate discrepancy detection can still yield maladaptive regulation. Clinical perfectionism links self-evaluation excessively to demanding standards despite adverse consequences (Shafran et al., 2002). Perfectionistic concerns are more consistently associated with psychopathology than high standards alone, and longitudinal evidence suggests reciprocal relations with depressive symptoms rather than a simple one-way cause (Limburg et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2021). The metacognitive problem may lie less in detecting an imperfection than in assigning it excessive significance and being unable to stop correction.

Overcontrol extends rigidity to emotional expression, risk, vulnerability and interpersonal signalling. Lynch (2018) describes maladaptive overcontrol in terms of inhibition, risk avoidance, perfectionism and difficulty adapting behaviour to context. RO-DBT was developed for difficulties associated with overcontrol, but the evidence remains promising rather than conclusive because of the limited number and heterogeneity of studies (Hatoum & Burton, 2024; Lynch et al., 2015). The present model treats persistent self-monitoring as one possible contributor to reduced spontaneity and connection, not as a validated or exhaustive clinical mechanism.

Regulatory-flexibility research strengthens the contextual interpretation. Adaptation depends on matching strategies to situational demands, maintaining effective strategies and changing ineffective ones rather than simply maximising variability (Aldao et al., 2015; Bonanno & Burton, 2013; Friese et al., 2024). Recent findings indicate that more flexibility is not invariably

better: regulatory flexibility shows diminishing or context-dependent associations with psychological health (Werner et al., 2026), and ambulatory data distinguish context-sensitive flexibility from mere variability and reveal nonlinear relations with affective well-being (de la Fuente et al., 2026).

These findings establish an important boundary condition for the proposed model. Flexible metacognition cannot be equated with frequent switching, continuous self-assessment, or indiscriminate responsiveness. It refers to the fit among signal relevance, context, control, and return to ongoing activity. Because the same observable behaviour may be adaptive in one situation and costly in another, the model should ultimately be tested through person-by-context and within-person designs rather than through global trait scores alone.

## **5. The proposed integrative model: the cycle of flexible metacognition**

### *5.1. The status and premises of the model*

The cycle of flexible metacognition is proposed as a theoretical and heuristic account of the relation among direct engagement, metacognitive distancing, regulation, and reintegration. It is neither a neuroanatomical architecture nor a validated clinical instrument, and it should not be understood as a fixed sequence that must occur in every task. Its purpose is to organise evidence concerning both the benefits and costs of monitoring and to generate testable hypotheses about transitions into and out of explicit metacognitive engagement.

The model rests on four premises. First, distancing alters the person's relation to a thought, emotion, or judgement and can reduce the automaticity of response, but observation itself can consume resources and modify the process being observed (Norman, 2020). Second, metacognitive information has functional value only insofar as it can inform a decision, strategy, action, or acceptance of a limit; accuracy without useful and proportionate control is insufficient.

Third, control should be deployed when its anticipated benefit and efficacy outweigh the costs of effort, delay, and interference, extending the expected-value-of-control principle to the decision to initiate or sustain monitoring (Shenhav et al., 2013). Fourth, adaptive regulation may require reintegration: selected metacognitive information modifies subsequent activity while explicit self-monitoring recedes. This proposition is compatible with, but not reducible to, the reduced identification and reactivity described in models of decentring (Bernstein et al., 2015).

Flexible metacognition is consequently conceived as a dynamic person-by-context capacity rather than as a stable global trait. The analytically relevant unit is the episode: what triggered monitoring, which cues were used, how those cues were interpreted, what control response followed, whether continued monitoring retained informational value, and how the person returned to the task, experience, or relationship.

### *5.2. The architecture of the cycle*

The cycle comprises four functional components—direct engagement, metacognitive distancing, regulation, and reintegration. These components should not be interpreted as strictly

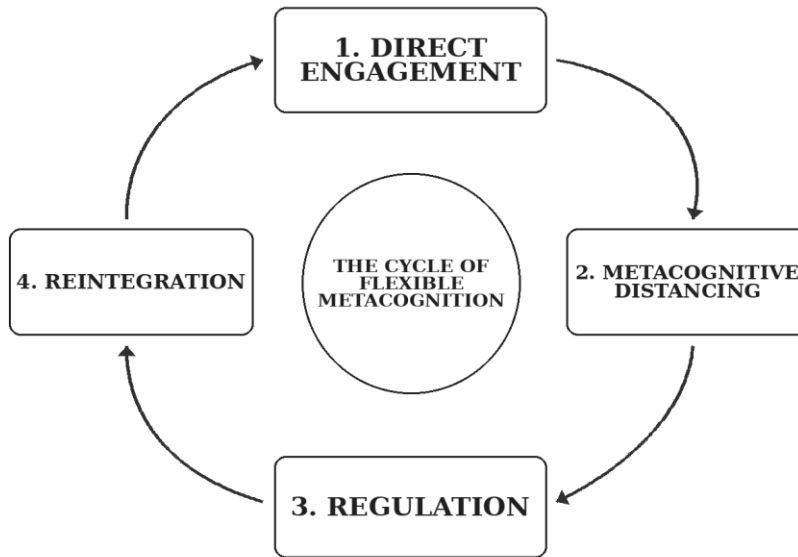
linear or obligatory phases; depending on situational demands, they may be activated, revisited, abbreviated, or omitted.

Direct engagement refers to immediate involvement in perception, thought, emotion, action, or interaction. Attention is directed primarily towards the object of activity rather than towards explicit evaluation of how that activity is being performed. Direct engagement may include automatised processes, expertise, implicit regulation, and sensitivity to feedback; it should therefore not be equated with passivity, lack of awareness, or exclusively intuitive processing.

Metacognitive distancing occurs when a signal of error, uncertainty, conflict, difficulty, or discrepancy transforms an aspect of ongoing mental activity into an object of observation. The person may examine a thought, emotion, confidence judgement, strategy, or the unfolding of an action. The trigger may be internal, such as a sense of error or difficulty, or external, such as feedback, disagreement, or an unexpected outcome.

Regulation refers to the use of the information obtained through monitoring to maintain, modify, or suspend a response. It may involve checking evidence, recalibrating confidence, reallocating effort, changing strategy, seeking support, inhibiting an impulsive response, or accepting that uncertainty cannot be eliminated completely. Crucially, regulation does not always entail increasing control; in some contexts the appropriate response is to reduce monitoring, tolerate ambiguity, or continue acting despite residual uncertainty.

Reintegration refers to incorporating selected metacognitive information into the primary activity while explicit self-monitoring is down-regulated. It is not equivalent to simply stopping evaluation or becoming distracted from it: the subsequent action, interaction, or strategy should retain the useful adjustment. Failure to reintegrate may sustain monitoring by turning the question of whether regulation has succeeded into a new object of scrutiny. Empirically, reintegration should therefore require both a return to engagement and evidence that the selected adjustment persists. Figure 1 presents the functional architecture of the cycle.



**Figure 1.** *The cycle of flexible metacognition*

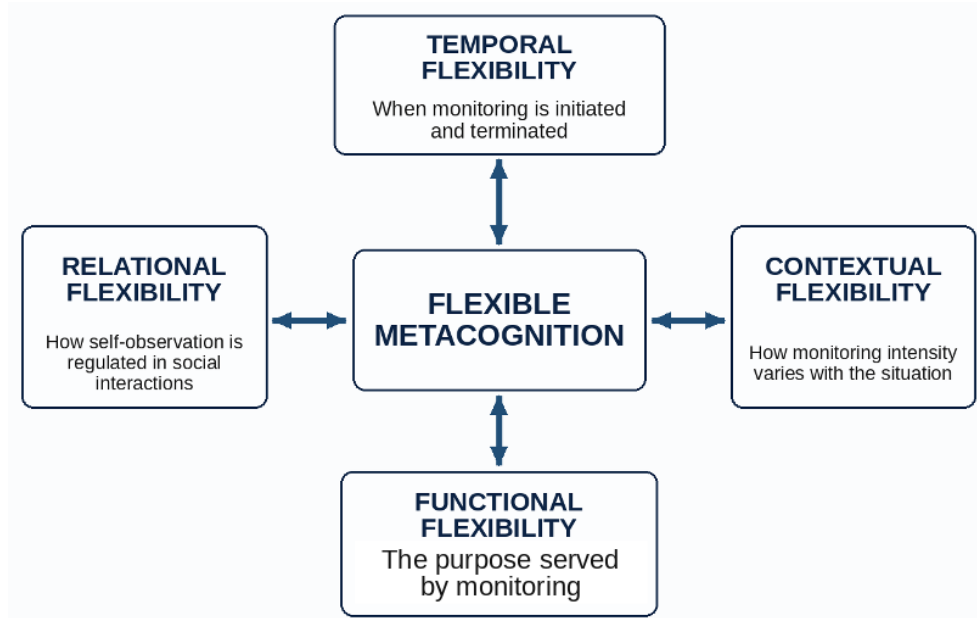
*Note.* The figure illustrates the relationship among direct engagement, metacognitive distancing, regulation and reintegration. The arrows indicate the dynamic and recurrent nature of the cycle. Reintegration is shown as a theoretically proposed component, not as an independently validated psychological mechanism. Depending on situational demands, the cycle may be brief, may involve movement back and forth between distancing and regulation, or may be interrupted before reintegration.

The cycle is intentionally non-rigid. In a familiar activity, a metacognitive signal may produce a rapid adjustment followed by immediate resumption of action; in a novel or high-stakes decision, distancing and regulation may be more elaborate; and during rumination or overcontrol, the person may repeatedly return from attempted regulation to renewed monitoring. Adaptive functioning therefore depends on four broad conditions: a relevant trigger, sufficiently informative and well-calibrated metacognitive judgements, regulation proportionate to the goal and context, and the capacity to terminate explicit monitoring once its informational value has been exhausted.

### 5.3. *Dimensions of metacognitive flexibility*

Flexible metacognition can be described along four interdependent dimensions: temporal, contextual, functional, and relational. These dimensions are proposed analytical criteria rather than a validated taxonomy. They extend the context-sensitivity and feedback logic of regulatory-flexibility models to meta-level observation and control (Aldao et al., 2015; Bonanno & Burton, 2013; Frieze et al., 2024). Temporal flexibility concerns when monitoring begins and ends; contextual flexibility concerns the intensity of monitoring relative to situational demands;

functional flexibility concerns the purpose served by monitoring; and relational flexibility concerns how self-monitoring shapes interpersonal engagement. Figure 2 summarises these dimensions.



**Figure 2.** *Dimensions of metacognitive flexibility*

*Note.* The figure presents the four dimensions of metacognitive flexibility around the general capacity to initiate, adjust and terminate metacognitive distancing, monitoring and control. The bidirectional relationships indicate that the dimensions are mutually dependent and that adaptive functioning results from their coordination.

Temporal flexibility concerns whether distancing is initiated, maintained and terminated at appropriate times. Reflection may be useful before a decision, during learning or after an action, because it can clarify the goal, strategy and outcome. The same processing may become disruptive when activated during an automated skill or continued after the relevant information has been obtained. Temporal flexibility therefore involves both initiating monitoring when appropriate and suspending it before it interferes with the primary task.

Contextual flexibility refers to adjusting the intensity and duration of monitoring to the characteristics of the situation. More extensive monitoring is justified when a problem is novel, information is ambiguous, the stakes are high, consequences are difficult to remedy, feedback is contradictory, or additional data may materially alter the decision. Less metacognitive involvement may be sufficient when a task is familiar and automated, consequences are minor or reversible, the cost of delay exceeds the benefit of checking, or further information no longer distinguishes among the alternatives.

Functional flexibility concerns the purpose served by monitoring. Thought processes that are similar in form may serve different functions. Analysing a problem may help identify a solution, but it may also postpone a decision or avoid uncertainty. Checking a response may reduce the risk of a significant error, but it may also pursue an unattainable degree of certainty. The central criterion is not the mere presence of reflection, but whether it produces usable information and supports proportionate regulation. Wells (2009) shows that rumination and worry may be sustained by beliefs about the usefulness of repeated analysis and the need to control thoughts. In such cases, distancing no longer serves a limited corrective function but becomes part of a rigid attempt to eliminate uncertainty.

Relational flexibility concerns the regulation of self-monitoring in interpersonal contexts. A certain degree of self-monitoring is necessary for adapting communication, respecting interpersonal boundaries, and assessing the effects of one's behaviour. When attention becomes predominantly focused on self-presentation, however, interaction may shift into a continuous evaluation of social performance. Questions such as 'Do I appear competent enough?', 'Have I expressed my emotions appropriately?', or 'What impression does each gesture create?' may reduce responsiveness to the other person and diminish spontaneity of expression. Lynch (2018) associates overcontrol with inhibited emotional expression and difficulties in interpersonal connectedness. Relational flexibility therefore involves using self-relevant information without allowing excessive self-monitoring to constrain vulnerability, interpersonal responsiveness, or openness to emotional connection.

The four dimensions should be understood jointly rather than as independent capacities. Monitoring may be temporally appropriate yet functionally maladaptive if it is initiated at a justified moment but serves the unattainable goal of eliminating all uncertainty. Similarly, analysis may be contextually warranted yet relationally maladaptive if attention to one's own behaviour substantially diminishes responsiveness to others. Flexible metacognition therefore denotes not a fixed optimal level of reflection, but the capacity to coordinate the timing, intensity, function, and interpersonal consequences of monitoring.

#### 5.4. *Functional and dysfunctional configurations of the cycle*

The functioning of the cycle varies with the relevance of the trigger for distancing, the quality of metacognitive information, and the proportionality of regulation and reintegration. The configurations in Table 3 are therefore conceived as context-dependent modes of functioning rather than as stable traits, diagnostic categories, or permanent person-level profiles.

**Table 3.** *Functional and dysfunctional configurations of the flexible metacognition cycle*

| Configuration    | Main mechanism                                                                               | Possible consequences                                                                     |
|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Under-monitoring | Signals of error or uncertainty do not trigger distancing or are not used for re-evaluation. | Overconfidence, impulsivity, repeated errors and persistence with ineffective strategies. |

| Configuration                              | Main mechanism                                                                                                                                                         | Possible consequences                                                                                                |
|--------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Flexible metacognition                     | Metacognitive distancing is activated selectively, yields relevant information, leads to proportionate regulation and is followed by a return to the primary activity. | Learning, confidence calibration, strategy adaptation and tolerance of uncertainty.                                  |
| Poorly calibrated metacognitive judgements | Distancing is initiated, but the associated metacognitive judgements are inaccurate or disproportionate.                                                               | Unnecessary checking, underconfidence, overconfidence and inappropriate decisions.                                   |
| Hypermonitoring and overcontrol            | Distancing is activated frequently, continues after losing its informational value and is not followed by a return to the primary activity.                            | Processes associated with rumination, indecision, perfectionism, performance interference and relational inhibition. |

*Note.* The configurations and consequences presented in this table are theoretical propositions of the model and should not be interpreted as validated categories, diagnostic profiles or established causal pathways.

These configurations may coexist within the same individual across domains and situations. A person may under-monitor in a domain characterised by overconfidence while hypermonitoring in another domain associated with high emotional or social stakes. Metacognitive flexibility should therefore be assessed at the intersection of person, task, and context rather than inferred from a single global tendency.

Dysfunction can arise at several points in the cycle. Signals of error or uncertainty may fail to trigger distancing; distancing may occur but yield poorly calibrated judgements; or relatively accurate metacognitive information may elicit rigid, disproportionate control. In the first case, contradictory feedback is insufficiently incorporated; in the second, subjective difficulty, anxiety, or familiarity may be misinterpreted as direct evidence of incapacity, danger, or understanding; in the third, uncertainty or error automatically prompts further checking and correction irrespective of contextual value.

A fourth dysfunction concerns failed reintegration. Even after sufficient information has been obtained and a response selected, the person may fail to return to the primary activity. Monitoring whether regulation has succeeded then becomes the object of renewed evaluation, generating a self-referential loop. Within the model, this failure is proposed as one possible mechanism contributing to the persistence of rumination, indecision, and overcontrol, without claiming to explain these phenomena exhaustively.

This distinction separates metacognitive accuracy from metacognitive flexibility. Problems may arise either in the detection and quality of metacognitive information or in how accurate information is translated into control and terminated. A person may recognise uncertainty correctly yet still respond rigidly through repeated checking and an inability to disengage from monitoring.

#### *5.5. Theoretical hypotheses and directions for operationalisation*

The model yields a set of empirically testable hypotheses. These should be understood as predictions derived from the literature and the proposed theoretical integration rather than as established conclusions.

The relationship between monitoring intensity and adaptation is expected to be non-linear. Very low levels should be associated with uncorrected errors and overconfidence, whereas very high levels should be associated with interference, delayed action and repetitive processing. Distancing should be more beneficial in novel, uncertain and high-stakes situations than in familiar, automated and easily reversible activities.

The capacity to terminate monitoring may explain variation in adaptation beyond metacognitive accuracy. Two people may detect uncertainty with similar accuracy yet differ in their ability to use the information and return to the task. Likewise, the actionability of information may mediate the relationship between monitoring and outcome: monitoring should be more useful when it enables a relevant adjustment than when no meaningful course of action is available.

In automated tasks, explicit monitoring of microcomponents should impair performance more than global monitoring of goals and outcomes. In clinical contexts, beliefs that uncertainty must be eliminated completely may predict hypermonitoring and ruminative processing independently of metacognitive accuracy. Interpersonally, chronic self-monitoring may be associated with reduced emotional expressiveness and spontaneity. Overall, indicators of metacognitive flexibility should predict everyday adaptation more strongly than the overall frequency of self-reflection.

Testing these hypotheses requires a multimethod approach because no single indicator can capture every component of the model. Monitoring accuracy can be assessed through confidence judgements and measures of metacognitive calibration, sensitivity, and efficiency; such methods permit confidence to be analysed separately from first-order performance (Fleming, 2024).

Distancing can be investigated using measures of decentring, meta-awareness, cognitive defusion or self-distancing, while recognising that these instruments are not interchangeable. Bernstein et al. (2015) show that existing measures capture different combinations of meta-awareness, disidentification and reduced reactivity. Validating the model will therefore require measures that distinguish the capacity for distancing from flexible regulation of its use.

Temporal flexibility can be investigated by manipulating when reflection occurs: before a task, during execution or after completion. Comparing novel and automated tasks would allow the moderating role of experience to be tested. Contextual flexibility can be examined by varying stakes, ambiguity, decision reversibility and the availability of additional information.

Functional flexibility requires assessment of the consequences of processing, not only its content. Daily-diary methods, ecological momentary assessment and longitudinal studies could examine whether reflection leads to clarification and action or to repetitive analysis without progress. Relational flexibility could be investigated through interactive tasks, behavioural observation and measures of attention directed towards oneself and others.

Reintegration is the most novel and least validated component of the framework. It may be operationalised through the latency of return to a task after evaluation, deliberate termination of checking, reduction in explicit self-evaluation after a response has been selected, and resumption of behavioural or interpersonal engagement. Experimental work should determine whether these indicators form a distinct dimension or are better explained by established constructs such as psychological flexibility, cognitive control, attentional disengagement, or tolerance of uncertainty.

## 6. Discussion

The cycle of flexible metacognition offers an integrative framework for findings that appear contradictory when metacognitive monitoring is treated as uniformly beneficial. Monitoring can enhance learning, confidence calibration, strategic adjustment, and interpersonal coordination, yet it can also consume cognitive resources, disrupt automatised performance, and sustain repetitive or excessive control. The present framework interprets these apparently divergent outcomes as different configurations of cue relevance, judgement quality, proportionality of control, and the capacity to return effectively to ongoing activity.

A first theoretical implication is that the adaptive value of metacognition cannot be captured by a linear “more is better” assumption. The relevant question is not whether reflection should be maximised, but whether the form, intensity, and duration of monitoring are appropriately matched to task demands. Novel, ambiguous, or consequential situations may justify extended verification, whereas familiar, highly automatised, or readily reversible activities may require little explicit monitoring. This position is consistent with evidence concerning the potential costs of metacognitive activity and with regulatory-flexibility research showing that adaptive outcomes depend on context-sensitive fit rather than on greater variability or control per se (de la Fuente et al., 2026; Norman, 2020; Werner et al., 2026).

A second implication concerns the distinction between metacognitive accuracy and flexibility in the use of metacognitive information. Accuracy refers to the correspondence between metacognitive judgement and performance, whereas flexibility concerns how such information is translated into control and whether monitoring is appropriately terminated once a sufficiently informative decision, strategy, or accepted limit has been reached. A person may accurately recognise uncertainty yet respond with excessive checking, while an imperfect judgement may still support adaptive behaviour if it remains open to revision and leads to proportionate regulation. This distinction suggests that adaptive metacognition cannot be inferred from calibration alone.

The framework also extends existing accounts by linking entry into monitoring, meta-level regulation, and exit from monitoring across multiple domains while preserving construct boundaries. Metareasoning already addresses effort allocation, strategic change, and stopping

within reasoning processes (Ball & Richardson, 2025); cognitive flexibility primarily concerns shifting among task sets, strategies, or perspectives; and psychological and regulatory flexibility refer to broader forms of context-sensitive adaptation. Flexible metacognition is narrower in its immediate object because it concerns the regulation of meta-level observation and control, but broader than metareasoning in the range of domains to which it is intended to apply, including cognition, affective experience, skilled performance, and interpersonal engagement.

Within this architecture, the most distinctive theoretical proposal is reintegration. Adaptive regulation is hypothesised to involve not merely the cessation of checking, but the resumption of primary engagement while the relevant metacognitive information remains functionally incorporated into subsequent behaviour. Reintegration therefore differentiates successful termination from simple disengagement or abandonment of monitoring. The framework will add explanatory value only if reintegration and the proposed dimensions of flexibility account for adaptation beyond metacognitive accuracy, reflection frequency, attentional disengagement, and established conceptually related constructs. If such incremental validity cannot be demonstrated, the framework would require narrowing, reformulation, or integration into more parsimonious existing accounts.

The model also provides a functional lens through which maladaptive processes such as rumination, perfectionism, and overcontrol can be examined without reducing them to a single mechanism. In rumination, the central difficulty may lie in the failure to transform reflection into a conclusion, decision, action, or acceptance of a limit. Observation generates further evaluation, and evaluation itself becomes a reason to continue monitoring. This interpretation is compatible with Wells' (2009) metacognitive account, in which repetitive processing may be maintained by beliefs concerning the usefulness of continued analysis and the perceived necessity of controlling thoughts.

Perfectionism illustrates a different form of disruption. Dysfunction may occur even when a discrepancy has been detected accurately. An individual may correctly identify an imperfection yet assign disproportionate significance to it and continue corrective activity after its marginal benefits have become negligible. From the perspective of flexible metacognition, the problem therefore need not reside in inaccurate monitoring, but in a rigid regulatory rule that converts each perceived error into a requirement for further control. This distinction reinforces the argument that the quality of metacognitive regulation cannot be reduced to the accuracy of metacognitive judgement.

In overcontrol, hypermonitoring may extend beyond thoughts and decisions to emotional expression, nonverbal behaviour, vulnerability, and the impression made on others. Lynch (2018) identifies difficulties in adapting behaviour to context as a central feature of maladaptive overcontrol. The present framework suggests that sustained self-monitoring may redirect attentional resources away from the interaction partner and constrain the spontaneous social signals that facilitate interpersonal connection. This interpretation remains a theoretical hypothesis rather than an independently validated clinical mechanism and should therefore be examined empirically rather than assumed to represent a general pathway.

The distinction between distancing and avoidance is particularly important in this context. Adaptive distancing preserves contact with an experience while creating sufficient psychological and cognitive space for evaluation and response selection, whereas avoidance reduces contact with the experience or with the situation in which it occurs. Distancing itself may become maladaptive when its primary function shifts from clarification or regulation to the postponement of action or the reduction of contact with vulnerable experience. Consequently, superficially similar difficulties may require opposite changes in metacognitive engagement: fusion with thoughts may benefit from greater decentring or defusion, whereas excessive self-scrutiny may require reduced evaluative monitoring and greater direct engagement. These implications remain conceptual and should not be interpreted as a therapeutic protocol in the absence of direct empirical validation.

The framework also has implications for education and self-regulated learning. Metacognitive instruction should not be conceived simply as an attempt to increase the frequency of reflection. Learners need to discriminate between diagnostic and misleading cues, compare subjective familiarity or confidence with actual performance, and use monitoring to initiate, maintain, or revise learning strategies. Equally important, they must be able to terminate reflection once it has fulfilled its informational function, so that monitoring learning does not begin to displace the learning activity itself.

This perspective supports instructional approaches that generate diagnostically informative feedback, including retrieval-based testing, self-explanation, and explicit comparison between predictions and subsequent outcomes. Such interventions should nevertheless be calibrated to expertise and task structure. During initial acquisition, explicit monitoring of component steps may support learning and error correction; once performance becomes substantially automatised, persistent attention to individual microcomponents may interfere with fluent execution. Metacognitive support should therefore change as the functional requirements of the task change.

Similar principles apply to decision-making. The amount of deliberative effort devoted to a decision should be calibrated to the stakes involved, the level of ambiguity, the reversibility of the outcome, and the expected informational value of further analysis. Extended verification is more defensible when errors carry substantial consequences and additional evidence can materially alter the choice. By contrast, in minor or readily reversible decisions, repeated analysis may impose cognitive and temporal costs that exceed the expected cost of making an imperfect choice. Flexible metacognition therefore concerns not only whether deliberation occurs, but whether its continuation remains informationally justified.

Metacognitive information also has an interpersonal dimension. Communicating degrees of confidence can facilitate collective decision-making when uncertainty is expressed in a way that remains open to disagreement and revision. However, differences in confidence expression should not be conflated with differences in competence. Group decisions may become distorted when the most forcefully expressed judgement receives disproportionate weight independently of its calibration. Adaptive collective reasoning therefore requires not only the communication of confidence, but also norms that preserve room for uncertainty, dissent, and revision.

Finally, the distinction between global monitoring and component-level monitoring may be particularly consequential in skilled performance under pressure. Experienced performers can remain sensitive to goals, outcomes, and task-relevant feedback without bringing each automatised component of performance back under explicit conscious control. Interventions designed to support performance should therefore aim to direct attention towards diagnostically useful information rather than attempting either to maximise self-monitoring or to eliminate self-awareness altogether.

## **7. Limitations and conclusions**

The breadth of this integrative review enables theoretical synthesis across several research traditions, but necessarily constrains exhaustiveness and reproducibility. The working corpus was purposively assembled rather than generated through a prospectively documented systematic-review protocol. Initial database yields, the exact number of duplicates, and complete reasons for full-text exclusion were not retained, while source selection and appraisal were conducted by a single author. Accordingly, the figures of 128 publications examined and 56 core sources should be interpreted as descriptive indicators of the working corpus rather than as components of a reproducible PRISMA flow.

A further limitation arises from the conceptual and methodological heterogeneity of the literatures integrated in the review. Metacognitive awareness, decentring, cognitive defusion, self-distancing, and mindfulness cannot be treated as manifestations of a single homogeneous process, while confidence judgements, autobiographical reflection, and interpersonal self-monitoring operate at different levels of analysis and are assessed through distinct methodological traditions. The construct-comparison framework proposed in this article is intended to clarify conceptual boundaries, but it does not in itself establish discriminant or incremental validity.

Relatedly, laboratory measures permit rigorous differentiation between first-order performance and metacognitive judgement, yet necessarily simplify contexts shaped by affect, values, interpersonal consequences, and incomplete information. Recent cross-domain findings provide an important basis for theoretical integration, but they do not warrant direct extrapolation from perceptual metacognition to clinical or interpersonal functioning (Double, 2026; Leckie et al., 2026). Ecological, longitudinal, and within-person research will therefore be required to determine whether the proposed dimensions of flexibility characterise naturally occurring episodes of monitoring, regulation, and return to ongoing activity.

The interpretation of clinical phenomena requires particular caution. A substantial proportion of the available evidence concerning metacognitive beliefs, rumination, perfectionism, overcontrol, and psychological symptoms is cross-sectional or correlational. Observed associations may therefore reflect antecedent vulnerability, consequence, reciprocal maintenance, or the influence of unmeasured third variables. The present framework does not establish a unidirectional causal pathway and should not be interpreted as a diagnostic classification or therapeutic protocol.

The proposed model itself remains theoretical and empirically unvalidated. Its dimensions may not emerge as psychometrically distinct factors, and reintegration may overlap substantially with established constructs such as attentional disengagement, action orientation, psychological flexibility, or the ordinary completion of cognitive control. Moreover, the cyclical representation necessarily simplifies processes that may be distributed, partially simultaneous, and dynamically coupled. The discussion of cerebral lateralisation is explicitly heuristic and should not be interpreted as providing neural localisation for any component of the model.

An additional challenge concerns the inherently normative question of when monitoring should cease. No universal threshold determines the point at which reflection has become sufficient. Continued analysis may be adaptive when the stakes are high, evidence remains incomplete, consequences are difficult to reverse, or moral obligations require further deliberation; the same persistence may function as avoidance, indecision, or overcontrol in another context. Any empirical or applied use of the framework must therefore specify the relevant goals, consequences, reversibility of action, informational value of further monitoring, and costs associated with continued cognitive engagement.

These limitations also define the principal conditions under which the model can be evaluated. Empirical validation requires evidence at the levels of construct differentiation, incremental prediction, and process-level observation. Metacognitive distancing must be distinguishable from introspection, avoidance, and suppression; flexible regulation must be assessed independently of the overall frequency of reflection; and reintegration must be operationalised through observable indicators such as the cessation of explicit monitoring, return to the primary activity, and persistence of the selected adjustment in subsequent behaviour. Evidence for incremental validity would require these indicators to explain variation in performance, well-being, or interpersonal functioning beyond metacognitive accuracy and established neighbouring constructs.

Equally important, the framework must remain explicitly open to falsification. If its proposed dimensions cannot be distinguished empirically, if reintegration provides no explanatory or predictive value beyond established constructs, or if existing theoretical models account for the relevant findings more parsimoniously, the cycle should be revised, narrowed, or abandoned in its present form. Its scientific value therefore depends not on the breadth of the phenomena that can be retrospectively accommodated within it, but on its capacity to generate discriminating and empirically testable predictions.

Within these constraints, the present synthesis suggests that the adaptive value of metacognition depends less on the amount of self-observation than on the context-sensitive regulation of when monitoring is initiated, how metacognitive information is interpreted, how strongly it influences control, and when explicit monitoring is brought to an end. The proposed cycle integrates direct engagement, metacognitive distancing, regulation, and reintegration while preserving the distinction between metacognitive distancing as a process and flexible metacognition as the regulation of that process.

From this perspective, metacognitive competence involves recognising when a shift in perspective is warranted, evaluating the informational value of the resulting metacognitive signals, translating those signals into proportionate regulation, and returning to ongoing cognitive, affective, behavioural, or interpersonal engagement once further monitoring no longer provides sufficient value. Flexible metacognition should therefore be understood as a testable theoretical framework rather than as an established account of metacognitive, neurocognitive, or clinical functioning.

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# **PROMOTING A NEURODIVERSITY-AFFIRMING CULTURE IN SCHOOLS: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND DIRECTIONS FOR INTEGRATIVE INTERVENTION**

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## ***Abstract***

The development of neurodiversity-affirming school cultures requires attention not only to educational practices and environmental adaptations but also to the attitudes and social behaviors of students. This theoretical paper examines the mechanisms through which the students' attitudes toward neurodiversity may contribute to the development of a neurodiversity-affirming school culture. Drawing on the neurodiversity paradigm, the neurodiversity-affirming perspective, Intergroup Contact Theory, the Theory of Planned Behavior, Social Learning Theory, and constructivist perspectives on learning, the paper proposes an integrative theoretical framework linking students' knowledge, attitudes, social norms, intergroup contact, cooperation, perceived behavioral control, and inclusive behavior. The analysis suggests that attitudinal development is embedded within broader social and environmental processes and that positive attitudes alone may not necessarily translate into inclusive behavior. Meaningful intergroup contact, cooperative learning, accurate and non-stereotypical information, inclusive social norms, adult modeling and increased predictability, competence, and autonomy may represent complementary mechanisms supporting inclusive participation and social belonging. The proposed framework conceptualizes the development of a neurodiversity-affirming school culture as a reciprocal process involving changes in individual attitudes, peer relationships, classroom practices, and wider school norms. The paper concludes by outlining directions for integrative school-based interventions and future empirical research.

*Keywords:* "neurodiversity"; "attitudes"; "neurodiversity-affirming"; "neurodiversity-affirming school culture"

## Introduction

Diversity represents a fundamental characteristic of contemporary society, and schools constitute one of the primary contexts in which children and adolescents encounter, explore, and learn to value differences among people. In this context, diversity refers not only to cultural, social, or individual differences, but also to the ways in which people perceive and process information, communicate, learn, and interact with their environment. The neurodiversity perspective brings precisely this variability in neurological functioning to the forefront, proposing a reconsideration of how differences between individuals are understood and, consequently, how these differences are addressed within educational settings.

Within the traditional deficit-centered paradigm, the characteristics of neurodivergent children are often interpreted predominantly in relation to norms of functioning considered typical. Consequently, difficulties related to communication, self-regulation, attention, sensory processing, or learning may become the primary reference points through which the child is defined. The neurodiversity paradigm proposes a shift in perspective, whereby neurological variations are viewed as part of human diversity and because of the interaction between individual characteristics and the features of the developmental environment, while their integration into neurotypical contexts becomes an educational objective. This shift in perspective does not imply disregarding the difficulties or support needs of neurodivergent children; rather, it involves reconsidering the relationship between individual characteristics and the environment in which children learn and develop. In the school context, this change in perspective has implications that extend beyond the individual adaptation of the educational process.

The inclusion of a neurodivergent student cannot be reduced to their mere physical presence in the classroom; rather, it involves participation, social interaction, a sense of belonging, and recognition of their value as a member of the school community. In this process, peers' attitudes represent an important factor. The ways in which students understand neurodivergence, respond to different behaviors, and relate to neurodivergent peers can either facilitate or, conversely, constrain their participation in classroom life.

In this regard, the concept of a *neurodiversity-affirming* approach offers a relevant perspective for developing an educational climate in which neurological differences are not merely tolerated, but recognized and valued. Such an approach involves promoting non-stigmatizing representations of neurodivergence, respecting individual characteristics, and creating contexts in which every student can participate in school life without being required to conform to a single model of functioning. Therefore, developing a *neurodiversity-affirming* culture involves both transforming educational practices and influencing the ways in which students think, feel, and act in relation to neurological differences.

From this perspective, fostering attitudes that are supportive of neurodiversity becomes an important component of inclusive education. Knowledge and understanding of neurodiversity, positive contact and cooperation among students, the modeling of inclusive behaviors by adults, and the development of group norms based on respect and acceptance of differences may represent

mechanisms through which schools contribute to reducing stereotypes and stigmatization and to developing more inclusive social relationships.

The present paper aims to theoretically examine how a *neurodiversity-affirming* culture can be promoted in schools and the mechanisms through which such a culture may contribute to the development of students' attitudes toward neurodiversity. To this end, the neurodiversity paradigm and the *neurodiversity-affirming* approach are examined, alongside the characteristics of attitude formation and several relevant theoretical frameworks for understanding attitudinal change, including intergroup contact theory, social learning theory, and the principles of inclusive education. The analysis also seeks to identify educational approaches that may contribute to developing a school culture in which neurodiversity is recognized as a natural component of human diversity. The central question guiding the theoretical inquiry is: *Through what mechanisms are students' attitudes toward neurodiversity related to the development of a neurodiversity-affirming school culture?*

## **Theoretical foundation**

### **1. THE NEURODIVERSITY PARADIGM AND THE NEURODIVERSITY-AFFIRMING PERSPECTIVE**

#### **1.1. The Concept of Neurodiversity: Conceptual Delimitations**

Over the past decades, the conceptualization of neurological and neurodevelopmental differences has undergone a significant shift, from a perspective predominantly centered on deficit and normalization toward one that recognizes the diversity of cognitive and neurological functioning. In this context, the neurodiversity paradigm has emerged, viewing neurological variations as part of human diversity and proposing a more nuanced examination of the relationship between individual characteristics and the environment in which individuals live and learn (Dwyer, 2022; Botha et al., 2024).

In a broad sense, the concept of neurodiversity refers to the diversity existing across human brains and patterns of neurocognitive functioning. It is important to distinguish between the terms *neurodiversity* and *neurodivergence*. Neurodiversity refers to neurological variation within the population, whereas the term *neurodivergent* is used to describe individuals whose patterns of neurocognitive functioning differ from those considered predominant or “neurotypical.” Depending on the definition adopted, this category may include autistic individuals and individuals with ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, or other forms of neurodevelopmental difference (Botha et al., 2024).

From a historical perspective, neurodiversity is frequently associated with the work of Judy Singer and with literature emerging in the late 1990s. However, recent research emphasizes that neurodiversity theory cannot be attributed to a single individual. Botha et al. (2024) argue that ideas associated with neurodiversity were developed collectively, particularly within autistic and neurodivergent activist communities during the 1990s. This clarification is relevant because it highlights the social, cultural, and political dimensions of the paradigm and the importance of

placing the lived experiences of neurodivergent people at the center of the definition and development of the field.

The neurodiversity paradigm does not imply denying the difficulties associated with different neurodevelopmental conditions, nor does it eliminate the need for specialized support. Rather, it challenges the assumption that neurological difference should be understood exclusively as an individual deficit that needs to be corrected or eliminated. As an alternative, it promotes inclusive functioning, individualized consideration of each person, and the alignment of educational and developmental approaches and environmental conditions with the individual's personal characteristics. This involves considering both the person's individual characteristics and the demands, norms, and barriers present within the environment. Such a shift in perspective is particularly relevant to education, where the school environment may either facilitate or, conversely, exacerbate difficulties related to participation and learning (Dwyer, 2022; Fletcher-Watson & Happé, 2019).

#### 1.2. From the Deficit Paradigm to the Neurodiversity Paradigm

The traditional perspective on neurodevelopmental conditions has been strongly influenced by the medical model and by a deficit-centered conceptualization. Within this approach, differences in behavior, communication, sensory processing, or executive functioning are primarily interpreted as problems located at the individual level. Consequently, the objective of intervention becomes the reduction of symptoms, the correction of behaviors considered atypical, and the approximation of the individual to dominant norms of functioning.

The neurodiversity paradigm is more closely associated with the social model of disability, according to which disability is not determined exclusively by individual characteristics, but also by the physical, social, and attitudinal barriers present within society. Rejection, overprotective attitudes, and the lowering or absence of expectations, whether originating from adults or from the peer group, may intensify differences in functioning and contribute to long-term maladjustment. Applied to education, this perspective entails shifting the focus from the question, "What needs to be changed in the student?" to the question, "What can be changed in the educational environment so that the student can participate and learn?" Accordingly, adapting teaching methods, the sensory environment, communication modalities, and academic demands become an important component of inclusion.

Furthermore, individual development cannot be reduced to the acquisition of information; it also involves the development of a broad range of social skills, including communication, social acceptance, negotiation, empathy, and a sense of safety, among others, upon which long-term quality of life may depend. The school years represent a particularly important period for the development of these social skills, and their acquisition cannot take place independently of meaningful engagement with the social environment. The mere physical presence of a neurodivergent student in a mainstream classroom, without genuine interactions with peers, cannot be equated with inclusion. For the educational environment to be genuinely inclusive, it must provide developmental opportunities in this domain as well. An inclusive school therefore involves

not only access to education, but also participation, belonging, opportunities for learning, and social relationships based on respect.

This shift in perspective is also supported by research examining the experiences of neurodivergent students. A recent systematic review of the positive experiences of autistic students in mainstream schools identified three major dimensions: understanding and acceptance by others, the availability of environments adapted to individual needs, and opportunities for students to exercise autonomy in managing their own needs (Mc Kinlay, 2025). Research on educational accommodations indicates that pedagogical and psychosocial adjustments to the environment may contribute to improving the functioning and participation of autistic students, although the empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of different accommodations remains heterogeneous and requires further development (Leifler et al., 2021).

### 1.3. The Neurodiversity-Affirming Perspective in Education

The concept of *neurodiversity-affirming* refers to an orientation that translates the principles of the neurodiversity paradigm into the ways in which neurodivergent individuals are understood, supported, and valued. The neurodiversity-affirming perspective does not regard conformity to a neurotypical model as an implicit educational objective; rather, it shifts the focus toward recognizing neurological differences, respecting individual identity and autonomy, reducing barriers to participation, and ensuring the conditions necessary for learning, communication, and social interaction (Wagland et al., 2025).

In the educational context, this perspective can be understood as a set of principles and practices through which schools seek to create an accessible and respectful environment for students with different patterns of neurocognitive functioning. This involves not only adapting tasks and environments to individual needs but also reconsidering the norms through which certain behaviors are defined as “normal,” “appropriate,” or “problematic.” From this perspective, the behaviors and communication styles of neurodivergent students should be interpreted in relation to their individual characteristics and the demands of their environment, avoiding the assumption that any deviation from neurotypical norms constitutes a deficit that needs to be corrected.

A central characteristic of the neurodiversity-affirming perspective is the distinction between *support and normalization*. Educational support aims to reduce barriers and increase students’ access to and participation in educational experiences, whereas normalization explicitly or implicitly involves modifying students’ behavior so that it approximates a neurotypical standard.

An affirming approach does not exclude educational or therapeutic interventions, nor does it imply that all difficulties associated with neurodivergence should be disregarded. On the contrary, such difficulties may require substantial support; however, the purpose of this support is to facilitate functioning, autonomy, and participation rather than to eliminate neurological difference as such. Given the considerable heterogeneity of neurodivergent experiences, even within the same diagnostic category, cognitive, sensory, and social profiles may vary substantially. Consequently, a neurodiversity-affirming approach does not assume the existence of a universal set of accommodations applicable to all neurodivergent students but rather emphasizes the *need for flexible and individualized responses*. This need for individualization is supported by recent

research highlighting the importance of neurodivergent people lived experiences and of practices adapted to contextual and individual characteristics (Lo et al., 2026). This perspective is particularly relevant in school settings, where the same environmental characteristics may function as facilitators for one student and as barriers for another.

The neurodiversity-affirming perspective also includes *respect for students' voices and autonomy*. Decisions concerning communication methods, educational accommodations, environmental organization, and support strategies should, whenever possible, consider students' experiences, preferences, and perspectives. A neurodiversity-affirming educational culture is not constructed exclusively "for" neurodivergent students, but together with them, by taking their perspectives and experiences into consideration. Recent research highlights the importance of involving children and families in the development of neurodiversity-affirming resources and practices (Shore & Powell, 2026). Also, literature likewise emphasizes the need for approaches that incorporate the lived experiences of neurodivergent individuals into research and the development of educational practices (Botha et al., 2024). In the case of students who are unable to communicate these preferences directly or fully, appropriate methods should be used to identify their needs and available forms of communication, without equating the absence of conventional communication with an absence of preferences or an inability to participate in decision-making.

Therefore, in the present paper, a neurodiversity-affirming school culture is conceptualized as a set of educational norms, practices, and relationships that recognize neurological diversity, respect the identity and autonomy of neurodivergent students, reduce barriers to participation, and promote genuine opportunities for learning, social interaction, and belonging. More operationally, it can be understood as an educational orientation that recognizes and respects neurological differences, avoids conditioning acceptance on conformity to neurotypical norms, and seeks to reduce barriers that restrict the autonomy, participation, and sense of belonging of neurodivergent students. Such a culture aims not only to reduce stigmatization, but also to transform the school environment so that neurological differences do not, in themselves, constitute grounds for exclusion or devaluation.

The "affirming" character of this perspective should not be understood as an obligation to regard all characteristics of neurodivergence as advantages, nor as a denial of the difficulties that individuals may experience. Rather, it refers to positioning the person beyond a deficit-based understanding, recognizing their right to exist and participate without this participation being conditional upon conformity to a single model of functioning, and creating educational contexts in which support and accommodation are oriented toward access, autonomy, participation, and well-being.

#### 1.4. The Relevance of the Neurodiversity Paradigm to School Culture and the Development of Students' Attitudes

Applying the neurodiversity paradigm in schools has implications not only for teachers' practices but also for the ways in which students perceive differences among their peers. Students' attitudes represent an important component of inclusion because they influence the quality of peer relationships, students' sense of belonging, and the opportunities available for neurodivergent

students to participate socially. The presence of a neurodivergent student in a classroom does not guarantee acceptance or inclusion. Studies indicate that autistic students may experience difficulties related to social acceptance, friendships, and stigmatization, which supports the relevance of interventions aimed at improving peers' attitudes (Settanni et al., 2024).

In this context, school culture becomes an essential factor in the formation of attitudes. The ways in which teachers talk about difference, how neurodevelopmental conditions are represented in the curriculum, the opportunities provided for cooperation among students, and institutional messages concerning respect and diversity may contribute to the development of less stereotypical representations. Teachers' attitudes may also indirectly influence students' attitudes, as students observe and internalize the social norms promoted within the classroom and school. Research on the inclusive education of autistic students highlights the importance of teachers' attitudes and school climate in the successful implementation of inclusive strategies (Petersson-Bloom & Bölte, 2022). Autism-related cases are used preferentially as a reference point because the largest body of empirical research within the neurodiversity literature has focused on autism.

Therefore, promoting a neurodiversity-affirming culture can be understood as a process that extends beyond the individual adaptation of the student and targets the transformation of norms, relationships, and practices within the school. Such a culture seeks to ensure that neurodiversity is presented to students not as a deviation from normality, but as one of the forms of human diversity. At the same time, it involves developing contexts in which students can acquire accurate knowledge about neurodiversity, interact positively with neurodivergent peers, and critically reflect on their own stereotypes and prejudices.

In conclusion, the neurodiversity paradigm provides a relevant theoretical framework for understanding school inclusion because it shifts the focus from individual deficit toward the interaction between students' characteristics and environmental conditions. The neurodiversity-affirming perspective extends this orientation by promoting respect for the identity and autonomy of neurodivergent individuals, adapting the environment, and valuing neurological differences. For schools, the central implication is that inclusion is not merely a matter of access or curricular adaptation, but also a matter of culture and social relationships. From this perspective, developing students' positive attitudes toward neurodiversity becomes an essential component of building an inclusive school climate and constitutes an important direction for the theoretical analysis of the mechanisms through which a neurodiversity-affirming culture can be promoted in schools.

## 2. STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD NEURODIVERSITY

### 2.1. The Concept of Attitude and Its Relevance to School Inclusion

Attitudes represent a central construct in social psychology and can be defined as favorable or unfavorable evaluations that individuals develop toward people, groups, situations, or behaviors. In the educational context, students' attitudes toward neurodivergent peers are particularly important because they may influence how students interact, cooperate, provide support, or, conversely, engage in avoidance, social distancing, and exclusionary behaviors.

Attitudes can be analyzed through cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. The cognitive component includes the beliefs and representations that an individual holds about the object of the attitude; the affective component refers to the emotions associated with that object; and the behavioral component reflects the tendency to act in a particular way. Applied to neurodiversity, this model allows for a distinction between what students know and believe about neurodivergence, what they feel in relation to neurodivergent individuals, and how they choose to interact with them. This distinction is important because the mere acquisition of information about neurodiversity does not necessarily guarantee the development of favorable attitudes.

However, an inclusive attitude toward neurodiversity involves a considerably more nuanced set of processes. It depends not only on knowledge of the characteristics associated with a particular form of neurodiversity, but also on the development of non-stereotypical representations, empathy, and willingness to engage in social relationships, as well as perceived group norms and individuals perceived capacity to manage particular social situations. In this regard, school inclusion should also be examined from the perspective of the quality of relationships among students, rather than solely in terms of the physical presence of neurodivergent students in mainstream classrooms. In a systematic review of interventions aimed at improving students' attitudes toward autistic individuals, Settanni et al. (2024) emphasize that simply placing an autistic student in a mainstream educational setting is not sufficient to achieve meaningful inclusion.

## 2.2. Attitudes, Stereotypes, Prejudice, and Stigmatization

Attitudes toward neurodiversity should be analyzed in relation to concepts such as stereotypes, prejudice, and stigmatization. These concepts are particularly relevant because they describe distortions or biases in cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses toward social categories constructed through the segregation of normality and abnormality characteristic of the medical model.

Stereotypes represent cognitive generalizations about members of a particular group and may lead to the attribution of common characteristics to all individuals belonging to that group. In the context of neurodiversity, stereotypes may result in reducing a person to their diagnosis or in automatically associating neurodivergence with certain negative characteristics. Prejudice involves an affective evaluation of an individual or group based on their membership in a particular social category, whereas stigmatization involves the behaviors, attribution of socially devalued characteristics who may lead to rejection, discrimination, and exclusion. In the school environment, these mechanisms may have significant consequences for neurodivergent students' social participation and sense of belonging.

This issue is particularly relevant for neurodivergent students, who may experience lower levels of social acceptance, fewer friendship relationships, and greater exposure to stigmatization and bullying. Cook et al. (2020) highlight the relevance of the school environment and peer relationships to children's attitudes toward autism and bullying. In their longitudinal study, conducted with 775 students aged 11–12 years, increased personal contact with autistic individuals

was associated with greater cognitive understanding, attenuation of negative emotional responses, and a more pronounced increase in positive attitudes toward autistic individuals.

In this context, the aim of education should not be limited to transmitting information about autism or other forms of neurodivergence but should also include reducing stereotypical representations and creating social contexts in which students can develop positive experiences of interaction. A neurodiversity-affirming perspective therefore entails moving beyond the mere “tolerance” of difference toward recognizing difference as a legitimate and valued component of human diversity.

### 3. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR DEVELOPING NEURODIVERSITY-AFFIRMING ATTITUDES

The development of neurodiversity-affirming attitudes among students, both as a component of and a precursor to a neurodiversity-affirming culture in schools, is supported by several psychological and educational theories. Two of these are particularly relevant for understanding students’ attitudes toward neurodiversity: Intergroup Contact Theory and the Theory of Planned Behavior.

3.1. *Intergroup Contact Theory* provides an explanatory framework for understanding how interactions between neurodivergent and neurotypical students may contribute to reducing stereotypes and prejudice. Allport (1954) started from the observation that prejudice emerges and is maintained, in part, through generalizations and stereotypical perceptions of members of another group. Interpersonal contact may allow individuals to perceive members of another group not merely as representatives of a category, but as concrete individuals with diverse characteristics, experiences, and needs.

According to Allport (1954), the reduction of prejudice is particularly likely when four conditions are present:

*Equal status* – individuals belonging to the two groups should interact under conditions of relatively equal status, rather than within a relationship in which one group is consistently positioned as inferior.

*Common goals* – members of the groups should pursue shared objectives.

*Intergroup cooperation* – achieving these objectives should require cooperation rather than competition between groups.

*Institutional support* – contact should be supported by authorities, norms, rules, or institutions that communicate that positive intergroup relationships are valued.

In education, this perspective highlights the importance of cooperative activities, shared goals, and opportunities for positive interaction between students. Positive effects of contact may occur even when the classical conditions formulated by Allport are not fully met, although these conditions contribute to strengthening its beneficial effects.

The meta-analysis conducted by Pettigrew and Tropp (2006), based on 713 independent samples from 515 studies, demonstrated that intergroup contact is generally associated with reduced prejudice. The authors also showed that contact effects tend to be stronger when

interactions occur under favorable conditions, such as cooperation and the presence of common goals. Applied to schools, this perspective suggests that the mere physical coexistence of neurodivergent and neurotypical students is insufficient to promote positive attitudes. Meaningful contexts of contact need to be created, characterized by cooperation, joint participation, and authentic social relationships.

In the context of disability, a systematic review conducted by MacMillan et al. (2014) identified 35 studies examining the relationship between children's contact with people with disabilities and attitudes toward disability. In 22 of these studies, a significant association was identified between contact and more favorable attitudes, supporting the importance of contact experiences in the development of children's attitudes. Similarly, Armstrong et al. (2017), in a systematic review and meta-analysis of school-based contact interventions, found positive effects of both direct and extended contact on children's attitudes toward disability. These findings suggest that direct interactions, as well as certain forms of indirect contact, may constitute relevant mechanisms for attitudinal change.

The relevance of this theory to neurodiversity is also supported by recent empirical research. In a systematic review of interventions aimed at improving students' attitudes toward autistic individuals, Settanni et al. (2024) identified 13 studies that included forms of direct, indirect, or peer-mediated contact; most of the interventions also included an educational component. Overall, the findings indicated favorable effects on attitudes, although the authors emphasize the need for further research regarding the effectiveness and sustainability of these interventions.

In the school environment, Intergroup Contact Theory therefore suggests that activities involving neurodivergent and neurotypical students should be designed to promote authentic interaction, cooperation, and the achievement of shared goals. Simply sharing the same educational space does not guarantee positive outcomes. On the contrary, superficial contact or contact characterized by avoidance of interaction may have limited value in the process of attitudinal change (Rademaker et al., 2020).

Complementary to Intergroup Contact Theory and relevant to the promotion of neurodiversity-affirming attitudes and, subsequently, a neurodiversity-affirming school culture, is the pedagogical approach of *cooperative learning*, in which students work together in structured groups to achieve common learning objectives, with each member having both individual responsibilities and a responsibility to contribute to the success of the group. This approach creates conditions for repeated contact, positive interdependence, and the achievement of shared goals. Unlike accidental or superficial contact, cooperative activities involve students' active participation and require them to draw upon the resources and competencies of each group member. Integrated activities and play-based groups, through the activation of positive emotions, have also been among the forms of contact associated with beneficial outcomes for inclusion.

In the case of neurodivergent students, cooperative learning may contribute not only to changing peers' perceptions but also to increasing opportunities for social participation. Repeated contact in functional collaborative situations may enable students to discover shared interests and

competencies and reduce the tendency to interpret behavioral differences through stereotypical frameworks. Therefore, cooperative activities may constitute a mechanism through which cognitive and affective change is translated into concrete social experiences. In a neurodiversity-affirming school, cooperation should not be viewed solely as a teaching method, but also as a strategy for building relationships and fostering a sense of belonging.

### 3.2. The Theory of Planned Behavior and the Transition from Attitudes to Behavior

Understanding the process through which attitudes are translated into behaviors can be achieved through the *Theory of Planned Behavior* (Ajzen, 1991). This theory proposes that behavioral intention is influenced by three main factors: attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control.

In the context of neurodiversity, this perspective helps explain situations in which a student may hold a positive attitude toward neurodivergent peers but may nevertheless avoid interacting with them. For example, a student may consider inclusion important but perceive that their peer group does not value interaction with a neurodivergent student or may feel that they lack the skills necessary to communicate effectively with that student. Therefore, attitudinal change needs to be accompanied by changes in social norms and by strengthening students' perceived sense of competence. Studies by Opoku and colleagues confirm that students' intention to learn together with autistic peers (Opoku et al., 2021) is influenced by neurotypical students' attitudes toward their autistic peers, perceived social norms, and perceptions of control over inclusive behavior.

Several predictive factors for positive attitudes toward neurodiversity can be derived from this model:

#### a. Norms promoted within the social environment

These include both peer-group norms and the norms governing hierarchical relationships. According to Bandura (1977), an important part of human behavior is acquired through observing and imitating the behavior of others, as well as through observing the consequences associated with such behaviors (*Social Learning Theory*).

Students observe how adults respond to difference, how neurodivergent behaviors are managed, and which types of interactions are valued or sanctioned within the group. Consequently, a teacher who uses respectful language, explains differences without stigmatization, and facilitates cooperation may indirectly contribute to the development of social norms that support inclusion.

Peer-group norms, in turn, constitute an important mechanism in the development of attitudes. Students do not form their opinions independently of their social context; rather, they observe their peers' reactions and adjust their behavior according to what they perceive as acceptable and valued by the group. Consequently, promoting a neurodiversity-affirming culture requires the development of collective norms that support respect, cooperation, and acceptance of differences. Interventions focused exclusively on changing the attitude of an individual student may have limited effects if that student returns to a group in which stereotypes and exclusionary behaviors continue to be valued.

b. Attitudes toward neurodiversity are influenced by the *cognitive representations* that students develop about neurodivergent individuals, which are shaped, among other factors, by

instruction and education. A lack of information or exposure to stereotypical information may contribute to the development of distorted perceptions. In this regard, education about neurodiversity may contribute to correcting misconceptions, reducing stereotypes, and developing a more nuanced understanding of neurological differences. Educational content should address both the challenges that neurodivergent individuals may encounter and their individual characteristics, interests, strengths, and diverse ways of communicating and participating.

However, information should not be regarded as sufficient. Research applying Intergroup Contact Theory to inclusive education has found that interventions combining contact and information were associated with more favorable attitudinal outcomes than interventions relying on a single component. Therefore, a neurodiversity-affirming approach requires information provided to students to be framed in ways that avoid reducing a person to a diagnosis or to the difficulties associated with it.

In this context, the constructivist perspective on learning proposed by J. Bruner (Bruner, 1996) should also be considered. Within this perspective, learning is understood as a social and relational process in which knowledge is not simply transmitted from teacher to student, but actively constructed through exploration, interaction, and the attribution of meaning to experiences; the educational process can be understood as a space for the co-construction of knowledge and meaning, in which students actively participate in learning, while the teacher assumes a facilitating and supportive role. This perspective is particularly relevant to a neurodiversity-affirming approach because it enables students to be viewed not as passive recipients of predetermined norms and content, but as active participants in constructing their own learning experiences and attributing meaning to them. Within this framework, diversity in communication, participation, and information-processing styles can be valued within the learning process, while interactions among students can become a context for negotiating and co-constructing meaning. This perspective is also consistent with the need to include neurodivergent individuals as active participants in the learning process, both as sources of knowledge for neurotypical students and as valuable resources for the development of all students, regardless of whether they are neurotypical or neurodivergent.

In this regard, education about neurodiversity may serve a dual function: on the one hand, it facilitates the cognitive understanding of differences; on the other hand, it may create the conditions for modifying affective and behavioral responses. Accurate information can reduce the uncertainty associated with interacting with a person perceived as different and may facilitate willingness to engage in contact and cooperation.

c. The role of predictability and control

The need for control is common to both neurotypical and neurodivergent individuals, the inclusion of all students may be influenced by the extent to which the school environment is perceived as predictable and controllable. When a challenging situation is perceived as falling outside established social norms or one's familiar routines, and the individual's perceived ability to control or manage the situation is considered low, the likely response of a neurotypical person may be withdrawal and disengagement from an inclusive stance. For a neurodivergent person, the

same situation may result in increased emotional distress and pressure to conform to neurotypical norms, potentially at the expense of autonomy, inclusion, and a sense of belonging.

From this perspective, increasing the perceived sense of control and competence among all individuals involved represents an important variable influencing inclusive behavior. Creating predictable, accessible, and flexible environments may therefore benefit both neurotypical and neurodivergent students: it may reduce uncertainty and facilitate sustained engagement among neurotypical peers, while simultaneously reducing the pressure on neurodivergent students to achieve conformity at the expense of their autonomy and authentic participation. From a neurodiversity-affirming perspective, reducing the emphasis placed on behavioral control and conformity allows intervention to focus on adapting the environment and reducing barriers to participation (Wagland et al., 2025).

These perspectives converge on a central idea: students' attitudes cannot be changed sustainably through a single intervention or through the simple transmission of information. Developing a neurodiversity-affirming culture requires an integrated approach that combines education about neurodiversity with positive contact experiences, cooperative activities, inclusive behavioral models, and social norms that value difference.

The theoretical foundations examined provide a framework for understanding how schools can contribute to the development of attitudes that support neurodiversity. Positive contact, information, cooperation, social learning, group norms, and a sense of competence represent complementary mechanisms through which conditions for inclusion and social participation can be created. Therefore, promoting a neurodiversity-affirming culture should be conceived as a process of transforming the knowledge, attitudes, norms, and behaviors of the school community, rather than merely as a series of individual accommodations intended for neurodivergent students.

## **Methodology**

### **1. Research Design**

The present paper adopts a theoretical and conceptual research design and aims to develop an integrative conceptual model describing the mechanisms through which students' attitudes toward neurodiversity may be related to the development of a neurodiversity-affirming school culture. Given the nature of the research question, the study does not seek to empirically test causal relationships. Instead, it identifies, organizes, and integrates relevant theoretical perspectives and empirical findings in order to develop a theoretically grounded explanatory framework.

The research is guided by the following question: Through what mechanisms are students' attitudes toward neurodiversity related to the development of a neurodiversity-affirming school culture?

The methodological approach can be characterized as an integrative narrative review, focusing on the identification and synthesis of theoretical perspectives and empirical findings relevant to the development of students' attitudes and their implications for school culture. This approach is appropriate given the interdisciplinary nature of the topic, which draws on social

psychology, educational psychology, inclusive education, and the emerging literature on neurodiversity-affirming practices.

#### Aims of the Study

The primary aim of the study is to develop an integrative theoretical model explaining how the development of attitudes supportive of neurodiversity among students may contribute to the formation of a neurodiversity-affirming school culture.

To achieve this aim, the analysis pursues several specific objectives:

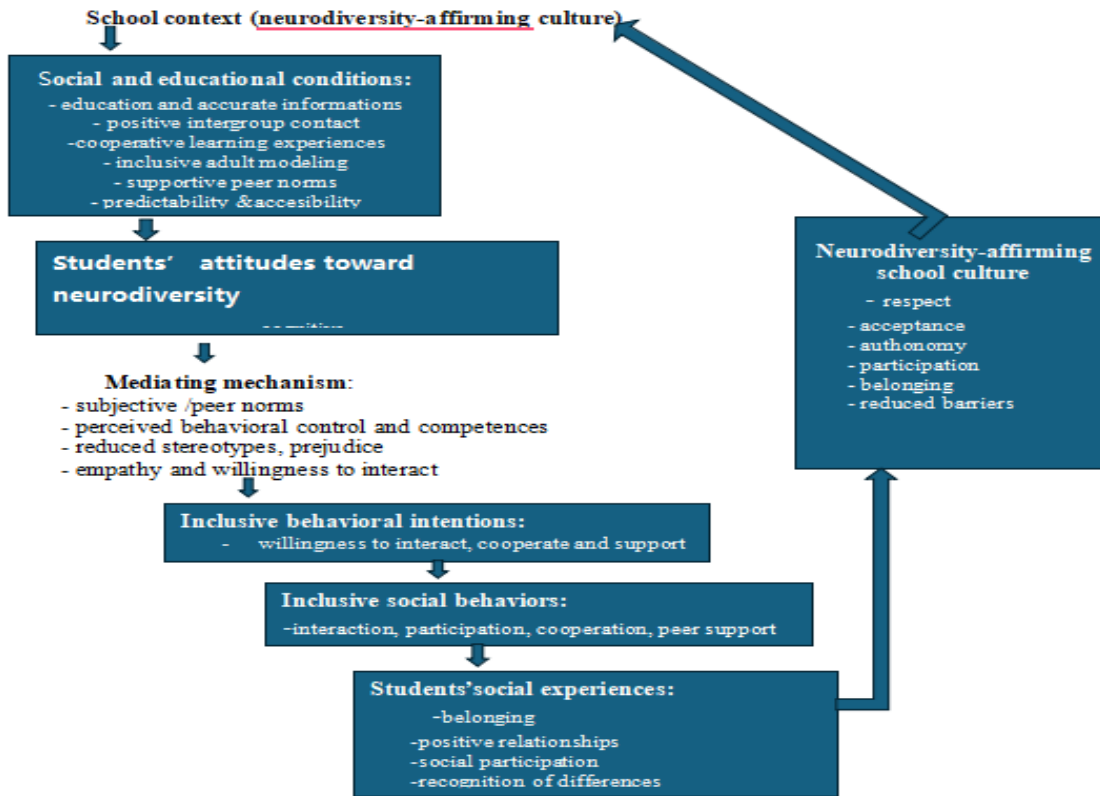
- to clarify the conceptual foundations of the neurodiversity paradigm and the neurodiversity-affirming perspective;
- to examine the concept of attitude and its relevance to school inclusion;
- to explore the relationships between attitudes, stereotypes, prejudice, and stigmatization;
- to identify the psychosocial and educational mechanisms that may contribute to the development of attitudes supportive of neurodiversity;
- to examine the roles of intergroup contact, cooperative learning, social norms, social learning, education and information, and perceived competence and behavioral control;
- to integrate these mechanisms into a coherent theoretical model explaining the development of a neurodiversity-affirming school culture.

#### 3. Literature Identification and Selection

The literature informing the development of the theoretical model was identified through the examination of scientific publications addressing neurodiversity, inclusive education, students' attitudes toward neurodivergent peers, intergroup contact, social norms, and attitudinal and behavioral change. Particular attention was given to empirical studies examining the attitudes of neurotypical students toward autistic and other neurodivergent peers, as well as to systematic reviews and meta-analyses addressing school-based interventions, intergroup contact, disability attitudes, and inclusive educational practices. Autism-related research was preferentially considered because autism is the most extensively studied form of neurodivergence in the existing empirical literature, particularly in research examining peer attitudes, social inclusion, and school-based interventions.

#### **Integrative theoretical model**

Based on the theoretical perspectives and empirical findings review above, an integrative theoretical model is proposed to explain the mechanism through which students attitudes toward neurodiversity may be related to the development of a neurodiversity-affirming school culture.



**Figure 1. Integrative theoretical model of the mechanisms linking students 'attitudes toward neurodiversity and the development of a neurodiversity-affirming school culture**

#### Theoretical Model: Synthesis and implications

The theoretical model proposed in this paper integrates the main mechanisms identified in the literature as potentially relevant to the relations between students' attitudes toward neurodiversity and the development of a neurodiversity-affirming school culture (Figure 1). Rather than conceptualizing this relationship as linear or unidirectional, the model proposes a dynamic and reciprocal process in which educational conditions, students' attitudes, social interactions, and school culture continuously influence one another.

At the individual level, students' attitudes toward neurodiversity comprise *cognitive, affective and behavioral dimensions*. However, the development of attitudes supportive of neurodiversity cannot be reduced to the acquisition of knowledge. Accurate information may contribute to more nuanced cognitive representation, while positive intergroup contact and cooperative experience may provide opportunities for reducing stereotypes, developing empathy, and increasing willingness to interact.

The model therefore places particular emphasis on the transition from attitudes to inclusive behavioral intentions and actual social behaviors. A student may hold favorable beliefs about inclusion while nevertheless avoiding interaction if peer norms discourage such interaction or if the student perceives limited competences or control in managing the situation. Conversely, predictable, accessible, and supportive environments may facilitate sustained engagement and reduce uncertainty for all students. In this sense, *perceived control* represents a relevant mechanism through which favorable attitudes may become observable inclusive behaviors.

Inclusive behaviors, including interaction, cooperation and peer support, create repeated social experience that may contribute to participation, positive relationships, and a sense of belonging among neurodivergent students. These experiences are not merely outcomes of an inclusive culture but may also contribute to its development. Repeated patterns of respectful interactions can become part of the *informal norms of the peer group* and, when supported by teachers and institutional practices, may become embedded within the broader school culture.

The model consequently conceptualizes a neurodiversity-affirming school culture as both a context and an outcome of inclusive processes. School norms, adult role modeling, opportunities for meaningful contact, cooperative learning, and accessible educational environments may shape students' attitudes and behavioral intentions. In turn, students' inclusive behaviors and social interactions may reinforce norms of respect, acceptance, autonomy, participation, and belonging. This reciprocal relationship suggests that sustainable change is unlikely to result from interventions targeting attitudes in isolation. Rather, attitudinal development should be embedded within broader changes in the social and educational environment.

Taken together, the model suggests that the development of the neurodiversity-affirming school culture may be understood as a *multilevel process* involving cognitive, affective, behavioral, interpersonal, and institutional mechanisms. Students' attitudes represent an important component of this process, but their effects are likely to depend on the social condition in which those attitudes are expressed. Consequently, interventions aiming to promote neurodiversity-affirming cultures should combine accurate education, meaningful contact, cooperative experiences, inclusive role modelling, supportive peer norms, and conditions that increase perceived competence, predictability, and control. This model thus provides a theoretical framework for understanding how individual attitudinal change may become connected to broader transformations in the relationships, norms, and practices that characterize school life.

### **Directions for integrative interventions**

The theoretical model proposed in this paper suggests that the development of a neurodiversity-affirming school culture is unlikely the result from a single intervention targeting students' knowledge or attitudes in isolation. Rather, it requires an integrated approach addressing the cognitive, affective, social, behavioral, and contextual mechanisms through which students relate to neurodivergent peers. Accordingly, future school-based interventions should combine neurodiversity education, positive intergroup contact, cooperative learning, inclusive social norms, adult modeling, and conditions that increase predictability, perceived competence, and autonomy.

First, educational interventions should provide students with accurate and non-stereotypical information about neurodiversity. Information should move beyond diagnostic description and deficit-based representations and should include the diversity of individual profiles, communication style, strengths, interests, support needs, and lived experiences of neurodivergent individuals. Autism may represent a particularly relevant reference category for intervention development, given that it is the most extensively studied form of neurodiversity in the existing empirical literature. However, autism should be used as an empirical reference point rather than as a representation of neurodiversity as a whole.

Second, educational information should be combined with meaningful opportunities for positive intergroup contact. The theoretical model suggest that knowledge may contribute to cognitive change, while contact may provide opportunities for students (even for neurotypical ones) to revise stereotypical expectations through direct social experience. Such contact should therefore be structured around authentic interactions, shared goals, cooperation, and meaningful participation rather than simple physical proximity

Third, cooperative learning may provide an important mechanism for integrating education and contact within everyday classroom practices. Structured collaborative activities can create repeated opportunities for students to interact, recognize one another's' competency, and experience positive interdependence. From a neurodiversity-affirming perspective, cooperative learning should be designed so that participation does not depend on a single communication style or behavioral pattern, allowing different students to contribute through diverse forms of communication, problem-solving and participation

Fourth, interventions should address the social norms operating within the peer group and the wider school environment. Changing an individual students' attitude may have limited effects if the surrounding social environment continues to reinforce avoidance, stereotypes, or exclusionary behavior. Consequently, teachers and other adults should model respectful responses to difference, while school should establish explicit norms supporting cooperation, dignity, participation, and respect for neurological differences. Peer group norms should be considered an important target of interventions rather than merely a contextual variable

Fifth, the model highlights the importance of predictability, perceived control, and competence for both neurotypical and neurodivergent students. Inclusive behavior may become more difficult when students perceive social situations as unpredictable and themselves as lacking the resources necessary to manage them. Interventions should therefore provide students with sufficient information, clear expectations, communication strategies and opportunities to develop confidence in interacting across neurological. At the same time, increasing predictability should not become another mechanism for imposing conformity on neurodivergent students. Environmental structure should be combined with flexibility and respect for individual autonomy.

## Conclusions

The present theoretical analysis suggests that students' attitudes toward neurodiversity may represent an important component in the development of a neurodiversity-affirming school culture. Their relationship with school culture is not linear, but is shaped by interconnected mechanisms including knowledge, intergroup contact, cooperation, social norms, perceived competences, predictability, and behavioral control. Consequently, promoting neurodiversity-affirming attitudes require more than providing information or encouraging individual attitudinal change; it requires educational and social environments that support meaningful interaction, participation, autonomy, and belonging for both neurodivergent and neurotypical students. The proposed framework therefore positions attitudinal development within a broader process of transforming classroom practices, peer relationships, and school norms providing a theoretical basis for the design of integrative interventions and for future empirical research.

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## INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION IN PRESCHOOL EDUCATION: A THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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### **Abstract**

Intercultural education has become a vital dimension of early childhood pedagogy, as children encounter cultural, linguistic, and social diversity from their very first years in institutional settings. This paper investigates the theoretical foundations, pedagogical principles, and practical strategies required to foster intercultural learning in preschools. Grounded in a targeted review of Romanian and international policy frameworks, scholarly literature, and professional guidelines on equity and culturally responsive teaching, the study argues against reducing interculturality to sporadic cultural celebrations. Instead, it advocates for a systemic approach embedded in classroom relationships, the curriculum, play, language policies, family partnerships, and assessment. Key focus is placed on the educator's role in reflecting on implicit biases, fostering inclusive environments, valuing home languages, and utilizing cooperative learning to build empathy and perspective-taking. The proposed framework outlines how observation, dialogic storytelling, role-play, and collaborative projects can enhance children's sense of belonging, social competence, and openness toward diversity.

*Keywords: intercultural education; preschool education; cultural diversity; inclusion; multilingualism; culturally responsive pedagogy.*

## 1. Introduction

Contemporary society is shaped and characterized by an increasingly evident cultural and linguistic diversity, and this diversity, having become a tangible reality, is reflected even within early childhood education institutions, specifically in preschools. The preschool group cannot be viewed as a space characterized by cultural homogeneity, as children may come from families with different histories, languages, values, religious practices, communication styles, and social experiences.

Thus, in this context, intercultural education becomes an essential component in ensuring the quality of the educational process. It helps children build, develop, and maintain relationships based primarily on respect, teaching them to observe differences not to transform them into advantages or disadvantages, nor to establish hierarchies, but to foster their sense of belonging to the group. UNESCO (2006) notes that intercultural education aims to promote not only understanding and respect, but also interaction among individuals belonging to different cultural and social contexts.

The importance of this topic is further highlighted by the characteristics of early child development. From their early years, children form various representations of themselves and those around them, building a set of values and principles regarding what is considered normal or accepted in their social environment. Early childhood education lays the foundations for first social experiences; therefore, experiences of cooperation, as well as those of conflict or negotiation, become decisive in how the future adult will approach human differences. The OECD (2023) indicates that early childhood education settings represent the first relevant space of socialization separate from the family for children. As such, all experiences and activities carried out in these contexts contribute to the formation of identity, a sense of belonging, and perceptions of the world, oneself, and others.

In Romania, the Curriculum for Early Childhood Education (2019), approved by Order of the Minister of National Education No. 4694/2019, envisions a child-centered perspective focused on overall development and the creation of learning situations through meaningful experiences. This allows for the integration of the intercultural dimension into various fields and activities, such as language development, education for society, arts, music, play, and environmental exploration.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the role of intercultural education in preschool education and to propose a methodologically realistic framework for integrating it into classroom activities. The pursued objectives include:

- Conceptualizing key terms: culture, diversity, multiculturalism, interculturalism, and inclusion;
- Highlighting pedagogical principles relevant to preschool age;
- Outlining the roles of the educator and the family;

- Proposing practical activity examples and evaluation benchmarks;
- Emphasizing the benefits and limitations of the intercultural approach at preschool age.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### *2.1. Conceptual Delimitations: Culture, Multiculturalism, and Interculturalism*

Culture can be understood as a dynamic set of values, meanings, practices, symbols, norms, communication channels, and relational patterns through which members of a group interpret the world and construct their identity. In education, culture should not be reduced to folkloric elements (such as traditional costumes, food, or holidays), as a child's cultural experience manifests deeply in language, family relationships, emotional expression, interactions with adults, play, and behavioral expectations. UNESCO (2006) emphasizes the complex and interdependent nature of the relationship between culture, language, and education.

Multiculturalism primarily describes a state of affairs: the coexistence of multiple cultural groups within a shared space. Interculturalism, however, involves a further step—not merely the passive recognition of differences, but the building of relationships, exchanges, and forms of mutual learning among individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. In preschool education, this distinction is essential. An activity in which each child presents an object 'specific' to their family carries predominantly explanatory or informational value; by contrast, an intercultural activity invites children to compare experiences, ask questions, discover analogies and differences, and co-construct new meaning.

Interculturalism does not imply relinquishing one's own cultural identity in favor of a uniform one. On the contrary, it supports the idea that identities can be multiple, flexible, and complementary. The Council of Europe (2018) links competencies for democratic culture to the set of values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge required to live together in culturally diverse societies. For young children, these competencies translate into observable, developmentally appropriate behaviors: active listening, expressing preferences respectfully, accepting differences, and cooperating during play.

### *2.2. Intercultural Education in Early Childhood*

Intercultural education in early childhood must be strictly adapted to children's cognitive, emotional, and linguistic development levels. Preschoolers learn primarily through direct experience, play, imitation, storytelling, conversation, movement, and social interaction. Therefore, abstract concepts such as discrimination or cultural pluralism must be translated into concrete life situations: a classmate speaks a different language, a family has a distinct tradition, two families organize a celebration differently, or people hold varied preferences and habits without these determining or conditioning their personal worth.

An authentic intercultural perspective simultaneously pursues two complementary directions: 1. Affirming each child's identity: the child must see themselves reflected in the educational environment and feel that their language, family, and experiences are valued. 2. Fostering openness toward others: the child is supported in observing differences, asking questions with curiosity, and avoiding generalizations or stereotypes. NAEYC (2019) recommends that the learning environment, educational materials, and daily interactions positively reflect the diversity of children and families, while educators eliminate stereotypical or exclusionary practices.

### *2.3. Principles of Intercultural Education in Preschool*

Equality in dignity: Children must consistently receive the message that human differences do not establish a hierarchy of personal worth. Educators have a responsibility to intervene promptly when labeling, name-calling, exclusion, or derogatory comments occur. Interventions should be calm, firm, and educational: the child is guided to understand the emotional impact of their behavior and to discover appropriate communication alternatives.

Balanced representation of diversity: If learning resources present a single image of family, beauty, language, or lifestyle, children may internalize the idea that this is the only legitimate model. Books, dolls, role-play props, and examples used in conversations should offer varied representations, avoiding the exoticization of specific groups. Diversity must be organically integrated into daily classroom life, rather than isolated within a single 'cultural week.'

Family engagement: Families represent an essential educational resource. Parents can provide authentic insights into the home language, stories, songs, games, objects, and personal experiences. However, the preschool-family partnership must be built on mutual respect and voluntariness; educators should refrain from turning a family into an 'official representative' of an entire culture or assuming that all members of a group share identical practices.

An asset-based approach: The OECD (2023) recommends moving beyond deficit-based views of diversity to recognize children's cultural and linguistic backgrounds as valuable assets. For multilingual children, for instance, knowledge of the home language should not be viewed as an obstacle to acquiring the language of instruction, but as a pillar of identity and cognitive development. Educators can introduce simple words from the languages spoken in the class, invite children to compare sounds or greetings, and leverage bilingual literature.

### *2.4. The Role of the Educator and the Educational Environment*

The educator serves as the primary role model for intercultural behavior. Children observe not only explicit instructional content, but especially the adult's implicit reactions to differences. Consequently, an educator's intercultural competence requires continuous self-reflection: identifying personal assumptions, examining stereotypes, and recognizing situations where certain children might unintentionally receive more attention, trust, or openness than others. NAEYC (2019) highlights the necessity of critical reflection on one's own values, beliefs, and cultural biases.

The physical classroom environment must reinforce these same values. An inclusive classroom integrates images of diverse children and families, books featuring characters from varied backgrounds, materials representing multiple family structures, and play areas where children can negotiate roles free from rigid stereotypes of gender, language, or origin. Furthermore, the decor should avoid displaying cultures as external 'curiosities,' encouraging instead a natural connection to shared human experiences.

### *2.5. Language, Play, and Storytelling as Intercultural Resources*

Language is a central dimension of identity. In a linguistically diverse classroom, the educator creates contexts where every child feels that their native language is valued, while the language of instruction is systematically developed. Greeting routines, naming objects, songs, short poems, and stories can easily incorporate plurilingual elements. The goal is not for all children to master every language spoken in the group, but to foster curiosity, respect, and a willingness to communicate.

Stories serve as an exceptionally effective pedagogical tool, allowing children to explore differences within a safe, symbolic framework. During reading activities, educators can ask questions focused on emotional and reflective processing: 'How did the character feel when arriving in a new place?'; 'What things were different, and what did the characters have in common?'; 'How can we help someone who feels lonely or different?'

In this way, the focus shifts from merely accumulating information about a culture to developing empathy and the ability to take another's perspective. Role-play allows for direct practice of social scenarios. Preschoolers can act out guided scripts where a new character joins the group, a classmate misunderstands a rule, two characters have different customs, or a child is temporarily excluded from play. The educator can pause the game at key moments to invite children to analyze the situation and propose constructive solutions. This method creates valuable opportunities for social-emotional learning, allowing teachers to observe actual behaviors without the rigidity of formal evaluation.

## **3. Methodology**

This paper is theoretical-applied in nature and employs the methods of document analysis and thematic synthesis. Reference documents in the fields of intercultural and early childhood education, scholarly works and professional position papers concerning equity, inclusion, cultural diversity, and intercultural competences, as well as relevant official policy documents for the Romanian context, were consulted.

The analysis targeted four fundamental categories of information: 1. Theoretical concepts and principles; 2. The role of the educator; 3. Pedagogical strategies and means; 4. Specific evaluation methods.

Source selection criteria included: • Direct relevance to early childhood education (preschool level); • Institutional or academic authority of the sources; • Currency of the analyzed documents; • Practical applicability of the recommendations within classroom activities.

The synthesis does not aim to measure an experimental effect nor does it present original empirical data; rather, it offers a structured integration of recommendations identified in the literature and policy documents. Based on this analysis, an orientative methodological framework for designing and conducting intercultural activities was developed.

This framework is structured around three guiding questions:

1. What must the child learn about themselves and others? (Cognitive and attitudinal dimension)
2. What concrete experience allows them to practice this? (Actionable/practical dimension)
3. What observable behaviors indicate progress? (Evaluative dimension)

This structure is fully compatible with a competence-based approach and supports the view that evaluation in early childhood should be predominantly authentic, based on systematic observation in natural contexts of play and interaction.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. *Identified Pedagogical Dimensions*

The theoretical synthesis indicates that effective intercultural education in early childhood requires a systematic and sustained character. Introducing occasional thematic activities is insufficient, as attitudes toward diversity are internalized through repeated daily experiences. Consequently, the findings of the analysis are grouped into six fundamental dimensions:

- **Socio-emotional climate:** Involves establishing clear rules based on mutual respect, ensuring equal opportunities for participation, and firm yet educational interventions in cases of exclusion.
- **Curriculum:** Integrates diverse perspectives into routine activities, moving beyond isolated themes dedicated to other cultures.
- **Language:** Simultaneously supports the development of the language of instruction and the valorization of home languages.
- **Physical environment:** Offers diverse visual representations and learning materials, avoiding stereotypes and exoticization.
- **Family partnership:** Facilitates a two-way exchange of information and the co-construction of authentic learning experiences.

- Assessment: Tracks individual progress in acquiring social and intercultural behaviors without ranking or comparing cultures against one another.

*Table 1. Dimensions, Activities, and Indicators for Intercultural Education in Preschool*

| <b>Dimension</b>               | <b>Example of Activity</b>                                                        | <b>Observable Indicator</b>                                                   |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Identity and Belonging         | “The Story of My Name” – children talk about their names and their families.      | The child talks about themselves and accepts their classmates’ presentations. |
| Linguistic Diversity           | “Greetings in Several Languages” – short greetings and expressions of thanks.     | The child shows curiosity and respect towards other languages.                |
| Empathy and Perspective-Taking | Story featuring a new character joining a group, followed by a guided discussion. | The child identifies emotions and suggests ways of offering support.          |
| Cooperation                    | Team-building construction game with rotating roles.                              | The child negotiates roles and accepts other people’s ideas.                  |
| Family and Community           | Inviting a family member to share a story, song, or game.                         | The child presents family experiences without devaluing other experiences.    |

#### *4.2. Examples of Intercultural Activities*

“Our Story Map”: Developed using short stories or books brought by children and their families. Each story is associated with a drawing, photograph, or symbol chosen by the child. The educator avoids rigid geographical approaches and emphasizes universal human experiences: family, friendship, play, celebration, mutual support, and belonging. The activity can be extended by identifying common elements and specific differences.

“The Friendly Words Box”: An activity designed for linguistically diverse classrooms. Children bring or learn simple greetings, expressions of thanks, and words of encouragement in the languages present in the group's community. Words are practiced together, and the educator facilitates discussions on scenarios where they can be used. This activity contributes to developing language awareness and creating a climate where linguistic diversity is visible and legitimized.

“What Would You Do If...?”: Utilizes role-play and problem-solving scenarios (e.g., a child is excluded from a game, someone laughs at a peer's accent or pronunciation, two children want the same role). Through guided discussion, preschoolers propose solutions and analyze their consequences. The emphasis falls on prosocial behaviors: active listening, inviting others to play, seeking help, assertively stating boundaries, and using respectful language.

#### *4.3. The Role of the Family and Community*

Partnering with families transforms intercultural education from a series of isolated instructional sequences into an integrated community experience. Educators can request information about songs, stories, games, greetings, objects, or traditions that hold meaning for the family. It is essential that this request be framed openly, without assuming that families must 'demonstrate' allegiance to a specific cultural mold. Some families may hold multiple identities or prefer to share everyday experiences rather than traditional elements.

Collaboration with the local community can include partnerships with libraries, cultural centers, non-governmental organizations, and resource persons. The primary selection criterion should not be the spectacularity of an activity, but its pedagogical relevance to children's developmental goals. A meeting with a guest is valuable when it stimulates curiosity, dialogue, and cooperation, moving beyond a mere 'cultural show.'

#### *4.4. Evaluating Intercultural Progress*

Assessment in early intercultural education is exclusively formative and authentic. Educators track behaviors through direct observation, such as: • Initiating interactions with peers from varied backgrounds; • Listening to others without frequent interruptions; • Accepting that multiple valid ways to complete a task can coexist; • Using respectful and inclusive language; • Spontaneously inviting other children to play; • Accurately recognizing and naming others' emotions; • Asking questions about differences out of curiosity, without intent to mock; • Seeking adult guidance in resolving conflicts.

These observations are recorded in qualitative observation sheets or collected within the child's individual portfolio. It is fundamental that assessment does not rank children by a hypothetical 'intercultural level.' The objective is identifying individual progress and adapting pedagogical interventions.

For multilingual children, assessment must consider the child's entire linguistic repertoire (a holistic approach); performance in a single language (e.g., the language of instruction) does not faithfully reflect overall cognitive or social development. The OECD (2023) and NAEYC (2019) strongly advocate for asset-based approaches and assessments sensitive to the child's socio-cultural context.

#### *4.5. Implementation Conditions*

Consistent implementation directly depends on the professional development of educators. The Council of Europe (2021) provides specific descriptors for democratic and intercultural competences applicable to children under 10, confirming the feasibility of operationalizing values and attitudes into age-appropriate behaviors.

For teachers, training programs should target: • Critical reflection on personal beliefs and implicit biases; • Empathetic communication and collaboration with diverse families; •

Constructive conflict management in the classroom; • Critical selection and adaptation of learning resources.

Another essential condition is adopting a whole-school approach. If an educator promotes respect in the classroom while organizational rules, materials, or general practices convey contradictory messages, the impact will be minimal. Intercultural education must be supported through institutional policy, collegial collaboration among teaching staff, parent relations, and equitable access to resources. As highlighted by the OECD (2023), real inclusion is built systemically: through curriculum, continuous professional development, organizational practices, and quality monitoring.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

The analysis demonstrates that intercultural education in preschool should not be confused with teaching theoretical facts about 'other peoples' or 'other cultures.' Such a superficial approach risks maintaining—even unintentionally—a rift between 'us' and 'them.' The intercultural perspective proposed in this paper is relational and process-oriented: children become aware of their own identity, encounter different identities, discover similarities and differences, and learn to negotiate meaning and behavior within the group. In this process, diversity is leveraged as a pedagogical resource rather than managed as a problem.

A major advantage of early intercultural education is its preventive nature. Stereotypical attitudes and exclusionary behaviors do not emerge in a vacuum; they are absorbed from the family environment, media, or broader social interactions. While preschool cannot control all sources of influence in a child's life, it possesses the capacity to offer corrective and alternative experiences: opportunities for cooperation, positive intergroup contact, respectful language modeling, stories from multiple perspectives, and equal chances for self-expression. NAEYC (2019) reaffirms the importance of educational environments where every child sees themselves represented positively and where human differences do not become grounds for exclusion.

At the same time, the limitations of this approach must be acknowledged. An isolated activity cannot deconstruct stereotypes, and superficial or touristy presentations of traditions can even reinforce rigid categorizations. Consequently, educators must avoid generalizations such as 'all members of group X do...,' opting instead for nuanced phrasing ('some families choose...') and guiding children to observe that variation exists both between cultures and within the same community.

The central conclusion of this paper is that quality intercultural education is constructed through everyday classroom practices: how the teacher greets children, distributes attention, selects stories, organizes play, mediates conflicts, values home languages, and collaborates with parents. From this viewpoint, intercultural competences do not represent a curricular addition or an optional 'supplement,' but develop transversally across all learning and social experiences.

For educational practice, it is recommended that every preschool unit or classroom establish a concise annual intercultural plan adapted to the local context. This plan should include clear goals regarding belonging, respectful communication, cooperation, valuing diversity, and family engagement. Proposed activities must be continuously evaluated through observation and pedagogical reflection, with the plan dynamically adjusted based on children's real needs. In this way, intercultural education becomes a continuous, coherent process appropriate for preschool-aged children.

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## INTEGRATION OF GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN EDUCATION: BENEFITS, RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES FROM THE STUDENT PERSPECTIVE. A SWOT ANALYSIS

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### **Abstract**

Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) is rapidly changing teaching, learning and assessment practices in higher education, generating both educational opportunities and concerns regarding the quality and integrity of the learning process. The study explores students' perceptions of the benefits, challenges/risks and expectations regarding the integration of GenAI in education and synthesizes the results through a SWOT analysis. Data were collected from 373 students in the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th years of the Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, at the beginning of the 2nd semester of the 2025–2026 academic year, through three open-ended questions. The responses were analysed thematically and quantified by the frequency of mentions. The results indicate that students mainly associate GenAI with quick access to information, supporting learning and autonomy, improving understanding and personalizing the educational process. At the same time, the main perceived risks concern AI dependency and the reduction of critical thinking, erroneous or unverified information, as well as issues of academic integrity, ethics and confidentiality. Students' expectations focus in particular on the development of AI skills, responsible integration and the existence of clear rules. The SWOT analysis highlights a cautious and conditional orientation toward AI integration: students recognise the educational value of the technology, but consider that it should complement, not replace, the cognitive activity of the student and the pedagogical role of the teacher. The results support the need for AI literacy, clear institutional policies and the adaptation of assessment practices for a responsible integration of AI in higher education.

**Keywords:** *generative artificial intelligence; student perceptions; SWOT analysis; AI literacy; educational risks; academic integrity;*

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## 1. Introducere

Inteligența artificială generativă (IAGen) a devenit o tehnologie cu impact tot mai important asupra învățământului superior, oferind posibilități de acces rapid la informații, generare de explicații și resurse și sprijin pentru activitățile de învățare (Kasneci et al., 2023; Ogunleye et al., 2024). În același timp, integrarea sa ridică preocupări privind acuratețea informațiilor, dependența de tehnologie, reducerea efortului cognitiv, integritatea academică și protecția datelor (Chan & Hu, 2023; Cotton et al., 2024). Prin urmare, valoarea educațională a IAGen depinde nu doar de disponibilitatea tehnologiei, ci și de modul în care aceasta este utilizată și integrată pedagogic.

Perspectiva studenților este relevantă pentru înțelegerea acestei transformări, deoarece aceștia se află atât în poziția de utilizatori direcți ai IAGen, cât și de beneficiari ai schimbărilor produse în procesele de predare, învățare și evaluare. Răspunsurile la întrebări deschise permit identificarea unor percepții și preocupări care pot depăși categoriile prestabilite ale instrumentelor cantitative.

În acest context, studiul de față investighează percepțiile a 373 de studenți din învățământul superior tehnic asupra integrării IAGen în educație. Sunt analizate tematic beneficiile, provocările/riscurile și așteptările privind integrarea viitoare a IAGen, iar rezultatele sunt ulterior sintetizate printr-o matrice SWOT. Studiul urmărește astfel să evidențieze atât valoarea educațională percepută a IAGen, cât și condițiile necesare pentru o integrare pedagogică, etică și instituțională responsabilă.

## 2. Fundamentare teoretică

Integrarea inteligenței artificiale generative (IAGen) în educație este asociată atât cu oportunități pedagogice, cât și cu limite și riscuri. Literatura evidențiază posibilitatea utilizării IAGen pentru acces rapid la informații, explicarea conceptelor, generarea de exemple și resurse și sprijinirea învățării personalizate. Din perspectiva studenților, aceste instrumente pot facilita activitățile academice și pot oferi forme suplimentare de sprijin pentru învățare (Chan & Hu, 2023; Kasneci et al., 2023).

În același timp, utilizarea necritică a IAGen poate afecta implicarea cognitivă a studentului, favorizând dependența de tehnologie și reducerea efortului individual. O altă limitare importantă este posibilitatea generării unor informații incorecte sau neverificate. Literatura semnalează, de asemenea, preocupări privind integritatea academică, utilizarea necorespunzătoare a conținutului generat și protecția datelor (Cotton et al., 2024; Kasneci et al., 2023). Aceste riscuri sugerează că IAGen trebuie utilizată ca instrument de sprijin și augmentare a învățării, nu ca substitut al activității intelectuale a studentului.

În acest context, alfabetizarea IA și utilizarea responsabilă devin condiții esențiale ale integrării IAGen. Competențele necesare includ nu doar utilizarea tehnică a instrumentelor, ci și evaluarea critică a rezultatelor, verificarea informațiilor, înțelegerea limitărilor IAGen și respectarea principiilor etice. UNESCO recomandă o abordare centrată pe om, susținută de

dezvoltarea competențelor IA, protecția datelor și politici instituționale adecvate (Miao & Holmes, 2023).

Prin urmare, integrarea IAGen trebuie analizată simultan prin prisma beneficiilor, limitelor, oportunităților și riscurilor. În acest studiu, perspectiva SWOT oferă un cadru sintetic pentru organizarea acestor dimensiuni și pentru evidențierea condițiilor necesare unei integrări pedagogice și responsabile a IAGen în învățământul superior.

### **3. Metodologie**

#### **3.1. Întrebări și obiective de cercetare**

Studiul a urmărit explorarea percepțiilor studenților asupra integrării inteligenței artificiale generative (IAGen) în educație. Au fost formulate trei întrebări de cercetare:

Q1. Care sunt principalele beneficii percepute de studenți în utilizarea IAGen în educație?

Q2. Care sunt principalele provocări și riscuri percepute în utilizarea IAGen în educație?

Q3. Care sunt principalele așteptări ale studenților privind integrarea viitoare a IAGen în educație?

Corespunzător, obiectivele cercetării au fost: (O1) identificarea și clasificarea tematică a beneficiilor; (O2) identificarea și clasificarea provocărilor și riscurilor; (O3) identificarea așteptărilor privind integrarea viitoare și (O4) sintetizarea rezultatelor într-o matrice SWOT.

#### **3.2. Participanți și contextul cercetării**

Studiul a fost realizat în cadrul Universității Tehnice din Cluj-Napoca, la începutul semestrului al II-lea al anului universitar 2025–2026. Eșantionul a inclus 373 de studenți din anii II, III și IV de studiu: 138 din anul II, 118 din anul III și 117 din anul IV. În funcție de gen, eșantionul a cuprins 170 de studenți de gen masculin și 203 de gen feminin.

Datele au fost colectate printr-un chestionar online, al cărui link a fost transmis prin canalul instituțional oficial Microsoft Teams. Participarea a fost voluntară, iar răspunsurile au fost colectate anonim și confidențial. Participanții au fost informați cu privire la scopul cercetării, iar completarea chestionarului a presupus acordul de participare și consimțământul informat.

#### **3.3. Instrumentul și colectarea datelor**

Pentru explorarea percepțiilor studenților asupra integrării inteligenței artificiale generative (IAGen) în educație au fost utilizate trei întrebări deschise, orientate către trei dimensiuni complementare: beneficiile percepute, provocările/riscurile și așteptările privind integrarea viitoare a IAGen.

Întrebările au fost:

„Menționați cel puțin 3 beneficii posibile ale utilizării IAGen în educație.”

„Menționați cel puțin 3 provocări/riscuri posibile ale utilizării IAGen în educație.”

„Menționați ce așteptări pentru viitor aveți referitoare la integrarea IAGen în educație.”

Caracterul deschis al întrebărilor a permis participanților să formuleze liber răspunsurile și să menționeze simultan mai multe aspecte. Pentru primele două întrebări, participanților li s-a solicitat explicit să menționeze cel puțin trei beneficii, respectiv trei provocări/riscuri.

### 3.4. Analiza tematică și cuantificarea datelor

Răspunsurile deschise au fost analizate prin analiză tematică descriptivă, prin identificarea, gruparea și organizarea răspunsurilor în teme și subteme. Codificarea a fost realizată respondent cu respondent, permițând identificarea mențiunilor tematice și examinarea distribuției acestora în funcție de gen și anul de studiu.

Pentru fiecare temă au fost calculate frecvența mențiunilor și, acolo unde a fost relevant, numărul de studenți unici care au făcut referire la tema respectivă. Procentele au fost raportate în relație cu numărul total de respondenți. Deoarece un răspuns putea conține mai multe idei aparținând unor teme diferite, frecvențele tematice nu reprezintă categorii mutual exclusive și nu trebuie interpretate ca proporții ale unor grupuri independente de respondenți.

În etapa finală, rezultatele Q1–Q3 au fost sintetizate într-o matrice SWOT. Strengths au reprezentat principalele avantaje și valori educaționale percepute, iar Weaknesses au reflectat limitele și vulnerabilitățile asociate utilizării IAGen. Opportunities au fost derivate în principal din așteptările studenților privind dezvoltarea și integrarea viitoare a tehnologiei. În schimb, Threats nu au fost colectate printr-o întrebare distinctă, ci au rezultat prin reclasificarea interpretativă a elementelor de risc identificate transversal în răspunsurile la Q1–Q3. Astfel, Q2 reprezintă analiza tematică directă a provocărilor/riscurilor, în timp ce categoria Threats constituie o etapă ulterioară de sinteză SWOT.

Pentru asigurarea coerenței analizei, clasificarea SWOT a urmărit distincția dintre limitele interne ale utilizării IAGen în procesul educațional (Weaknesses) și consecințele sau riscurile mai largi care pot afecta calitatea educației și integritatea instituțională (Threats).

## 4. Rezultate

### 4.1. Beneficiile percepute ale utilizării IAGen

Analiza tematică a răspunsurilor la Q1 a evidențiat șase teme principale (Tabelul 1).

*Tabelul 1. Beneficiile percepute ale utilizării IAGen în educație*

| Tema                                 | Subteme principale                                                 | Mențiuni (n) | % din N = 373 |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|---------------|
| Acces rapid la informații și resurse | acces imediat la informații, economie de timp, resurse disponibile | 171          | 45,8%         |

|                                                  |                                                                   |     |       |
|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-------|
| <b>Învățare și autonomie</b>                     | studiu individual, feedback, aprofundare                          | 105 | 28,2% |
| <b>Explicații și înțelegere mai bună</b>         | explicații clare, exemple suplimentare, simplificarea conceptelor | 100 | 26,8% |
| <b>Personalizarea învățării</b>                  | adaptarea la nivel, ritm individual, nevoi specifice              | 67  | 18,0% |
| <b>Eficientizarea activităților educaționale</b> | automatizare, productivitate, economisirea timpului               | 58  | 15,5% |
| <b>Generarea de materiale educaționale</b>       | grafice, machete, materiale vizuale, prezentări                   | 47  | 12,6% |

*Notă. Frecvențele reprezintă mențiuni/codări tematice și nu numărul de respondenți unici. Procentele sunt calculate în raport cu N = 373; categoriile nu sunt reciproc exclusive.*

Cea mai frecventă a fost **accesul rapid la informații și resurse**, cu 171 de mențiuni (45,8%), urmată de **învățare și autonomie** (105; 28,2%) și **explicații și înțelegere mai bună** (100; 26,8%). Personalizarea învățării a fost menționată de 67 de ori (18,0%), eficientizarea activităților educaționale de 58 de ori (15,5%), iar generarea de materiale educaționale de 47 de ori (12,6%).

Rezultatele indică o percepție predominant funcțională a IAGen, asociată în special cu accesul la cunoaștere, sprijinirea studiului individual, clarificarea conceptelor și eficientizarea unor activități.

#### **4.2. Provocări și riscuri percepute**

Analiza celei de-a doua întrebări a evidențiat cinci teme principale (Tabelul 2).

*Tabelul 2. Provocările și riscurile percepute ale utilizării IAGen*

| <b>Tema</b>                                               | <b>Subteme principale</b>                                   | <b>Mențiuni (n)</b> | <b>% din N = 373</b> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Dependența de IAGen și diminuarea gândirii critice</b> | utilizare excesivă, înlocuirea gândirii proprii, rezolvarea | 141                 | 37,8%                |

|                                                             |                                                                                             |    |       |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|-------|
|                                                             | automată, pasivitate<br>cognitivă                                                           |    |       |
| <b>Informații eronate<br/>sau neverificate</b>              | răspunsuri incorecte,<br>halucinații, lipsa<br>verificării surselor,<br>dezinformare        | 74 | 19,8% |
| <b>Confidențialitate și<br/>aspecte etice</b>               | protecția datelor,<br>utilizarea<br>necorespunzătoare a<br>informațiilor,<br>probleme etice | 36 | 9,7%  |
| <b>Plagiat și fraudă<br/>academică</b>                      | copiere, trișare, lipsa<br>originalității,<br>realizarea automată a<br>temelor              | 30 | 8,0%  |
| <b>Reducerea<br/>implicării în<br/>procesul de învățare</b> | învățare superficială,<br>lipsa efortului<br>individual,<br>autonomie redusă                | 30 | 8,0%  |

*Notă. Frecvențele reprezintă mențiuni/codări tematice și nu numărul de respondenți unici. Procentele nu sunt reciproce exclusive.*

**Dependența de IAGen și diminuarea gândirii critice** a fost preocuparea dominantă, cu 141 de mențiuni (37,8%). Studenții au asociat utilizarea excesivă a IAGen cu diminuarea gândirii critice și reducerea implicării cognitive. De exemplu, utilizarea IAGen „poate descuraja gândirea critică deoarece oferă răspunsuri rapide, fără a mai fi nevoie ca utilizatorul să cerceteze mai multe surse și să își formeze o opinie proprie” (subiect masculin, anul IV).

A doua temă a fost reprezentată de **informațiile eronate sau neverificate** (74; 19,8%), urmată de **confidențialitate și aspecte etice** (36; 9,7%). **Plagiatul și fraudă academică** și **reducerea implicării în procesul de învățare** au înregistrat câte 30 de mențiuni (8,0%).

#### **4.3. Așteptările studenților privind integrarea viitoare a IAGen**

A treia întrebare a evidențiat cinci direcții principale privind viitorul integrării IAGen în educație (Tabelul 3).

**Tabelul 3. Așteptările studenților privind integrarea viitoare a IAGen**

| <b>Tema</b> | <b>Subteme principale</b> | <b>Mențiuni (n)</b> | <b>% din N = 373</b> |
|-------------|---------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
|-------------|---------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|

|                                                       |                                                              |     |       |
|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-------|
| <b>Formarea competențelor de utilizare a IAGen</b>    | cursuri, alfabetizare AI, utilizare corectă și etică         | 154 | 41,3% |
| <b>IAGen ca instrument de sprijin pentru învățare</b> | suport pentru studenți și profesori, instrument complementar | 70  | 18,8% |
| <b>Integrare responsabilă și reglementată</b>         | reguli, limite, utilizare etică și responsabilă              | 65  | 17,4% |
| <b>Creșterea eficienței procesului educațional</b>    | economisirea timpului, automatizare, acces rapid la resurse  | 46  | 12,3% |
| <b>Personalizarea învățării</b>                       | adaptarea conținutului, ritm individual, nevoi specifice     | 23  | 6,2%  |

*Notă. Frecvențele reprezintă mențiuni/codări tematice și nu numărul de respondenți unici. Procentele nu sunt reciproc exclusive. Frecvențele și citatele sunt preluate din analiza tematică a răspunsurilor.*

În Q3, cea mai frecventă așteptare a fost **formarea competențelor de utilizare a IAGen**, cu 154 de mențiuni (41,3%), incluzând solicitări privind alfabetizarea AI și utilizarea corectă și etică a instrumentelor. Au urmat utilizarea IAGen ca **instrument de sprijin pentru învățare** (70; 18,8%) și **integrarea responsabilă și reglementată** (65; 17,4%). Creșterea eficienței procesului educațional a fost menționată de 46 de ori (12,3%), iar personalizarea învățării de 23 de ori (6,2%). Așteptarea privind formarea este ilustrată de observația: „profesorii și studenții vor fi instruiți în utilizarea IA, în scrierea unui prompt etc.” (subiect masculin, anul II).

Prin urmare, așteptările nu vizează doar extinderea utilizării IAGen, ci și dezvoltarea competențelor necesare și existența unui cadru responsabil de utilizare.

#### **4.4. Sinteza rezultatelor**

Privite împreună, cele trei seturi de răspunsuri evidențiază o orientare prudentă și condiționată a IAGen. Beneficiile asociate accesului la informații, sprijinului pentru învățare și personalizării coexistă cu preocupări privind dependența, diminuarea gândirii critice și utilizarea informațiilor neverificate.

O convergență importantă apare între riscuri și așteptările pentru viitor: preocupările privind utilizarea necorespunzătoare, integritatea academică și lipsa verificării sunt însoțite de solicitări pentru formare, alfabetizare AI, reglementare și utilizarea IAGen ca instrument complementar.

#### 4.5. Analiza SWOT a integrării IAGen în educație

Pe baza analizei tematică a Q1–Q3 a fost construită ulterior matricea SWOT. **Strengths** sintetizează beneficiile percepute, **Weaknesses** vulnerabilitățile asociate utilizării, **Opportunities** derivă în principal din așteptările privind integrarea viitoare, iar **Threats** reprezintă o reclasificare interpretativă ulterioară a elementelor de risc identificate transversal în Q1–Q3. Prin urmare, *Threats* nu reprezintă răspunsurile la o întrebare distinctă.

*Tabelul 4. Matricea SWOT privind integrarea IAGen în educație*

| <b>Strengths – Puncte tari</b>                            | <b>n (%)</b>   | <b>Weaknesses – Puncte slabe</b>                       | <b>n (%)</b>   |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| <b>S1. Acces rapid la informații și resurse</b>           | 171<br>(45,8%) | W1. Dependența de IAGen și diminuarea gândirii critice | 141<br>(37,8%) |
| <b>S2. Învățare și autonomie</b>                          | 105<br>(28,2%) | W2. Informații eronate sau neverificate                | 74<br>(19,8%)  |
| <b>S3. Explicații și înțelegere mai bună</b>              | 100<br>(26,8%) | W3. Confidențialitate și aspecte etice                 | 36<br>(9,7%)   |
| <b>S4. Personalizarea învățării</b>                       | 67<br>(18,0%)  | W4. Plagiat și fraudă academică                        | 30<br>(8,0%)   |
| <b>S5. Eficientizarea activităților educaționale</b>      | 58<br>(15,5%)  | W5. Reducerea implicării în procesul de învățare       | 30<br>(8,0%)   |
| <b>S6. Generarea de materiale educaționale</b>            | 47<br>(12,6%)  |                                                        |                |
| <b>Opportunities – Oportunități</b>                       | <b>n (%)</b>   | <b>Threats – Amenințări</b>                            | <b>n (%)</b>   |
| <b>O1. Formarea competențelor de utilizare a IAGen</b>    | 154<br>(41,3%) | T1. Dependența de IAGen și diminuarea gândirii critice | 148<br>(39,7%) |
| <b>O2. IAGen ca instrument de sprijin pentru învățare</b> | 70<br>(18,8%)  | T2. Compromiterea integrității academice               | 86<br>(23,1%)  |
| <b>O3. Integrarea responsabilă și reglementată</b>        | 65<br>(17,4%)  | T3. Informații eronate și lipsa verificării surselor   | 81<br>(21,7%)  |
| <b>O4. Creșterea eficienței procesului educațional</b>    | 46<br>(12,3%)  | T4. Diminuarea procesului autentic de învățare         | 63<br>(16,9%)  |

|                                     |              |                                                               |               |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| <b>O5. Personalizarea învățării</b> | 23<br>(6,2%) | T5. Probleme etice și de<br>confidențialitate                 | 42<br>(11,3%) |
|                                     |              | T6. Utilizarea necontrolată a<br>IAGen și lipsa reglementării | 35<br>(9,4%)  |

*Notă. N = 373. Frecvențele reprezintă mențiuni/codări tematice și nu respondenți unici; categoriile nu sunt mutual exclusive, astfel încât procente nu trebuie însumate. Strengths au fost derivate din analiza tematică a răspunsurilor la Q1 (beneficii), Weaknesses din Q2 (provocări/riscuri), iar Opportunities din Q3 (așteptări). Threats nu provin dintr-o întrebare distinctă, ci reprezintă o reclasificare SWOT ulterioară a elementelor de risc identificate transversal în Q1–Q3, cu accent pe consecințele potențiale asupra procesului educațional, integrității academice și cadrului instituțional.*

Matricea evidențiază o relație directă între beneficiile percepute și oportunitățile de integrare, pe de o parte, și riscurile cognitive, academice, etice și instituționale, pe de altă parte. În ansamblu, rezultatele evidențiază o orientare prudentă și condiționată a studenților față de integrarea IAGen, asociată cu necesitatea dezvoltării competențelor de utilizare, a verificării critice a informațiilor, a unor reguli clare și a menținerii rolului activ al studentului în procesul de învățare.

## 5. Discuții

### 5.1. Beneficiile percepute și valoarea pedagogică a IAGen

Rezultatele evidențiază o percepție predominant favorabilă asupra potențialului educațional al IAGen. Studenții o asociază în principal cu accesul rapid la informații și resurse, sprijinirea învățării, clarificarea conceptelor, personalizarea și eficientizarea activităților. Această perspectivă este în concordanță cu cercetări anterioare care evidențiază utilitatea IAGen pentru activități academice, învățare individuală și accesul la resurse educaționale (Baidoo-Anu et al., 2024; Chan & Hu, 2023).

Un aspect important este însă relația dintre accesibilitatea informației și învățarea autentică. Studenții apreciază IAGen pentru posibilitatea de a obține rapid explicații și de a studia în ritm propriu, ceea ce poate susține autonomia în învățare. Totuși, această autonomie este benefică numai atunci când studentul păstrează controlul asupra procesului cognitiv. Transferarea către IAGen a unor sarcini precum formularea, analizarea sau rezolvarea problemelor poate transforma sprijinul tehnologic într-o formă de substituție a efortului intelectual.

Această ambivalență este relevantă deoarece aceeași tehnologie apare, în răspunsurile studenților, atât ca facilitator al autonomiei, cât și ca posibilă sursă a dependenței și diminuării gândirii critice. Prin urmare, rezultatele susțin perspectiva potrivit căreia valoarea pedagogică a IAGen nu derivă din utilizarea sa în sine, ci din modul în care este integrată în activități care mențin studentul implicat activ în procesul de învățare.

### 5.2. Riscurile cognitive și epistemice ale utilizării IAGen

Rezultatele evidențiază faptul că principalele preocupări ale studenților nu sunt legate exclusiv de limitele tehnice ale IAGen, ci mai ales de efectele posibile asupra procesului de

învățare. Dependența de tehnologie, diminuarea gândirii critice, reducerea efortului intelectual și învățarea superficială sugerează existența unui risc de transfer al unor procese cognitive către sistemul generativ. Această constatare este importantă deoarece beneficiile asociate accesului rapid la informații și sprijinului pentru învățare pot deveni dezavantaje atunci când IAGen înlocuiește, și nu susține, activitatea cognitivă a studentului. De exemplu, un subiect de gen feminin din anul IV a sintetizat această preocupare astfel: „Mulți studenți nu verifică conținutul generat și sar peste procesul de învățare și înțelegere.”

O a doua problemă este de natură epistemică: informațiile generate de IAGen pot fi formulate convingător, fără a fi neapărat corecte sau complete. Prin urmare, utilizarea educațională a acestor instrumente presupune capacitatea studentului de a evalua critic răspunsurile și de a verifica informațiile prin surse credibile. Literatura subliniază că limitările privind acuratețea și fiabilitatea conținutului generat reprezintă una dintre provocările importante ale utilizării IAGen în educație (Chan & Hu, 2023; Kasneci et al., 2023).

În acest context, riscurile identificate de studenți susțin necesitatea unei utilizări active și critice a IAGen, în care tehnologia furnizează sprijin, dar responsabilitatea pentru înțelegere, verificare și decizie rămâne la utilizator. Astfel, problema centrală nu este dacă IAGen trebuie utilizată în educație, ci cum poate fi utilizată fără diminuarea autonomiei cognitive și a învățării autentice.

### ***5.3. Alfabetizarea AI, reglementarea și integrarea responsabilă***

Așteptările studenților indică faptul că integrarea viitoare a IAGen nu este percepută ca o simplă extindere a utilizării tehnologiei, ci ca un proces care necesită competențe și reguli adecvate. Frecvența ridicată a solicitărilor privind formarea în utilizarea IAGen sugerează că studenții consideră alfabetizarea AI o condiție pentru valorificarea beneficiilor și reducerea riscurilor asociate acestor instrumente. Această perspectivă este în concordanță cu recomandările UNESCO privind dezvoltarea competențelor necesare utilizării eficiente, critice și responsabile a IAGen în educație (Miao & Holmes, 2023).

Formarea nu ar trebui însă limitată la competențe tehnice. În context educațional, utilizarea competență presupune capacitatea de a formula solicitări adecvate, de a evalua critic rezultatele generate, de a verifica informațiile și de a înțelege implicațiile etice ale utilizării IAGen. Prin urmare, alfabetizarea AI poate reprezenta mecanismul prin care avantajele percepute de studenți sunt transformate în practici educaționale sustenabile.

În paralel, așteptările privind reglementarea și utilizarea responsabilă indică necesitatea unui cadru instituțional clar. Regulile privind utilizarea IAGen în activitățile academice, transparența utilizării și protejarea integrității procesului de evaluare pot reduce ambiguitățile și pot orienta tehnologia către funcția sa de instrument complementar. În acest sens, răspunsurile studenților sugerează o orientare prudentă și condiționată față de integrarea IAGen, tehnologia fiind considerată utilă atunci când completează procesul educațional, fără să substituie studentul sau

profesorul. Această orientare este exprimată clar de un subiect de gen feminin din anul IV: „Să fie un sprijin pentru studenți, nu să înlocuiască gândirea critică și efortul acestora.”

Rezultatele susțin astfel o abordare în care dezvoltarea competențelor AI, orientările instituționale și adaptarea practicilor pedagogice trebuie să evolueze împreună. Integrarea responsabilă a IAGen presupune, prin urmare, nu doar acces la instrumente, ci și capacitatea de a le utiliza critic, transparent și în acord cu obiectivele educaționale.

#### **5.4. Semnificația analizei SWOT și implicații pentru învățământul superior**

Matricea SWOT evidențiază o relație strânsă între beneficiile percepute ale IAGen, vulnerabilitățile asociate utilizării sale și condițiile considerate necesare pentru integrarea viitoare. Studenții nu exprimă o poziție de respingere a tehnologiei, ci una de orientare prudentă și condiționată față de integrarea IAGen în educație, în care beneficiile sunt condiționate de utilizarea competentă, critică și responsabilă. Studenții recunosc valoarea sa educațională, dar subliniază necesitatea dezvoltării competențelor de utilizare, a verificării critice a informațiilor și a existenței unor reguli clare.

Un aspect relevant este convergența dintre Weaknesses și Threats, pe de o parte, și Opportunities, pe de altă parte. Riscurile privind dependența, diminuarea gândirii critice, informațiile neverificate și integritatea academică sunt însoțite de așteptări privind formarea în utilizarea IAGen, reglementarea instituțională și menținerea tehnologiei într-un rol complementar. SWOT nu trebuie astfel interpretată doar ca o enumerare a avantajelor și dezavantajelor, ci ca o reprezentare a condițiilor de echilibrare a beneficiilor și riscurilor.

Din perspectivă instituțională, rezultatele sugerează trei direcții prioritare: dezvoltarea alfabetizării AI a studenților și cadrelor didactice, elaborarea unor orientări clare privind utilizarea IAGen și adaptarea practicilor de predare și evaluare astfel încât să fie menținută implicarea cognitivă a studentului. Aceste direcții sunt compatibile cu abordarea centrată pe om promovată de UNESCO, care plasează dezvoltarea competențelor și responsabilitatea utilizatorilor în centrul integrării IAGen în educație (Miao & Holmes, 2023).

În ansamblu, analiza SWOT sugerează că valoarea educațională a IAGen depinde mai puțin de tehnologie în sine și mai mult de cadrul pedagogic și instituțional în care aceasta este utilizată. Integrarea sustenabilă presupune, prin urmare, transformarea IAGen dintr-un simplu instrument de generare a conținutului într-o resursă utilizată deliberat pentru susținerea învățării, a gândirii critice și a autonomiei studentului.

#### **5.5. Limitările studiului**

Rezultatele trebuie interpretate în raport cu câteva limite. În primul rând, studiul a inclus 373 de studenți dintr-o singură universitate tehnică, ceea ce limitează transferabilitatea rezultatelor către alte instituții, discipline și contexte educaționale. În al doilea rând, datele se bazează pe răspunsuri deschise auto-raportate și reflectă percepțiile studenților, nu efecte măsurate direct ale IAGen asupra învățării, gândirii critice, performanței academice sau integrității academice. În al

treilea rând, frecvențele tematice reprezintă numărul de mențiuni codificate și nu trebuie interpretate ca indicatori ai prevalenței în populația studențească. În fine, matricea SWOT include o etapă interpretativă suplimentară, deoarece categoria Threats a fost construită prin reclasificarea ulterioară a elementelor de risc provenite din Q1–Q3, și nu printr-o întrebare distinctă.

## 6. Concluzii

Studiul a evidențiat modul în care 373 de studenți din învățământul superior tehnic percep integrarea inteligenței artificiale generative (IAGen) în educație. Analiza tematică a răspunsurilor deschise a arătat că studenții recunosc în principal valoarea IAGen pentru accesul la informații și resurse, sprijinirea învățării, clarificarea conceptelor, personalizare și eficientizarea activităților educaționale.

În același timp, rezultatele evidențiază preocupări privind dependența de tehnologie, diminuarea gândirii critice, informațiile eronate sau neverificate, integritatea academică și reducerea implicării autentice în procesul de învățare. Aceste constatări arată că beneficiile IAGen nu sunt independente de modul în care aceasta este utilizată, iar transferarea excesivă a sarcinilor cognitive către tehnologie poate diminua valoarea sa educațională.

Așteptările studenților indică necesitatea dezvoltării competențelor de utilizare a IAGen, a formării studenților și cadrelor didactice și a unor reguli instituționale clare. Matricea SWOT sintetizează această perspectivă, evidențiind o orientare prudentă și condiționată a studenților față de integrarea IAGen în educație, asociată cu valorificarea beneficiilor sale educaționale și cu reducerea riscurilor unei utilizări necritice sau necontrolate.

În concluzie, integrarea IAGen în învățământul superior poate fi valorificată atunci când tehnologia este utilizată ca instrument complementar, în cadrul unor practici pedagogice care mențin rolul activ al studentului, stimulează gândirea critică și asigură utilizarea responsabilă și transparentă a instrumentelor generative. Studiul oferă astfel o perspectivă empirică asupra condițiilor percepute de studenți ca fiind necesare pentru o integrare sustenabilă a IAGen în educație.

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## ÎN CONTRA ANALFABETISMULUI FUNCȚIONAL (II). MIMESISUL ÎN EDUCAȚIE. LITERATURA ȘI FILMUL

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«Modalitatea în care mimesis-ul  
este privit ca un comportament corelativ  
în care un subiect se angajează în mod activ  
în „a face pe cineva similar cu un Altul”  
disociază mimesisul de definiția sa ca simplă imitație».  
(Spărișu, 1984, p. 34)

### **Abstract**

Starting from comparative modern vs. postmodern philosophical traditions, this paper will explore issues surrounding educational mimesis as relationships between personal mimesis vs. significant mimesis, between texts – books and images in visual literacy in regard to theory and praxis. Perspectives are sought from those engaged in the fields of education, visual arts and literature, on issues related to the interconnections generated from intertextuality upon Jacques Derrida's philosophy of deconstruction, between visual literacy and cultural identity.

*Keywords: mimesis, functional illiteracy, education, literature*

## 1. Mimesis personal vs. mimesis educațional

continuu, inteligibil și coerent de evenimente înșiruite logic și devine acea experiență fragmentată și fragmentară, disruptivă și incoerentă a omului în lumea contemporană.

Contextualizând astfel conceptul de realitate, vom susține că educația postmodernă pe care o considerăm, mai degrabă, un vector de problematizare, exersează în privința modurilor de receptare a ficțiunii (post)moderne ceea ce Varsava denumește *mimesis personal*: acea instanță în care majoritatea cititorilor/ privitorilor nu reușesc inițial să recunoască un anumit tip de realitate prezentată de o operă de ficțiune din pricina multiplelor neconcordanțe și fracturi apărute între viziunea autorului (străinul / celălalt) și competența de decodare a subiectului cititor/ privitor. Așadar, vom extinde comprehensiunea mimesisului asupra fenomenului educațional, înțelegând prin *mimesis educațional*, dincolo de imitație și reprezentare, o strategie educațională care are în centru atitudinea postmodernă, fie de creator, fie de receptor de literatură, film ori alte arte, care implică modelarea, adaptarea și recreația. Or, aceste metode presupun *mimesisul semnificativ*: se realizează atunci când viziunea autorului, pe de o parte și aspirațiile și experiența cititorului de cealaltă parte, își găsesc un loc comun și când cititorul e capabil să recunoască în viziunea ficțională a autorului fragmente din propria sa experiență (trecută/ prezentă/ viitoare).

Prin urmare, vom considera *mimesisul educațional* drept o strategie complexă de exersare a receptării literaturii de ficțiune și a filmului pe baza principiului diferenței (J. Derrida), propunând un model de mimesis nonierarhic, centrat pe cititor/ privitor/ receptor, cel care stabilește de fapt legătura textului cu lumea. Cu deosebire, insistăm asupra posibilității ca aceeași operă de ficțiune să reprezinte atât un exemplu de *mimesis personal* pentru unii cititori / privitori, cât și unul de *mimesis semnificativ* pentru alții, în funcție de experiențele diferite ale acestora și de gradul lor de congruență cu viziunea auctorială. În ambele cazuri, competența de comprehensiune și interpretare este cea care permite recunoașterea anumitor coduri culturale. În cazul textelor/ filmelor cu grad înalt de inovație, cititorul este forțat să își rafineze competența. Totuși, în cazul multor texte/ filme postmoderne, chiar și cel mai competent cititor/ privitor este confruntat cu ceea ce Varsava numește *mimesis personal*. De multe ori, ficțiunea îi confruntă pe cititori/ privitori cu viziuni atât de excentrice încât acestea riscă să rămână „monumente solitare”.

## 2. Dimensiuni etice/ morale/ religioase ale mimesisului educațional / personal/ semnificativ

Socializarea și rațiunea reprimă comportamentul „natural” al omului, iar arta asigură un „refugiu pentru comportamentul mimetic”. Mimesis-ul estetic asimilează realitatea socială fără a subordona

natura astfel ca subiectul să dispară în lucrarea de artă, iar lucrarea de artă permite o reconciliere cu natura.

J. Derrida folosește conceptul de mimesis în relație cu textele, care nu sunt dubluri disponibile aflate mereu în relație cu ceea ce le-a purces. Textele sunt considerate „indisponibile” și „copii” întrucât ele se referă mereu la ceva care le-a precedat și sunt, așadar, „niciodată originea, niciodată interiorul, niciodată exteriorul, dar mereu dublura”. Textului mimetic (care începe mereu în calitate de dublură) îi lipsește un model original, iar intertextualitatea sa inerentă cere deconstrucția”.

Diferența este principiul mimesis-ului, o libertate productivă, nu eliminarea ambiguității; mimesisul contribuie la abundența de imagini, cuvinte, gânduri, teorii și acțiune, fără a deveni el însuși tangibil”. Prin urmare, mimesis- ul se împotrivesc teoriei și construiește o lume a iluziei, a aparențelor, a esteticii și a imaginilor, în care lumile existente sunt adecvate, schimbate și re-interpretate. Imaginile sunt parte din existența noastră materială, dar și ne și leagă în mod mimetic experiența realității de subiectivitate și sugerează „o experiență senzorială, care există dincolo de referința la realitate”.

Narațiunea Sinelui și/ sau mai mult sau mai puțin filmul ambiguu al identității cuiva construiesc dihotomiile menite să conducă către auto-cunoaștere prin transpunerea textelor în texte, a contextelor în contexte, a textelor în contexte și a contextelor în texte; biografiile, poveștile, națiunile, culturile, tiparele de comportament, identități etc. devin interșanjabile și asigură soluții pentru criza de identitate și re-construcția de sine. Mergând pe linia ideilor lui Erich Fromm și a lui H.S. Sullivan, lucrarea noastră presupune că un astfel de fenomen educațional dezvăluie „acele secrete ale sufletului” care induc seninătatea în procesul de construire a identității și în adaptarea interculturală sau de-a lungul unei culturi, prin relații interpersonale, și asigură o soluție pentru anxietatea individului postmodern, tulburarea nevrotică împrumutată de la moderniști.

### **3. Strategii ce vizează abordarea integrată a verbalului și a nonverbalului**

#### **1.**

2. Strategiile ce vizează abordarea integrată a verbalului (cuvânt/ simbol) și nonverbalului (imagine, gest, ton, intonație, ritm, prozodie afectivă etc.) în strategiile didactice comunicative sunt mai eficiente în *mimesisul educațional*. Rezultate ale cercetării aspectului emoțional și social în utilizarea limbii (discursul în conversație și narațiune, rolul povestirii, al glumelor și al umorului), al sensurilor figurate - inclusiv metafora, ironia, sarcasmul, idiomul, înjurătura), dezvoltarea limbii (la nivelurile fonologic, lexical și gramatical), au condus la concluzia că, în procesul comunicării, important este, deopotrivă, atât ceea ce spunem, cât și modul în care spunem. Emisfera cerebrală stângă este responsabilă de prima componentă (persoanele cu o dominanță stângă fiind auditive), în vreme ce emisfera dreaptă răspunde de a doua componentă (persoanele fiind dominant vizuale). Cele două emisfere, pe de o parte se opun, pe de altă parte se completează. Faptul că emisfera stângă este dominant cognitivă (analizează și folosește dominant rațiunea), pe când emisfera dreaptă este non-cognitivă (se bazează pe imaginație și

intuiție, sintetizează) a determinat pe mulți autori să inventarieze dualitatea/ complementaritatea celor două emisfere (cf. Roco: 2001: pp. 52-55).

De-construcția (J. Derrida) continuă a lumii artei și re-construcția propriei vieți, prin experiențe de descentrare a lumii și de fragmentare socială și culturală ne vor ghida în această încercare de conturare a unor repere pentru o pedagogie a minții prin comprehensiune reciprocă, conform „noilor pedagogii” (v. Anexa 1).

3. Vom încerca să răspundem chestiunii: Cum inducem creativitatea pe parcursul acestor activități? Implicații pedagogice: Contrar ideilor exprimate de unii autori, creativitatea nu este localizată în emisfera dreaptă (Roco: 2001: 53). Biologul Dahlia Zaidel (1984) consideră că artiștii au abordări variate și diferite, descoperirea presupunând demersul în ambele emisfere. Prin urmare, *mimesisul educațional* având ca miză creativitatea presupune abordări ce implică „creierul total” și complementaritatea activităților ambelor emisfere cerebrale (stânga-dreapta) și rezolvarea unor conflicte / opoziții de genul: *mimesis personal* vs. *mimesis semnificativ*, cognitiv vs. non-cognitiv, rațional vs. afectiv, verbal vs. nonverbal / paraverbal, simbolic vs. iconic. Prin urmare, acest gen de activități bazate pe sincretismul artelor și al limbajelor, combinând și diversificând mijloacele și canalele de comunicare vor induce creativitatea și vor fi o cale a dezvoltării sociale/ (inter)personale.

4. În acest fel, dascălul devine acel personaj care nu numai trezește, ci și “deșteaptă”: “Este vorba despre deșteptarea politică la lume și la prezența lucrurilor”; “deșteptarea etică la celălalt și la coprezență” (J. R. Resweber, 1988).

5.

#### 4. Sugestii pentru lectura anexei

Am mizat pe unicitatea subiectului uman (personaj literar și / sau elev/ cititor) care poate să contribuie la revigorarea moralei contemporane. Cu cât mai repede se înțelege că fiecare eu este ireplasabil, ca relațiile dintre euri sunt asimetrice, cu atât mai repede se manifestă o anumită atitudine (deschidere, toleranță) înainte de constituirea relațiilor. Noi nu este pluralul lui eu, spune Lévinas, nu este un rezultat de însumare. Relația cu Celălalt nu este ireversibilă, și este în mod esențial neegală: “Eu are întotdeauna o responsabilitate mai mare decât a tuturor.” Cultivarea imaginarului, valorizat ca spațiu al creativității literare și științifice, își are resursele în capacitatea de a se mira a celui educat, comunicarea morală fiind strâns legată de euristică și hermeneutică. Astfel, mirarea incită la reconstrucție poetică și speculație, “puterea imaginarului fiind coextensivă celei a inconștientului”; el “nu e altceva decât scrierea lumii la marginea inconștientului”. De fapt, spune Resweber, orice strategie pedagogică viabilă constă în “a deschide fantasma hranei sufletești spre imaginarul culturii și totodată a descărca subiectul de fantasma cu care era încărcat la plecare” (1988, p. 99). Suntem conștienți și de principala sa limită: un astfel de model de comportament mimetic este ambiguu, întrucât „imitația poate desemna producerea

unei copii asemenea obiectului, dar, pe de altă parte, se poate referi și la activitatea unui subiect care se modelează pe sine în acord cu/ sau în dezacord cu un prototip dat” (Spariosu, 1984, p. 34) și le asociază cu practica semiotică a interpretării și creativității.

Am încercat să provoc conștientizarea faptului că, dacă a învăța să vorbim despre cărți (citite, recitite, răsfoite și/ sau necitite) vs. filme (privite/ interpretate/ trăite) este o primă formă de întâlnire cu exigențele creației, atunci asupra celor care predau apasă o responsabilitate specială, aceea de a valoriza această practică a relaționării intertextuale și interculturale, pe care, datorită experienței personale, sunt cei mai în măsură să o transmită. Paralizați de respectul datorat textelor și de interdicția de a le modifica, obligați să le învețe pe de rost sau să știe ce „conțin”, prea mulți studenți / elevi își pierd capacitatea interioară de evaziune și își interzic să facă apel la imaginație, în împrejurări în care le-ar fi totuși cea mai utilă. Căci, să știm să vorbim cu gust și finețe despre ceea ce nu cunoaștem (foarte bine) este important și dincolo de universul cărților. Cultura se deschide celor care își dovedesc capacitatea, demonstrată de mulți scriitori, de a tăia legăturile între discurs și obiectul său și de a vorbi despre sine.

Ca dascăl, prin îndemnul adresat învățăceilor de a îndrăzni să-și aroge *dreptul de a (re)inventa cărți/ filme* prin lecturi plurale am răspuns la întrebarea dacă e posibilă (re)creația în spiritul studenților/ elevilor, oglindirea ta în «celălalt». Ce dar mai frumos îi poți oferi unui discipol decât acela de a-l face sensibil la artele invenției, adică ale (re)inventării de sine? Orice mimesis educațional ar trebui să tindă să-i ajute pe cei cărora le este destinat, să dobândească îndeajuns de multă libertate în raport cu operele pentru a deveni ei înșiși scriitori sau artiști.

Am sugerat că a-ți face timp să studiezi cu grijă ideile și comportamentul (valorile și atitudinile) celuilalt ( personaj/ coleg/ dascăl) în așa fel încât să devină și ale tale, ar putea fi condiția unui veritabil schimb cultural, fără a suprima partea de indecizie din limbaj, care ne permite libertatea să ne imaginăm și să umplem spațiile goale ale schematizărilor discursive. În acest context cultural, anexele didactice formează un fel de al doilea limbaj, la care am făcut apel pentru a vorbi despre noi înșine, pentru a ne prezenta în fața celorlalți și pentru a comunica cu ei. Ca și limbajul, ele au rolul să ne exprime, dar și să ne completeze, furnizând elementele lipsă ale personalității noastre, prin fragmentele prelevate din ele și reconfigurate, acoperindu-ne astfel propriile breșe.

Prin acest material nu dorim să transformăm într-un spațiu al adevărului discuția despre cărți și filme, citirea cărților și vizionarea filmelor, discuție care aparține unui spațiu al jocului, unui spațiu de negociere permanentă și, care rămâne, prin urmare, un spațiu al indeciziei și al golurilor din Anexa1. Căci adevărul destinat celorlalți contează mai puțin decât adevărul despre sine, accesibil numai celui ce se eliberează de exigența constrângătoare de a părea complet.

## 5. Concluzii. Avantaje și limite ale modelului propus

Mimesisul educațional, combinând și contrapunând mimesisul semnificativ vs. mimesisul personal duce implicit, la depășirea de sine care presupune acceptarea Celuilalt, numai această mișcare du-te-vino permițând experiența Celuilalt. Trăirea caracterului străin al Celuilalt presupune dispoziția de a cunoaște prin sine pe Celălalt. Niciun individ nu este o unitate, fiecare fiind format din părți contradictorii dintre care fiecare este o (altă) sursă de (noi) dorințe de acțiune. Rimbaud a formulat cu multă forță această condiție a individului: “Eu sunt un altul”. Din experiențele / modelele / discuțiile / filmele / cărțile citite studenții și / sau elevii realizează că, prin mijlocirea sincrismului limbajelor artelor construcția și deconstrucția de sine amplifică trăirea și experiența, întrucât se creează situații de învățare pentru a valoriza următoarele aspecte:

- ceea ce elevul nu poate învăța prin propria experiență despre natura umană / morală poate învăța prin mijlocirea experienței altora, personaje literare, pe calea narațiunii;
- adolescența mai ales e timpul studiului istoriei și al caracterelor umane prin intermediul fabulelor / dilemelor etice;
- pentru a putea ajunge la generalizarea pe care o presupun noțiunile morale, tânărul trebuie să dobândească un repertoriu de impresii, reprezentări asociate întotdeauna unui sentiment trăit, și nu unei percepții, filmul, imaginile venind în sprijinul suplinirii experienței;
- starea afectivă odată trăită de subiect, va fi stocată mnezic ca și imaginea mentală pe care o însoțește, numai prin mijlocirea sentimentului trăit, de care intelectul ia act ca de o semnificație a reprezentării. Inovația în paradigma mimetică de- și re-constructivistă seamănă foarte mult cu această situație imaginară: ea înseamnă combinația inedită și ingenioasă a unor valori care înainte fuseseră gândite separat: raționalul și intuitivul, inteligența logică și inteligența emoțională, privatul vs. publicul.

Să le arăți studenților/ elevilor că o carte vs. un film se reinventează la fiecare lectură înseamnă a le oferi mijloacele de a ieși fără să piardă nimic, ba chiar câștigați, dintr-o mulțime de situații dificile de (re)lectură și (re)scriere. Ceea ce luăm drept cărți este o acumulare eteroclită de fragmente de texte, transformate de imaginarul nostru și fără legătură cu cărțile celorlalți, chiar și atunci când acestea ar fi identice din punct de vedere material cu cele care ne-au trecut prin mâini. De foarte multe ori, „necunoașterea” textului ne poate permite, în mod paradoxal, un acces mai direct la unul dintre multiplele sensuri posibile, evident nu la un adevăr anume ascuns în operă, ceea ce face ca spațiul discuțiilor despre cărți să fie discontinuu și eterogen, la fel ca și spațiul acestui discurs.

Cert e însă, că doar atunci când individul dobândește capacitatea de a se exprima prin simboluri și imagini, când i se permite să jongleze în mod spontan și ludic cu percepțiile, conceptele și semnificațiile lucrurilor și ale întâmplărilor din jurul său, doar atunci își va cunoaște și își va putea depăși limita interioară, dobândind libertatea. Numai astfel va fi ajutat să își ia în proiect existența, învingându-și teama de cultură și modele culturale, prin care autorii încearcă și uneori reușesc să-l modifice pe omul de la capătul celălalt al cărții, cititorul, cel care desăvârșește scriitura.

# ANEXA 1

## RELAȚIA CUVÂNT-SIMBOL-IMAGINE

*Cel mai iubit dintre pământeni*, de Marin Preda

(Relația incipit-final - fragmente)

| Cartea / textul / cuvântul /                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
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| <i>cuvânt/noțiune/cognitiv/limbaj rațional</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <i>Simbolul care deschidespre interpretare / motive cheie din text</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | <i>Imagine/ afectiv/ emoție/sentiment</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <p><b>Moartea</b> e un fenomen <b>simplu</b> în natură, numai oamenii îl fac <b>însălmântător</b>. Vorbes de <b>moartea</b> naturală, care adesea e o dulce ispită. Înainte de a fi depus aici, în celulă, din care nu voi mai ieși decât pentru a intra într-o <b>captivitate</b> perpetuă, în plimbările mele solitare pe la marginea orașului, pe poteci, uitându-mă în jos și privind <b>pământul</b>, un sentiment senin se insinua în sufletul meu, la început de dragoste pentru el, <b>pământul negru, tăcut, liniștit, apoi de atracție, de dorință, un fel de melancolie, de nostalgie blândă, de a mă culca pe el și a rămâne acolo, întins pentru totdeauna</b>. Ceea ce și făceam, stând cu ochii spre cer, până ce adormeam. Mă trezeam copleșit de un adânc sentiment de regret: de ce m-am mai trezit?</p> <p>Dar <b>moartea violentă, sinuciderea</b>, la care ești împins de către oameni? Tandra nepăsare față de lume te poate stăpâni într-adevăr numai când te simți străin de propria-ți ființă, dar când, dimpotrivă, ai</p> | <p>generalizarea pe care o presupun noțiunile morale impune ca tânărul să dobândească un <b>repertoriu de impresii, reprezentări</b></p> <p>generate de cuvintele-cheie subliniate / inițierea în tainele naturii și ale vieții / iubirii</p> <p>Cuvintele sunt prea sărace ca să evoce întreaga încărcătură existențială, dramatismul momentului</p> <p><i>Cel mai iubit dintre pământeni</i>, de Marin Preda este un asemenea text: personajul, de-a lungul existenței sale trece prin situații-limită în care drama alegerii îi va marca întreaga existență/ conștiință;</p> | <p><b>asociate întotdeauna unui sentiment trăit</b>, și nu unei percepții;</p> <p>elevii au mărturisit că <b>memoria afectivă</b> i-a făcut să evoce participări la înmormântări / pierderea cuiva drag / adolescența mai ales e timpul studiului istoriei și al caracterelor umane prin intermediul fabulelor / dilemelor etice;</p> <p>Ceea ce elevul nu poate învăța prin propria experiență despre natura umană / morală poate învăța prin <b>mijlocirea experienței altora</b>, personaje literare sau actori celebri în filme</p> |

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| <p><b>conștiința</b> că ea este totul? Și știi cu certitudine că acest totul nu va mai fi liber niciodată? Închisoarea pe viață!<br/>/..../<br/>Am mai avut de a face cu <b>anchetele</b> și <b>justiția</b> și am mai fost <b>condamnat</b>, dar nu pe viață și nu fără speranța de a ieși curând. Nu fusese chiar curând, dar nici prea târziu ca să nu pot uita. Acum însă descopăr cu <b>groază</b> că ei, cei care mă interogau, erau liberi (și asta se vedea din <b>pofta cu</b> care îmi consemnau depoziția, acele <b>infame gesturi ale ființei animalice</b> care se simte trăind <b>fără opreliști, gestul cu care aplicau o ștampilă, răsoitul hîrtilor, mîncatul</b> unui sandvici, <b>înghiortăitul</b> unui pahar cu apă, <b>scârțăitul</b> scaunului sub trupul voinic, ancorat bine în realitate, <b>uitatul pe fereastră, căscatul, rîgăitul, gândul la muierea tânără</b> pe care o <b>vor strînge în brațe la noapte</b>) iar eu nu voi mai fi niciodată ca ei, toate <b>gesturile</b> mele vor fi sau îmi vor reaminti că sunt <b>condamnat să nu mai fiu liber până la moarte...</b><br/>Dar iată-mă atingând, chiar și pe un plan secund, miezul existenței mele și, ca întotdeauna la cei loviți, <b>gândul</b> mi se întoarce înapoi, la vremea</p> | <p>Textul/ cuvântul e destul de neutru, foarte greu transmite ceva, mai ales la începutul romanului când încă nu știm nimic despre drama personajului; transmite ceva mai mult doar la a doua relectură, după ce am aflat că eroul fusese condamnat dintr-o eroare provocată de o simplă neînțelegere a sensului literal al unui cuvânt (<b>ordonanțe</b> vs. <b>ordine</b>) dintr-o scrisoare a unui prieten plecat în străinătate și urmărit de securitate: ”Aștept ordonanțele dumneavoastră...”</p> <p>Rememorarea / scrisul / amintirea fiicei sale/ responsabilitatea față de aceasta și față de ceilalți nu îl lasă pe Petrini/ pe om absorbit cu totul de rolul / sfârșitul care îi este atribuit „de sus”</p> <p>construiesc dihotomiile menite să conducă către auto-cunoaștere prin transpunerea textelor în texte, a textelor în contexte și a contextelor în texte; biografiile, poveștile, națiunile, culturile devin <b>doar prilej de reflecție</b></p> | <p>renumite, pe calea narațiunii</p> <p><b>filmul</b> debutează ex abrupto, cu această scenă, a violării intimității familiei Petrini prin intrarea forțată în miez de noapte, în apartamentul familiei, în puterea nopții (scena erotică, încătușarea, drumul la miliție/ securitate, ancheta, condamnarea)</p> <p><b>efectele auditive</b> (muzica sinistă, ritmul cadențat al pașilor securiștilor) și <b>vizuale</b> (noaptea, umbrele, lumina foarte difuză) potențează ideea de situație limită, o transmit tele-spectatorului</p> <p>Transparența ideii de <b>situație limită groază/ crispăre/ nesiguranță</b> prin <b>intensificarea stărilor, a emoțiilor</b> datorită acțiunii automate / elevii au mărturisit că au trăit gesturi reflexe prin declanșarea mecanismelor non/cognitive (<b>tresăriri de durere, suferință, spaimă, înfiorări de</b></p> |
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| <p>inocenței pierdute, când am săvârșit prima infamie.</p> <p>Tinerețea e o <b>trufie</b>, rareori o valoare. Cel puțin în cazul meu. Trufia mi-a apărut în <b>conștiință</b> într-o zi când am citit în Platon următoarea afirmație: „Dacă <b>moartea</b> ar fi sfârșitul a tot, cei mai câștigați ar fi <b>ticăloșii</b>, moartea lor i-ar elibera și de trup și de păcate... și <b>tăcerea</b> care s-ar lăsa peste mormintele lor ar fi egală cu a celor care au fost vituoși.”</p> <p>Îmi pierdusem de mult <b>credința în Dumnezeu</b> și în viața viitoare, nu prin vreun proces dramatic, ci pe nesimțite, prin lipsa simplă de credință a altora (...). În loc să fiu neliniștit, turmentat ca un erou dostoievskian că dacă Dumnezeu nu există totul ne este permis, dimpotrivă, simțeam o jubilațiune liniștită că sunt liber de credință - și niciun imbold de a săvârși ceva nepermis nu mă ispitea. pp. 12-13</p> <p>Să zicem că două mii de ani <b>credința Nazarineanului</b> ne-a cutremurat conștiințele, și încă ni le mai <b>cutremură</b> (pe a mamei mele într-un fel adânc, o să mă opresc curând la acest</p> | <p>Inspirat de spiritul mesajului biblic, noul umanism nu se mai susține deci pe <b>rațiunea concepută ca un limbaj abstract, universal și anonim</b></p> <p>6. Problema alterității este una din marile provocări ale erei postmoderne, este un paradox postmodern care afirmă capacitatea umană de relație și de definiție a sinelui, și aceasta într-o vreme în care se manifestă individualismul, diferența, specificitatea. Este un domeniu în care sunt absorbite extremele, captând energia lor și creând un laborator de experiențe care încântă <b>sensibilitatea umană</b>.</p> <p>Cum izbutește Petrini/ omul, în circumstanțe potrivnice să fie altceva decât o jucărie a destinului?</p> <p>Altfel spus, umanul își face apariția atunci când un subiect, în mod paradoxal, este responsabil pentru celălalt înainte de a se preocupa de propria persoană; Prin voință el reușește să își conserve o marjă a lui de libertate de mișcare și acțiune ridicându-se</p> | <p><b>empatie, entuziasm etc.)</b></p> <p>Narațiunea Sinelui și/ sau mai mult sau mai puțin <b>filmul</b> ambiguu al identității cuiva prin <b>transpunerea contextelor în contexte</b>, culturile, tiparele de comportament, identități etc. devin interșanjabile și asigură <b>soluții pentru criza de identitate și reconstrucția de sine</b>.</p> <p><b>filmul / imaginea</b> va insista pe prezent, nu vor exista flash-back-uri în adolescența „dură și turbulentă”:</p> <p><b>Filmul</b> insistă tocmai pe aceste scene, făcând abstracție de lungile capitole de digresiuni metafizice</p> <p>Insistența pe devotament, deschidere și responsabilitate, consacrând morala dragostei, a sincerității, înțelepciunea și responsabilitatea omului</p> <p>un astfel de fenomen educațional dezvăluie „acele secrete ale sufletului” care induc seninătatea în procesul</p> |
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| <p>lucru), dar ce îl determină pe <b>Platon</b> să creadă că moartea nu e sfârșitul a tot? (...) Aici să revin asupra <b>mamei</b>. Învățase și ea la liceu (...). Erau <b>simple lecții</b> care trebuiseră să fie învățate, în timp ce <b>Dumnezeu era real, nu fusese învățat, ci se născuse cu el în suflet...</b> Cum? Tot așa de simplu cum nu se născuse în mine...Unde stătea deci Dumnezeu? Unde erau raiul și iadul, în Sirius, în Vega? /.../ Dostoievski are aerul să spună că aceste întrebări sunt naive, e vorba de <b>un cu totul alt Dumnezeu</b>. Care? /.../ În același timp, știa că există o lume invizibilă de ființe care ne puteau îmbolnăvi... Cine îmi spusese mie că gardianul chiar vrusea să mă omoare? Faptul că alții muriseră?.....pp. 310-31</p> | <p>deasupra evenimentelor rânduite/ destinate /exterioare/ istorice/ determinate social/ păstrându-și astfel demnitatea umană</p> <p>Ce implică <b>credința / încrederea</b> în șansa ta ca și în capacitatea insului de a interveni și, în ultimă instanță, de a dispune liber de sine?</p> | <p>de construire a identității și în adaptarea interculturală sau de-a lungul unei culturi, prin relații interpersonale, și asigură o soluție pentru anxietatea individului postmodern, tulburarea nevrotică împrumutată de la moderni.</p> <p><b>Răspunsul afectiv, o stare emoțională odată trăită de subiect, chiar prin film,</b> chiar prin experiența altcuiva, va fi stocată mnezic ca și imaginea mentală pe care o însoțește, numai prin mijlocirea sentimentului trăit, de care intelectul ia act ca de o semnificație a reprezentării</p> <p><b>Imaginea/ arhetipul mamei</b> întreține însă relația cu Celălalt / divinul / prin coincidența contrariilor: <b>blândețea și îndărătnicia</b> ei, <b>supușenia și revolta</b> împotriva soțului / <b>iubirea aproapelui și credința Nazarineanului</b></p> |
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|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |  | <p><b>misticul, moralul, religiosul</b> se insinuează însă în film prin <i>imagini</i> generatoare de probleme (mai ales în final, prin urcarea treptelor bisericii, regăsirea comunicării cu o instanță superioară/ Dumnezeu / care poate are răspunsul / răspunsurile așteptate)</p> |
| <p><b>Concluzii:</b> Lungi digresiuni metafizice, foarte greu de înțeles la prima lectură, fără corelația cu desfășurarea acțiunii și evenimentele tragice în care a fost implicat eroul: <b>trădat</b> de soția sa Matilda și de prieteni, cât timp a fost în închisoare, <b>îndepărtat</b> de fiica sa, Silvia, <b>înșelat</b> sau nelăsându-se înșelat prin reîntâlnirea cu fosta sa iubită din adolescență, <b>neînțeles</b> de tatăl său și având cu acesta o comunicare închistată / și <b>totuși</b> liber și <b>perseverând</b> în <b>căutarea fericirii prin iubire</b> și întâlnind-o pe Suzi, fără putința unui final fericit însă</p> <p>• Problematizarea consecințelor alegerilor și faptelor noastre/ relația exterior/ interior/ conștiința noastră</p> |  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |

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| <p>„Atâta timp cât aceste <b>trepte</b> urcate și coborâte de mine, vor mai fi urcate și coborâte de mulți alții, putem mărturisi oricând: dacă <b>dragoste</b> nu e, <b>nimic</b> nu e.”</p> | <p>Etape/ lecții de viață / la capătul drumului a văzut că adevărul nu e moartea, ci iubirea/<br/>„<b>valorizarea implicită</b>” (Pirău, 2007) acest determinism subtil care leagă viața afectivă de decizie. /.../un fel de <i>inducție afectivă</i> având forma: a este mai important decât b, b este mai important decât c; deci, în mulțimea a, b, c, a este mai important decât b, c.<br/>Conceptul [de adevăr, dreptate, n.n.] cu care operează subiectul la un stadiu sau altul apare mai degrabă ca o <i>generalizare a unui set de experiențe/ stări afective decât ca o generalizare în sens logic</i>”</p> | <p>Parafrizarea vorbelor din scrisoarea apostolului Ioan Către Corinteni: „Dacă dragoste nu am, nimic nu am.”<br/><i>Imaginea emoționantă din final</i> generatoare de probleme (supuse dezbaterii: Prin urcarea treptelor bisericii, putem vorbi despre regăsirea comunicării cu o instanță superioară/ Dumnezeu / care poate are răspunsul / răspunsurile așteptate? DA vs. Nu</p> |
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## ANEXA 2

### Repere pentru o pedagogie a construcției (mentale) de sine prin mimesis semnificativ vs. mimesis personal. Literatură și filmul.

Texte, filme / personaje, lumi și identități/ Valori și atitudini sociale mimetice

Data.....

1. Student(a).....

Email.....

Telefon.....

Obiective educaționale:

- Cum se transformă normele sociale față în față cu valorile individuale și sociale / literare?
- Ce atitudini au individualitățile singulare față de normele și valorile universale?
- Cum induc ele inovația & creativitatea?

2. Mai întâi citește cu atenție listele din tabelul de mai jos pentru a te familiariza cu noțiunile:

| 7. Valori personale<br>8.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | 9. Valori sociale                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 10. Atitudini                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 11. Instituții                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Autocontrol<br>2. Bunele maniere<br>3. Consum<br>4. Credință<br>(religioasă)<br>5. Divertisment<br>6. Dorința de a<br>munci<br>7. Dragoste<br>8. Fericire<br>9. Generozitate<br>10. Imaginație<br>11. Independență<br>12. Libertate<br>13. Loialitate<br>14. Onestitate<br>15. Ordine<br>16. Plăcere<br>17. Prietenie<br>18. Răbdare<br>19. Responsabilitate<br>20. Respect<br>21. Sănătate<br>22. Sinceritate<br>23. Spirit de<br>economie<br>24. Tendință spre<br>ideal<br>12. 25. Toleranță | 13. Avere<br>2. Carieră<br>3. Cinste<br>4. Civism<br>5. Cooperare<br>6. Creativitate<br>7. Cultură<br>8. Educație<br>9. Hărnicie<br>10. Încredere<br>11. Patriotism<br>12. Prestigiu<br>13. Proprietate<br>14. Respect față de<br>instituții<br>15. Sociabilitate<br>16. Solidaritate<br>17. Interculturalitate<br>18. Plurilingvism<br>19. ....<br>20.....<br>21..... | 1. Admirație<br>2. Animizitate<br>3. Conflict<br>4. Conformism<br>5. Contestare<br>6. Cooperare<br>7. Curiozitate<br>8. Curaj<br>9. Dispreț<br>10. Gândire pozitivă<br>11. Indiferență<br>12. Inițiativă<br>13. Implicare<br>14. Invidie<br>15. Lene<br>16. Politețe<br>17. Resentiment<br>18. Revoltă<br>19. Seriozitate<br>20. Superficialitate<br>21. Teribilism<br>14. 22..... | 1. Armata<br>2. Biserica<br>3. Băncile<br>4. Familia<br>5. Guvernul<br>6. Justiția<br>7. O.N.G.-urile<br>8. Parlamentul<br>9. Partidele politice<br>10. Poliția<br>11. Presa<br>12. Președinția<br>13. Școala<br>14.....<br>15. 15..... |

2. Atribue câte 3-5 valori și atitudini personajelor Victor Petrini, Matilda Petrini și..... (la alegere) din romanul Cel mai iubit dintre pământeni de Marin Preda / filmul cu același nume în regia lui Stere Gulea și / sau din romanul Orele, de Michael Cunningham și filmul The Hours în regia lui Stephen Daldry / din romanul Fight Club al lui Chuck Palahniuk și filmul omonim.....

16. ....

3. Descrie 2 atitudini față de personajele de mai sus, încercând să explici diferențele dintre ele mai întâi, dintre ele și voi / tine apoi.

4. Ce atitudini și valori sociale caracterizează generația ta? Alege din lista de mai sus și enumeră.

5. Asociați un „P” și / sau un „L” pentru posibilitățile, respectiv limitele lumii postmoderne:

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
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| <p>.....Suntem generația de mijloc,<br/>                 .....viața e (ca) în avion,<br/>                 .....încet înțelegem și ne revoltăm<br/>                 .....experimentăm onestitatea și sinceritatea,<br/>                 .....fiecare putem fi eroi, cu legenda lui<br/>                 .....nu e nevoie de niciun sacrificiu<br/>                 .....limbajul nonverbal preferat este dansul /<br/>                 sexul / meditația / îmbrățișarea/.....(alege)<br/>                 .....se poate să mori în orice moment,<br/>                 ..... tragedia unora este că nu mor,<br/>                 .....însuși doze întregi de panică,<br/>                 ..... totul este de unică folosință,<br/>                 .....prezervativul este accesoriul generației<br/>                 noastre, .....există o mulțime de opțiuni,<br/>                 .....posibilitățile de deschidere sunt<br/>                 multiple<br/>                 .....frontierele spațiale nu mai există,<br/>                 .....experimentăm complexitatea și<br/>                 imensitatea,<br/>                 ..... Lumea-i plină de răni, boala-i o stare<br/>                 naturală</p> | <p>..... Nu mai e nimic nou de făcut / de creat<br/>                 .....și suntem foarte furioși,<br/>                 .....trăim iluzia siguranței,<br/>                 .....permite lucruri interesante<br/>                 .....minciuna unora o reflectă pe a mea,<br/>                 ....fiecare are un drog necesar<br/>                 .....toți suntem sacrificați / ne autodistrugem<br/>                 (alege)<br/>                 ..... avem meserii pe care le dorim / urâm<br/>                 (alege)<br/>                 ....lumea-i plină de martiri / monștri / inocenți<br/>                 (alege)<br/>                 .....sexul a luat locul religiei,<br/>                 .....Dragostea / Dumnezeu / Omul a murit<br/>                 (alege)<br/>                 .....sexul a devenit un sport,<br/>                 .....dezvoltarea de sine e (ca o)<br/>                 masturbare,<br/>                 .....poți iubi intens pentru o zi,</p> |
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6. Ce atitudini și valori sociale te caracterizează pe tine? Alege din lista de mai sus și enumeră.....

7. Alege unul / două / trei personaje din cărțile / filmele de mai sus care au fost / sunt / ar putea fi (taie ce nu corespunde) modele de viață pentru tine scriind în dreptul lor frecvența (uneori, rareori, foarte rar, deseori, mereu, ....) și motivează.

8. Dintre colegii mei de an / grupă mă identific / mă simt aproape de (alege prinsubliniere!!).....și.....și.....  
 .....pentru că avem în comun: valorile sociale .....,  
 ....., și atitudinile: ....., .....

9. Dintre colegii mei de an / grupă mi-e indiferent // mă fascinează // îl \_o admir pe.....// .....//  
 //.....întrucât: avem în comun vs. ne deosebește.....

10. Completează tabelul de mai jos privind problema / soluția personajelor vs. soluția ta / a voastră:

| Personaje                 | Problema vs. | soluția |
|---------------------------|--------------|---------|
| Victor Petrini            |              |         |
| Matilda                   |              |         |
| Ion Micu                  |              |         |
| Director regie deratizare |              |         |
| Alt personaj              |              |         |

11. Alege unul / două simboluri / mituri din romanele citite / filmele vizionate și analizează reprezentarea și metamorfoza lor în film (regie, imagine, sunet ș.a.). Poți să iei ca reper o replică a unui personaj: „Rațiunea face ca totul să fie o copie a copiei copiei...” sau alta.....

12. Alege 6-7-8 expresii / sintagme de la cerința nr. 4 și fă o descriere a generației și a lumii în care trăiești, raportându-te la semnificații / imagini din romanele / filmele vizionate.

13. Reflectați asupra unor roluri / statusuri / ipostaze umane pe care le aveți / le veți avea. Identificați-vă profilul social prin bifare. Motivați unde e necesar/ e cazul:

| Roluri / statusuri / ipostaze | 17. trecut | 18. prezent | 19. Viitor / motivație |              |            |
|-------------------------------|------------|-------------|------------------------|--------------|------------|
|                               |            |             | 20.                    | 21. probabil | 22. cert   |
|                               |            |             |                        |              | 23. incert |

|                      |      |      |      |      |      |
|----------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Tată                 | 24.  | 25.  | 26.  | 27.  | 28.  |
| Mamă                 | 29.  | 30.  | 31.  | 32.  | 33.  |
| Copil                | 34.  | 35.  | 36.  | 37.  | 38.  |
| Fiu_Fiică            | 39.  | 40.  | 41.  | 42.  | 43.  |
| Soț                  | 44.  | 45.  | 46.  | 47.  | 48.  |
| soție                | 49.  | 50.  | 51.  | 52.  | 53.  |
| Elev                 | 54.  | 55.  | 56.  | 57.  | 58.  |
| Student(ă)           | 59.  | 60.  | 61.  | 62.  | 63.  |
| Profesor             | 64.  | 65.  | 66.  | 67.  | 68.  |
| Prieten              | 69.  | 70.  | 71.  | 72.  | 73.  |
| Iubit(ă)             | 74.  | 75.  | 76.  | 77.  | 78.  |
| Iubit și iubită      | 79.  | 80.  | 81.  | 82.  | 83.  |
| Coleg(ă)             | 84.  | 85.  | 86.  | 87.  | 88.  |
| Cetățean al orașului | 89.  | 90.  | 91.  | 92.  | 93.  |
| Cetățean european    | 94.  | 95.  | 96.  | 97.  | 98.  |
| Cetățean al lumii    | 99.  | 100. | 101. | 102. | 103. |
| .....                | 104. | 105. | 106. | 107. | 108. |
| Concluzii            | 109. | 110. | 111. | 112. | 113. |

14. Reflectați și faceți un scurt comentariu raportându-vă la ce simțiți față de 2 dintre personajele de mai sus (compasiune, toleranță / non-violență, respect, admirație, acceptare, umilință ..... ) integrând:

- cel puțin 2 perspective (individ / grup, femeie / bărbat, român / maghiar) și
- mentalități / culturi diferite (europeană / americană / indiană / arabă etc.).
- ia ca repere și actorii din filmele date și / sau vorbele lui Andrei Pleșu (*Despre bucurie în Est și în Vest*, 2006): „În realitate, un om întreg și o societate sănătoasă au nevoie în același timp de beneficiile subzistenței și de cele ale reflexiei, de șosete și vise, de pâinea zilnică și de utopii.”

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## **APPROACHES, METHODS, AND TECHNIQUES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING: A CONCEPTUAL AND PEDAGOGICAL ANALYSIS**

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### ***Abstract***

This paper examines the conceptual and pedagogical distinctions among approaches, methods, and techniques in English Language Teaching (ELT), with particular attention to their development and application in contemporary educational contexts. Drawing on established theoretical perspectives in language pedagogy, the study explores the relationship between underlying assumptions about language and learning, systematic instructional procedures, and specific classroom practices. Particular consideration is given to the transition from teacher-centred traditional methods towards learner-centred and communicative approaches. The paper also discusses the pedagogical implications of distinguishing among concepts such as Communicative Language Teaching, Task-Based Language Teaching, Project-Based Learning and classroom techniques including role-play, information-gap activities, and collaborative learning. The analysis highlights the importance of terminological precision for both ELT research and effective classroom practice.

*Keywords: English Language Teaching; approach; method; procedure; technique.*

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## Introduction

English Language Teaching (ELT) has evolved in response to developments in linguistic theory and educational research. Traditionally, language teaching was characterised by teacher-centred instruction, explicit grammar teaching, translation, memorisation, and controlled practice, with methods such as the Grammar-Translation Method and the Audio-Lingual Method playing an important role. In contrast, contemporary ELT emphasises learner-centredness, communicative competence, interaction, collaboration, learner autonomy, and the meaningful use of language. Consequently, approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), and Project-Based Learning have shaped English language teaching. However, the distinction between traditional and modern practices should not be understood as a strict opposition, as effective language teaching may integrate elements from different pedagogical traditions according to learners' needs, educational objectives, and classroom contexts. Teachers are responsible for designing and delivering high-quality teaching and learning. To maximise student learning, they should adapt instructional strategies, questioning techniques, feedback, explanations, and classroom activities to learners' needs. "The art of teaching does not lie in accessing a checklist of skills but rather in knowing which approach to adopt with different students, in different curricular circumstances or in different cultural settings" (Klapper, 2001, p. 17). Moreover, language teaching should extend beyond linguistic competence, supporting students' personal development and their ability to participate as responsible individuals.

## Theoretical Framework

Richards and Rodgers (2001) conceptualize language teaching through the hierarchical relationship between *approach*, *method*, and *technique*. In this framework, an *approach* refers to the underlying theoretical assumptions about the nature of language and language learning; whereas, a *method* represents an overall plan for organizing language teaching in accordance with those assumptions "an umbrella term for the specification and interrelation of theory and practice" (Richards and Rodgers, 2001, p. 16). The term *method* is also defined by Brown as "a generalized set of classroom specifications for accomplishing linguistic objectives" (Brown, 2000, p.16). Furthermore, a *technique* refers to a specific classroom procedure or activity used to achieve a particular instructional objective; it implies the techniques and practices employed in the classroom as consequences of particular approaches and designs. Teaching methods refer to systematic ways of organising and delivering instruction to support learners' understanding, retention, and application of knowledge and skills. Appropriate teaching strategies can make learning more engaging and meaningful while enabling teachers to respond to learners' academic, social, and emotional needs (Richards and Rodgers, 2001).

For example, within Total Physical Response (TPR), the approach is reflected in the emphasis placed on comprehension, physical action, and the relationship between language and

motor activity; TPR constitutes the method as an organized system of language teaching; and activities such as the teacher giving commands ('Stand up', 'Open the door', or 'Touch your head') and learners responding physically represent techniques used in classroom practice. This hierarchy therefore moves from relatively abstract theoretical principles to an organized teaching system and finally to observable classroom behaviour. The distinction is particularly important in English language teaching because a *method* is not simply an individual classroom activity: it encompasses a broader set of principles concerning objectives, teacher and learner roles, classroom procedures, and the selection and sequencing of activities.

Romanian educational methodology employs a related but conceptually different set of categories, commonly expressed as *metodă*, *procedeu*, and *mijloc didactic*. *Metodă didactică* [teaching method] denotes an organized way of conducting the teacher's and learners' activities in order to achieve instructional objectives, while a *procedeu didactic* [teaching technique] refers to a more specific procedure through which a method is applied in a particular teaching situation. *Mijloc didactic* [teaching aid] is the instructional resource or instrument that supports the teaching-learning process, such as a textbook, picture, flashcard, worksheet, audio recording, or digital presentation. For instance, an English teacher may use *metoda exercițiului* [the exercise method] to practise vocabulary, employ a specific questioning or repetition procedure as a *procedeu*, and use flashcards or a digital presentation as *mijloace didactice*. Thus, although there are functional similarities between the two terminological systems, particularly between ELT *technique* and the Romanian concept of *procedeu*, they should not be regarded as exact equivalents. The principal difference is that Richards and Rodgers place *approach* at the theoretical level and conceptualize *method* as a comprehensive language-teaching system, whereas Romanian methodology places greater emphasis on the practical organization of instruction and explicitly distinguishes the method, its specific procedures, and the resources used to implement it. Consequently, the two frameworks can be productively compared, but their categories should be interpreted within their respective methodological traditions rather than treated as interchangeable terms.

### **A Comparative Perspective on Communicative Language Teaching, Total Physical Response, and Project-Based Learning**

Freeman and Anderson (2011) identify several defining characteristics of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, reflecting a broader shift from form-focused, teacher-centred instruction towards meaningful communication and learner participation. The primary objective is to develop learners' ability to communicate in the target language, thereby positioning communicative competence, rather than the mastery of grammatical structures, as a central outcome of instruction. Therefore, "the goal is to enable students to communicate in the target language. To do this, students need knowledge of the linguistic forms, meanings, and functions. They need to know that many different forms can be used to perform a function and also that a single form can often serve a variety of functions. They must be able to choose from

among these the most appropriate form, given the social context and the roles of the interlocutors” (Freeman and Martin, 2011, p.161). Communicative goals are successfully achieved by prioritising meaningful language use over knowledge of language forms, promoting fluency alongside accuracy, and incorporating authentic language within meaningful communicative contexts. This orientation also redefines the teacher’s role, positioning the teacher as a facilitator, advisor, and, when appropriate, co-communicator who supports and participates in the learning process. Learners, in turn, are expected to assume a more active role in constructing and negotiating meaning.

From a pedagogical perspective, CLT places particular emphasis on activities involving genuine communicative purposes, especially those incorporating information gaps, role- plays, learner choice, and feedback. Such activities seek to create conditions in which language is used as a means of communication rather than treated solely as an object of study. The approach also recognises that communicative competence extends beyond linguistic knowledge to include an understanding of language functions, sociocultural conventions, and the contextual appropriateness of language use. Consequently, communicative functions and meaningful interaction are generally prioritised over the isolated presentation of linguistic forms, while the development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing is integrated from the early stages of instruction.

Another significant feature of CLT is its relative tolerance of learners’ first language and of errors during fluency-oriented activities. Rather than treating every error as an immediate obstacle to learning, CLT distinguishes between fluency and accuracy objectives, allowing corrective feedback to be adapted to the pedagogical purpose of an activity. Assessment similarly seeks to consider both dimensions, with integrative tasks providing opportunities to evaluate learners’ ability to use language for communicative purposes. Nevertheless, in practice, an exclusively communicative orientation may present challenges in contexts where examination requirements, large classes, limited instructional time, or learners’ proficiency levels constrain opportunities for authentic interaction. A critical understanding of the CLT approach suggests that its principles are most effectively implemented flexibly, with communicative activities, explicit attention to language form, corrective feedback, and appropriate teacher support being integrated according to learners’ needs and the specific educational context.

According to Richards (2006), communicative competence encompasses several dimensions of language knowledge. These include the ability to use language for a variety of purposes and communicative functions, as well as to adapt language use to different contexts, settings, and participants, including the appropriate use of formal and informal language and the distinction between spoken and written communication. Communicative competence also involves the ability to produce and comprehend different types of texts, such as narratives, reports, interviews, and conversations. It includes the capacity to maintain communication despite limitations in language knowledge by employing appropriate communication strategies. In Brown’s view, “given that communicative competence is the goal of a language classroom, instruction needs to point toward

all its components: organisational, pragmatic, strategic, and psychomotor” (Brown, 2007, p. 79). Furthermore, effective language instruction should equip learners with the ability to transfer and apply their classroom-based knowledge to new, unrehearsed communicative situations beyond the classroom and in real-world contexts.

Information-gap activities are communicative tasks in which learners possess different pieces of information and must interact in the target language to obtain the missing information and achieve a shared outcome. They are particularly useful for developing speaking and listening skills because they create an authentic need for communication. By requiring learners to exchange information, ask questions, seek clarification, and negotiate meaning, these activities encourage meaningful interaction and provide opportunities to use linguistic resources in context. Typical types of information gap activities include: describe and draw, spot the difference, jigsaw readings and listenings, and split dictations ([www.teachingenglish.org.uk](http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk)).

Scrambled sentences is a communicative classroom activity in which learners are presented with a text or dialogue whose sentences have been deliberately placed in an incorrect order. Their task is to reconstruct the original sequence by identifying the linguistic and semantic relationships between the sentences. This activity develops learners’ awareness of cohesion and coherence, particularly how linguistic devices such as pronouns establish connections across sentences and how semantic relationships contribute to the overall unity of a text. The activity can also be adapted to spoken or visual contexts, for example by asking learners to reconstruct a mixed-up dialogue or arrange a series of pictures in a logical sequence and create an accompanying dialogue or narrative.

Language games are a frequently used technique in Communicative Language Teaching to provide learners with engaging opportunities for meaningful interaction. When appropriately designed, they encourage communicative competence by incorporating three key features: an information gap, learner choice, and feedback. These activities can enhance fluency, motivation, confidence, and spontaneous language use (Littlewood, 1981). However, their effectiveness depends on purposeful design; games should involve genuine communication rather than focus primarily on competition or mechanical language practice. Therefore, language games are most effective when aligned with specific communicative objectives and require learners to exchange information, make meaningful choices, and negotiate meaning.

A picture strip story is a communicative technique that encourages learners to make predictions, exchange information, and negotiate meaning. In a typical activity, learners examine a sequence of pictures, predict what happens next, and explain their ideas to peers. The task promotes problem-solving, collaboration, and meaningful language use, while allowing learners to focus on communicating ideas rather than producing predetermined forms. Its efficiency, however, depends on careful task design and appropriate scaffolding to ensure that visual prompts generate genuine interaction rather than simple description.

Role-plays also constitute a relevant CLT technique, providing learners with opportunities to develop communicative competence in a variety of social situations and roles. They can be

highly structured, with the teacher providing specific roles and lines, or more flexible, with students deciding what to say based on the given situation and topic. Less-structured role-plays promote learner choice, create information gaps, and encourage spontaneous interaction and negotiation of meaning. By providing opportunities for authentic language use and immediate communicative feedback, role-plays can contribute to the development of both fluency and pragmatic competence.

Brainstorming is a classroom technique that involves the rapid generation of ideas around a particular topic without initially evaluating or organising them. The ideas generated can subsequently serve as a basis for activities such as writing or discussion ([www.teachingenglish.org.uk](http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk)). It can activate learners' prior knowledge, encourage creative thinking, and promote learning through the exchange of ideas. The teacher facilitates the activity and provides language support when necessary, while allowing learners sufficient freedom to contribute. As a pre-writing or pre-task activity, brainstorming helps learners generate and organise ideas before engaging in more structured communicative or written tasks.

Although brainstorming, word webs, and star bursting are related techniques, they differ in their primary function. Brainstorming encourages the free generation of ideas, word webs establish visual connections between related words and concepts, making associations and categorising words, being useful for introducing a topic and preparing learners for subsequent language production; whereas, starbursting focuses on generating questions to explore a topic from different perspectives. On the one hand, a word web is a visual brainstorming technique to develop vocabulary and organise ideas around a central topic; a technique that can activate learners' prior knowledge, expand their vocabulary, and help them organise ideas before speaking or writing activities. Learners begin with a key word or concept and add related words, expressions, or ideas, establishing connections between them. On the other hand, starbursting is a questioning-based brainstorming technique in which a central topic is surrounded by questions such as *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, *why*, and *how*. Learners generate further questions from these prompts, exploring the topic from different perspectives and developing critical thinking, vocabulary, and communication skills ([www.mindtools.com](http://www.mindtools.com)).

Total Physical Response (TPR) was developed by James Asher, a professor of psychology, and is based on the coordination of language and physical movement (Asher, 1969). Its primary aim is to provide an enjoyable and low-anxiety learning experience in which learners can experience a sense of success while minimising the stress commonly associated with foreign-language learning. TPR is suitable for beginners and young learners because grammatical structures and vocabulary are introduced through imperative forms, with meaning conveyed through physical actions rather than lengthy verbal explanations. A central principle of TPR is that comprehension should precede language production and that spoken language should generally be introduced before the written form. Learners demonstrate their understanding by physically responding to commands given by the teacher, who can introduce novel and often humorous variations to maintain engagement and motivation. The teacher initially assumes the role of

prompter, while learners respond through non-verbal actions. The teacher gives commands in the target language and performs the actions with the students. Therefore, teachers should “vary the sequence of the commands so that students do not simply memorize the action sequence without ever connecting the actions with the language” (Freeman and Martin, 2011, p.147). Meaning is conveyed through actions, which also activate memory through learner responses. The target language should be taught in meaningful chunks rather than word by word. As learners develop confidence and readiness to speak, they gradually assume a more active role by giving commands to their classmates. Students should learn to interpret new combinations of language chunks instead of relying only on sentences they have practiced. Exposure to new items of language can increase motivation and make learning more enjoyable. Vocabulary and grammar receive greater emphasis than other language areas and are introduced through imperatives that are used partly because they are common in speech addressed to young children learning their mother tongue. Learners should first develop an understanding of spoken language before being expected to produce it themselves.

Consequently, greater emphasis should be placed on spoken communication, allowing students to begin speaking naturally when they feel ready. Thus, activities can be extended to include games and other language-learning tasks, thereby increasing learner participation and interaction. The teacher may work with individual learners as well as with the whole group, providing opportunities for gradual progression from comprehension to spoken production. Assessment can be conducted primarily through observation of learners’ physical responses (Freeman and Martin, 2011). The teacher can evaluate comprehension by asking individual learners to perform a sequence of actions in response to verbal commands. Errors are considered a natural part of the transition to spoken production, and teachers generally focus on correcting significant errors while avoiding excessive interruption of communication. Overall, this approach emphasises comprehension, physical involvement, learner participation, and a supportive classroom environment, making it particularly valuable during the early stages of language learning.

Grounded in meaning, relevance, and student agency, Project-Based Learning (PBL) represents a transformative educational approach. Project-Based Learning (PBL) broadens the purpose of learning by encouraging students to move beyond simply receiving information towards understanding learning as an active process of inquiry and discovery. Therefore, learners are invited to make predictions, solve problems, ask questions, and actively seek answers to issues that are meaningful to them. Creativity is not simply an added component of learning; instead, it constitutes an integral dimension of how learning occurs. A key feature of this approach is giving learners opportunities to make choices about what they investigate. Rather than working exclusively with topics predetermined by the curriculum, students can explore authentic issues and situations that connect with their experiences and interests. This movement from passive participation to active creation can strengthen students’ sense of ownership and transform engagement from an obligation into a genuine desire to learn. Krauss and Boss introduce this

principle in “Thinking Through Project-Based Learning” (2013), arguing that students develop knowledge, skills, and dispositions by exploring open-ended questions, constructing meaning, and communicating their understanding in purposeful ways. From this perspective, PBL is not simply about increasing student engagement, but it provides a context in which learners can develop critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and authentic communication; it “prioritizes experiences where students construct knowledge by pursuing authentic problems and communicating insights in impactful ways” (Krauss and Boss, 2013, p.5).

When students work with open-ended problems, they are encouraged to formulate meaningful questions, integrate information from different sources, collaborate with others, and communicate findings that have a clear purpose. Adopting PBL therefore requires teachers to take on the role of facilitators who guide students through processes of prediction, inquiry, problem-solving, and creation rather than functioning primarily as transmitters of information. Choosing this approach represents a shift away from rigid standardization toward a more learner-centered model of education. It requires teachers to trust students as active participants in the learning process and to recognize that meaningful understanding develops through exploration, experimentation, and engagement as well as highlighting its capacity to foster curiosity, creativity, independence, and meaningful learning. PBL’s collaborative nature strengthens communication, interpersonal skills, and critical thinking through peer interaction and shared problem-solving. It also shifts the teacher’s role from instructor to facilitator and mentor, requiring flexibility, professional judgement, and a balance between guidance and learner independence. However, facilitating projects can be challenging and requires skills in differentiation, conflict resolution, and formative assessment. It often demands more classroom time than traditional lessons, which can make the pace at which the curriculum is delivered and standardized test preparation more difficult.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, teaching English as a foreign language reflects a shift towards learner-centred, communicative, and meaningful language learning. Approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Total Physical Response (TPR), or Project-Based Learning (PBL), together with techniques including role-plays, language games, problem-solving tasks, and collaborative activities, emphasise interaction, communicative competence, and relevant language use. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these approaches may vary considerably across different educational contexts as communicative practices may be constrained by large classes, limited time, varying proficiency levels, curriculum and assessment demands, and limited resources. Consequently, teaching English as a foreign language should not be viewed as a complete shift away from traditional methods, but as a flexible process of adapting and combining different pedagogical practices to better fit a particular teaching context. Successful teaching depends on teachers’ ability to critically adapt approaches, methods, and techniques to learners’ needs and

specific educational contexts, while balancing teacher's guidance, learners' autonomy and linguistic knowledge with meaningful communication.

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## THE ROLE OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN PROMOTING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

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### **Abstract**

The present article examines the role of inclusive education in promoting diversity, equity, and active participation within the contemporary educational process. The article commences with a paradigm shift that reframes student difference as a normal feature of any classroom rather than a deviation to be corrected. It then traces the conceptual, historical, and theoretical foundations of the inclusive education movement, from international policy frameworks to the debates surrounding integration, mainstreaming, and inclusion. The text then goes on to analyse how inclusive practices can offer concrete support for diversity, equity and participation. It also discusses teaching strategies and the role of the teacher in implementing differentiated, universally designed instruction. Finally, it identifies the structural, attitudinal and resource-related barriers that continue to hinder full implementation, both internationally and within the Romanian education system. The article concludes that inclusive education requires a comprehensive redesign of pedagogy for the whole classroom, rather than supplementary measures reserved for a minority of students, and outlines directions for further development.

*Keywords: inclusive education, diversity, equity, active participation, differentiated instruction, universal design for learning, teacher training, educational policy*

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## 1. Introduction

The present study sets out to explore whether teachers entering secondary school classrooms today still consider the fact that they are faced with twenty-five different learning pathways, as opposed to just one, before opening their register. This is not a rhetorical question. Indeed, it encapsulates the very tension around which the discourse on inclusive education has been built over the last three decades. For a period, an individual's 'difference' was regarded as a deviation that necessitated identification, diagnosis and, to the greatest extent possible, correction. In the contemporary context, at the level of public policy, difference is recognised as a normal feature of any human community. The task of the school has shifted from the elimination of difference to its management through pedagogical approaches (Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson 2006).

The present article adopts this paradigm shift as its point of departure for the purpose of examining the specific role that inclusive education plays in promoting three key aspects of contemporary education: diversity, equity and active participation. It is not the case that these are to be regarded as three interchangeable labels. Diversity can be defined as a state of affairs, that is to say, the actual heterogeneity of any given class. The term 'equity' is employed to denote a principle of distribution, namely the differentiated allocation of resources according to need, as opposed to an egalitarian distribution of the same resources to all. Participation, therefore, is defined as the extent to which each pupil actually learns alongside others, rather than merely in their presence. In the context of school practice, three distinct dimensions function as communicating vessels. This aspect is discussed in Section 2 in greater detail.

In this article, we posit a hypothesis that, while straightforward in formulation, is nevertheless challenging to operationalise: inclusive education should not be regarded as a series of supplementary measures applicable solely to a minority of pupils 'with special needs'. Instead, it should be conceptualised as a comprehensive redesign of pedagogical practices, applicable to the entire class. The present thesis is explored by first examining the historical, legislative and theoretical landmarks of the inclusive movement (Section 2), before outlining the conceptual and methodological approach adopted in this analysis (Section 3). Section 4 presents the results of this analysis, showing how inclusive practices contribute to diversity, equity and participation, and detailing the specific teaching strategies and the role of the teacher. Section 5 discusses, in no uncertain terms, the barriers that still prevent this change from being implemented on a wide scale, both in the international literature and, with certain particularities, in Romanian schools, before drawing the article's conclusions.

## 2. Literature Review (Theoretical foundation)

The following essay explores the conceptual, historical and theoretical foundations of inclusive education.

### *2.1. From exclusion to inclusion: an examination of paradigm evolution.*

The manner in which education systems have historically responded to the needs of children with disabilities or in vulnerable situations can be traced through four successive paradigms.

The initial exclusionary practices have historically prevailed in the realm of institutionalised education, with children deemed ‘uneducable’ being systematically excluded from formal schooling. The responsibility for their education was exclusively shouldered by their families or care institutions. The second paradigm, segregation, acknowledged these children’s right to education but implemented it through separate structures – namely, special schools organised by type of disability – whilst nevertheless reinforcing a logic of parallelism: ‘different’ children were educated within a distinct system, with minimal opportunities for interaction with their peers.

Integration, the third paradigm, developed primarily in the 1970s and 1980s, facilitated the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs into mainstream schools. However, this integration often occurred without any substantial modifications to other aspects of the educational system, such as the curriculum, methodology, or the organisation of the classroom. It was the responsibility of the pupil to ensure that they were able to maintain pace. The result, as documented by numerous case studies, was a form of disguised exclusion: physical presence without genuine participation (Slee 2011). Inclusion, the fourth paradigm of interest in this article, reverses the direction of adaptation: it is not the pupil who adapts to the school, but the school – understood as a whole comprising the curriculum, assessment, methodology and institutional organisation – that is redesigned to respond to the real diversity of its pupils. It is important to note that the concept of inclusion is not exclusively limited to children with disabilities; rather, it extends to any pupil who may be at risk of marginalisation. This includes children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, children belonging to ethnic or linguistic minorities, gifted children who require a different approach, or pupils who are temporarily in vulnerable situations.

## *2.2. The international legislative and policy framework.*

The Salamanca Declaration, adopted in 1994 under the auspices of UNESCO, is widely regarded as the foundational document of the inclusive education movement. The text states unequivocally that inclusive mainstream schools are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes and building welcoming communities (UNESCO 1994). Nevertheless, it was the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted by the United Nations (UN) in 2006, that truly changed the rules of the game: As stated in Article 24, persons with disabilities are entitled to an inclusive education system at all levels, without discrimination (United Nations, 2006). The transition from the medical model, which conceptualises disability as an individual deficit, to the rights-based model, which is comprehensively examined in sub-chapter 2.7, is legally codified through this document.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular, delineates the commitment of signatory states to ensure ‘inclusive and equitable quality education’ for all, as outlined in Goal 4 (UN 2015). The monitoring reports published periodically by UNESCO provide a global picture of progress and, above all, of areas lagging behind: the 2020 edition, explicitly dedicated to

inclusion, shows that the phrase ‘education for all’ remains, in many systems, closer to an aspiration than to a verifiable reality (UNESCO 2020). At the European level, the reports of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (EASNIE) provide a useful comparative framework across Member States (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2022).

### *2.3. Inclusive education in the Romanian context.*

In Romania, the principle of inclusive education has been enshrined in law through the National Education Act No. 1/2011, which recognises the right to education for all children, regardless of their social or ethnic background or whether they have special educational needs. The Act also provides for the development of dedicated support services (National Education Act No. 1/2011). It is evident, upon thorough examination of the extant literature, that the regulatory framework of Romania is, to a significant extent, congruent with European standards. Over the past two decades, educational policies have sought to extend the network of support and itinerant teachers, establish county-level educational resource and support centres, and introduce personalised intervention plans.

However, the discrepancy between this regulatory framework and its practical implementation in schools remains a salient issue, as emphasised in the EASNIE reports (2022), representing a persistent challenge within the educational system – a topic that will be addressed in greater detail in Section 5.

### *2.4. The presence of diversity within the educational environment is a key consideration.*

Diversity can be defined as the totality of differences that characterise a student population. These differences can be categorised into various domains, including functional differences (cognitive, sensory and motor abilities), cultural and ethnic differences, linguistic differences, differences in socio-economic status, gender, learning pace and style, as well as differences related to life experiences, such as migration, institutionalisation or social vulnerability. The acknowledgement of diversity necessitates a paradigm shift in perspective, whereby differences are no longer perceived as deviations from an assumed norm, but rather as integral components of any given human collective.

It is imperative to emphasise that diversity should not be regarded as a mere administrative responsibility; rather, it should be recognised as an invaluable pedagogical resource. A heterogeneous class, in which pupils bring different perspectives and experiences, offers genuine opportunities for collaborative learning and for practising critical thinking (Jones, 2019). This idea will be revisited from a theoretical perspective in the following section, which discusses Vygotsky’s approach (sub-chapter 2.8).

### *2.5. The distinction between equity and equality has been demonstrated to have a significant impact on professional practice.*

The concept of equality in education can be defined as the provision of identical resources and conditions to all pupils, irrespective of their individual needs. In contrast, equity emphasises the allocation of resources according to individual needs, ensuring that all pupils have genuine opportunities to realise their potential, as opposed to mere formal opportunities. The well-established metaphor of three people of different heights watching a match over a fence is employed to illustrate this point. Equality provides all of them with the same box to stand on, which solves nothing for the shortest person; equity, on the other hand, provides each of them with the number of boxes they need to see just as well as the others.

When applied to the classroom, equity signifies the provision of additional time in assessments for pupils with processing difficulties, the adaptation of materials for pupils with visual impairments, and the provision of language support for non-native speakers. These disparate measures are aimed at the same objective. A frequently overlooked aspect pertains to the fact that equity concerns not only initial conditions, but also outcomes. An equitable education system is defined as one in which academic performance cannot be predicted on the basis of a pupil's social or ethnic background. PISA data demonstrate that the highest-performing systems are also the most equitable, thus contradicting the notion of an irreconcilable tension between excellence and equity (OECD, 2023).

#### *2.6. Active participation is defined as engagement rather than mere attendance.*

Of the three concepts, participation remains the most reliable indicator of the success of inclusive practices. Participation, therefore, must extend beyond mere physical presence in the classroom and encompass active involvement in the learning process, the right to express one's opinions regarding decisions that affect one's educational trajectory, and the assurance of recognition as a full member of the learning community. As asserted by Booth and Ainscow (2011), participation is defined in terms of three complementary dimensions: the presence of the individual, their acceptance by others, and their active involvement alongside others. The absence of any one of these compromises the quality of participation: a pupil may be present but socially isolated; they may be socially accepted but excluded from relevant learning activities.

From the perspective of inclusive education, participation also involves the recognition of the pupil's voice, namely their right to express their opinions and to be heard, as provided for in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations 1989). This dimension has been shown to transform the pupil from a passive recipient of education into an active participant who shares responsibility for their own learning journey.

#### *2.7. The social model of disability.*

One of the theoretical pillars of inclusive education is the social model of disability, formulated as a critical alternative to the medical model, which was dominant until the second half of the last century. The medical model is predicated on the premise that the problem resides within the individual, treating disability as a condition to be diagnosed and, as far as possible, corrected.

In contrast, the social model posits that disability is not rooted in biological impairment, but rather in the barriers erected by the environment that impede full participation. These barriers can be categorised as physical, attitudinal, or institutional.

When applied to the school setting, this distinction has immediate practical consequences: the pupil is not the ‘problem’, but rather the environment – understood as a whole comprising a rigid curriculum, a one-size-fits-all methodology, standardised assessment and unsuitable infrastructure – which contains the barriers that must be identified and removed. The role of the teacher has evolved from one of ‘fixing’ pupils to make them compatible with the school environment, to one of reconfiguring said environment so that it becomes accessible to all, regardless of their individual characteristics.

#### *2.8. The socio-cultural perspective: Vygotsky and the zone of proximal development: an analysis.*

The socio-cultural theory of development, formulated by Lev Vygotsky, remains one of the most robust psycho-pedagogical foundations of inclusive education, through the concept of the zone of proximal development, defined as the distance between what a pupil can achieve independently and what they can achieve with the support of an adult or a more experienced peer (Vygotsky 1978). The central idea is that social interaction and mediation are not an addition to the learning process, but its underlying mechanism. This provides a solid theoretical justification for the collaborative learning practices discussed in sub-chapter 4.8.

From a Vygotskian perspective, the heterogeneity of a class is not regarded as an obstacle, but rather as a resource. Students with different levels of competence can act as ‘more advanced experts’ for their peers, mediating their learning through explanations and modelling. Indeed, the majority of contemporary inclusive teaching strategies are predicated on this notion, encompassing a wide spectrum of approaches from peer tutoring to the organisation of heterogeneous working groups.

#### *2.9. Universal Design for Learning (UDL).*

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is arguably the methodological framework with the most direct practical impact on current teaching practice. The UDL framework is predicated on the principle of universal design in architecture, namely the conception of spaces that are accessible from the outset to a wide range of users, without the need for subsequent adaptations (CAST 2018). The same logic is applied to curriculum design.

The Undergraduate Course (UDL) is distinguished by three core principles: namely, the utilisation of diverse representations of information, varied modes of action and expression, and multiple pathways for engagement and motivation. A fundamental distinction of UDL lies in its deviation from conventional curriculum adaptation, namely the absence of impromptu modifications to a curriculum intended for a ‘standard’ pupil. Instead, UDL emphasises the proactive design of adaptable activities and materials from the outset, with the objective of catering

to the actual diversity of the class (CAST 2018). In practice, this approach is proactive rather than reactive, and notably, it serves to reduce the stigma associated with ‘visible’ adaptations intended exclusively for individual pupils.

#### *2.10. Inclusive pedagogy.*

In their 2011 publication, Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) propose the concept of inclusive pedagogy, which extends beyond the logic of individual adaptations for pupils with special needs, advocating instead an expansion of the available resources for all pupils. From this standpoint, individual differences are regarded as inherent aspects of development, rather than as issues necessitating distinct solutions for specific pupils. This approach circumvents the dichotomy between ‘mainstream pupils’ and ‘pupils with special needs’.

In practice, inclusive pedagogy demands a shift in the question a teacher asks when designing an activity: from ‘what do I do differently for this particular pupil?’ to ‘how do I design the activity so that it is accessible to all pupils in the class, including this one?’ (Florian and Black-Hawkins 2011). While the distinction may appear negligible, it has the effect of transforming the very foundation of the intervention, moving from a model of individual remedial support to one of inclusive lesson planning at the level of the class.

#### *2.11. The Inclusion Index.*

The Inclusion Index, a tool developed by Booth and Ainscow (2011), has become one of the most widely utilised instruments for the assessment and development of inclusive practices within educational institutions. The tool is organised around three dimensions: inclusive cultures (the values, attitudes and relationships that underpin the school community), inclusive policies (the organisation of resources and support) and inclusive practices (the actual occurrences in the classroom). The value of the framework lies precisely in the fact that it places inclusion at the level of the school’s organisational culture, rather than at the level of one-off measures aimed at a few pupils.

### **3. Methodology**

This article adopts a conceptual and analytical approach, based on a narrative review and critical synthesis of the international and national specialised literature on inclusive education. Sources were selected to cover three complementary strands: (a) the historical, legislative and policy documents that have shaped the inclusive education movement; (b) the theoretical frameworks that underpin current inclusive practice; and (c) empirical and policy-oriented reports documenting the implementation of inclusive education internationally and in Romania. Rather than presenting original empirical data, the article’s contribution lies in the systematic organisation and critical interpretation of these sources around the three axes of diversity, equity and active participation, in order to identify convergences, tensions and gaps between policy intentions and classroom practice.

#### 4. Results

This section presents the results of the conceptual analysis undertaken in this article. It first examines the function of inclusive education in the promotion of diversity, equity and active participation, before turning, in its second part, to the specific teaching strategies and the role of the teacher in inclusive education.

##### *4.1. The progression from tolerance to valuing diversity.*

The promotion of diversity within educational settings is primarily facilitated by inclusive education, which involves a shift in the manner in which differences are addressed within the school environment. This shift entails a transformation from an approach that perceives differences as deficiencies to one that recognises them as assets to be utilised. The shift under discussion is evident in the field of lesson planning. Teachers who value diversity design activities in which pupils can contribute from different perspectives, drawing on their life experiences, cultural knowledge or the languages spoken at home. A class comprising pupils from Roma families, families of migrants who have returned from abroad, or Hungarian-speaking families has the capacity to transform this very linguistic and cultural heterogeneity into a starting point for intercultural education activities. In such activities, pupils present their traditions and perspectives to one another – not as a weekend ‘exoticism’, but as a natural part of the curriculum.

##### *4.2. The implementation of a differentiated curriculum, as opposed to a simplified one, is imperative.*

In terms of curriculum, the promotion of diversity necessitates a transition from a uniform curriculum to a more adaptable one, characterised by diversified learning pathways. It is imperative to elucidate what differentiation does not entail: namely, it does not pertain to the simplification of content for some pupils and the augmentation of complexity for others. Rather, it concerns the diversification of pupils’ access to the same fundamental learning objectives (Tomlinson, 2014), through tasks of incremental complexity, a plethora of materials, and manifold methods of demonstrating comprehension.

In practice, this may involve tasks at different levels of difficulty within the same topic, multiple options for the final learning outcome – such as an essay, an oral presentation, a poster or a role-play – or flexible working groups, formed according to the needs of the teaching moment, rather than on the basis of fixed labels assigned to pupils over the long term (Tomlinson 2014).

##### *4.3. The presence of a diverse range of cultural, linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds within the classroom environment.*

The phenomenon of migration, international labour mobility and the expansion of socio-economic inequalities have collectively led to the transformation of the majority of classrooms in Romania and throughout Europe into inherently diverse spaces. Inclusive education is a pedagogical approach that acknowledges this reality by placing a premium on plurilingualism. It

involves the provision of support for non-native speaking pupils in acquiring the language of instruction without diminishing the significance of their mother tongue. Furthermore, it fosters a connection between the pupils' cultural backgrounds and the school's cultural milieu (Loreman, Deppeler, and Harvey 2010).

Inclusive education also acknowledges the considerable impact of socio-economic status on educational outcomes and proposes compensatory measures such as 'second-chance' programmes, financial support for pupils from vulnerable families, or 'after-school' programmes. The purpose of these programmes is to reduce the influence of social background on outcomes and to offer all individuals a genuine chance of success.

#### *4.4. The concept of equity in access to education is of particular significance in this context.*

The initial dimension of equity promoted by inclusive education is access: the guarantee that all children, irrespective of their individual circumstances, can attend a high-quality form of education in close proximity to their community. This process encompasses the removal of physical barriers, such as ensuring accessibility for pupils with mobility impairments within educational buildings, along with the removal of administrative barriers, including the implementation of transparent enrolment procedures. Additionally, economic barriers are to be addressed through the provision of complimentary textbooks, school supplies, and, where necessary, school transport.

The process entails the preliminary identification of children who are at risk of disengagement from education, or of never attending school. This group includes children residing in isolated rural communities, children from low-income households, and children belonging to ethnic groups that have historically experienced marginalisation. Early intervention programmes have been shown to play a pivotal role in this context, with longitudinal studies frequently cited in the relevant literature indicating that the gaps that accumulate in the initial years of life often prove to be extremely challenging to remediate later in life (UNESCO 2020).

#### *4.5. The concept of equity in the learning process is of particular interest in this study.*

The second dimension pertains to the learning process itself: beyond formal access to a school, it is imperative that every pupil receives the support they need to learn effectively. In practical terms, this necessitates the formulation of personalised intervention plans for pupils with special educational needs, the provision of support services (i.e. itinerant teachers, school counsellors, speech and language therapists, school psychologists), the implementation of reasonable adjustments to teaching methods and, where appropriate, the use of assistive technologies.

Furthermore, it necessitates meticulous management of the teaching pace. It is important to acknowledge that pupils do not all learn at the same pace. A rigid approach, which imposes a single pace on the whole class, systematically disadvantages both slower pupils, who fall behind and

develop gaps in their knowledge, and faster pupils, whose needs for deeper learning remain unmet. Station-based learning or learning centre rotation strategies represent tangible pedagogical responses to this tension.

*4.6. The concept of equity in assessment is a complex and multifaceted one.*

The third dimension, which is often insufficiently discussed in relation to the other two, concerns assessment. It is important to note that a fair assessment does not necessarily imply uniformity for all individuals; rather, it signifies a method of evaluating each pupil's progress that is valid and does not compromise their opportunities on the basis of factors unrelated to the competence being assessed.

In practice, this necessitates the implementation of reasonable adjustments to the assessment conditions, including the allowance of additional time, the provision of alternative question formats, and the utilisation of assistive technology. Furthermore, the diversification of assessment methods is imperative to ensure that they do not systematically favour a particular type of competence (e.g., rapid written expression under time pressure) at the expense of other equally valid forms of demonstrating learning, such as the use of portfolios, projects, oral presentations, and practical work. Formative assessment, with its emphasis on constructive feedback, fulfils a role that is challenging for summative assessment to fulfil on its own.

*4.7. The involvement of pupils in the decision-making process is of paramount importance.*

The concept of inclusive education emphasises the promotion of participation not only in day-to-day teaching activities, but also in decisions concerning the pupil's educational pathway. The involvement of pupils in the formulation of personalised intervention plans, the establishment of realistic goals, and the creation of participatory structures at school level – such as pupil councils or peer mediation schemes – fosters a sense of ownership over their own educational journey, which would otherwise be challenging to achieve.

The participatory dimension assumes particular significance for pupils with special educational needs or from historically marginalised groups, whose voices have historically been under-represented in decisions that directly affect them. Practices of self-determination, defined as pupils' ability to express their preferences and make informed decisions, remain an important educational objective in their own right, with documented effects on motivation (Loreman, Deppeler, and Harvey 2010).

*4.8. The utilisation of collaborative learning methodologies in conjunction with mixed-ability groups has been demonstrated to be a highly effective pedagogical approach.*

The organisation of activities in mixed-ability groups, which bring together pupils with different levels of competence, is one of the most effective strategies for promoting participation. Structures such as the mosaic method, pair work or group projects offer all pupils an active role

and a visible contribution to the shared outcome, thus counteracting the tendency, common in traditionally organised classrooms, for certain pupils to remain mere spectators.

In order to facilitate genuine participation in collaborative learning settings, it is essential to meticulously design tasks that assign each member a clearly defined responsibility for the successful completion of the shared task. This approach is crucial to ensure that collaborative learning fosters meaningful engagement, rather than merely formal co-presence within the same group. The positive interdependence among group members, a central concept of cooperative learning according to Johnson and Johnson (1999), is the condition under which the group's diversity becomes a resource for learning, rather than a source of inequality within it.

#### *4.9. The school–family–community partnership.*

Active participation is not confined to the pupil–teacher relationship; rather, it necessitates a functional partnership between the school, the family and the community. The families of pupils with special educational needs or from vulnerable groups must be regarded as active partners, rather than passive recipients of decisions made by specialists. Their genuine involvement in the creation of personalised intervention plans contributes significantly to the coherence of the support offered to the child.

At the level of the community, collaboration with social services, health services and non-governmental organisations can supplement the resources available within the school and provide complementary forms of support, such as psychological counselling, material support or school mediation for vulnerable communities. This, in turn, can expand the school's capacity to respond to the diversity of pupils' needs beyond its own, often limited, resources.

#### *4.10. The implementation of Differentiated Instruction is of paramount importance.*

The central strategy through which the principles of inclusive education are put into everyday teaching practice is that of differentiated instruction. The focus of the curriculum may be oriented towards content (the knowledge and skills that pupils acquire), process (the methods by which pupils learn), product (the ways in which pupils demonstrate their learning), or the learning environment (the physical and temporal organisation of the educational space) (Tomlinson 2014). Each of these dimensions may be adapted according to pupils' level of attainment, interests and learning profiles.

In order to facilitate successful differentiation, it is imperative to undertake initial and continuous assessment of pupils' prior knowledge. This enables educators to ascertain each pupil's initial starting point and to design tasks that are situated within the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). Such tasks must be both accessible and achievable with support, while simultaneously challenging to ensure progress is generated.

#### *4.11. Cooperative learning and peer tutoring.*

As previously discussed in sub-chapter 4.8, cooperative learning structures are also one of the most thoroughly documented strategies for enhancing academic performance in mixed-ability classes. Meta-analyses in this field have repeatedly demonstrated that the implementation of effective cooperative structures consistently yields superior outcomes in comparison to both competitive and individual approaches, exhibiting benefits for pupils across the entire spectrum of academic performance (Johnson and Johnson 1999).

Peer tutoring, whereby more advanced pupils provide structured support to those experiencing difficulties, is a particularly effective form of collaborative learning. The pupil receiving support is given explanations in language that is often closer to their own way of thinking than that of an adult, whilst the student providing support consolidates their own knowledge through the very act of explaining it to someone else.

*4.12. The utilisation of assistive technology and the promotion of inclusive digitalisation are pivotal in this regard.*

The advent of digital technologies has led to a substantial augmentation in the array of instruments at the disposal of educators seeking to implement inclusive pedagogical practices. Assistive technologies can facilitate access to information for pupils who would otherwise face significant barriers, ranging from text-to-speech and speech recognition software to alternative communication devices for pupils with severe communication difficulties.

Digitalisation also offers opportunities for large-scale differentiation, with adaptive learning platforms being able to automatically adjust the level of difficulty according to individual progress. Furthermore, open educational resources, available in multiple formats (text, audio, video, interactive), enhance the flexibility of access to content. However, a key issue that cannot be overlooked is the need for careful consideration of equity in device and internet connectivity, which must accompany the introduction of technology into the classroom. Otherwise, there is a risk of perpetuating the very exclusion that these tools are designed to address.

*4.13. The implementation of inclusive classroom management strategies is of paramount importance.*

The organisation of an inclusive classroom necessitates a re-evaluation of established rules, routines and the physical learning environment. The arrangement of furniture to facilitate work in flexible groups, the consistent application of clear rules to all pupils, and the establishment of a socio-emotional climate founded on mutual respect and acceptance of differences are prerequisites for the implementation of a differentiated teaching strategy.

It is imperative that behavioural management is predicated on a functional understanding of challenging behaviours as a form of communication of unmet needs, rather than as acts of disobedience requiring punishment. Positive approaches to behavioural support, centred on prevention and the explicit teaching of expected behaviours, have proven to be more effective in

the long term than exclusively punitive approaches, both for the pupil concerned and for the overall classroom climate (Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson 2006).

*4.14. The possession of the following professional competencies is a prerequisite.*

The successful implementation of inclusive education is contingent upon the competencies, dispositions and convictions of the teaching staff who engage directly with pupils. In addition to general teaching skills, a teacher prepared for an inclusive classroom must possess the ability to assess individual learning needs, to design differentiated activities, knowledge of the main categories of special educational needs, and the ability to collaborate with support specialists and families.

It is important to note that this ability to reflect on one's own practice is often underestimated, yet it is essential. An inclusive teacher is one who is able to critically evaluate their teaching decisions, identify the barriers that their own practices may inadvertently create for certain pupils, and continually adjust their approach based on pupils' actual progress, rather than on assumptions about what 'should' work.

*4.15. Initial and ongoing professional development.*

The extant literature pertaining to the training of teachers consistently draws attention to a discrepancy between the mounting demands of high-quality inclusive education and the preparation imparted by initial training programmes. These programmes are frequently found to be inadequately focused on the acquisition of practical skills for mixed-ability classes. The introduction of modules dedicated to inclusive education, in conjunction with teaching placements in genuinely inclusive settings, is internationally recognised as a priority (Ainscow 2005).

Continuing professional development (CPD) plays a role that initial training cannot fulfil; it updates the skills of teachers already in post. The most effective models combine a theoretical component with sustained practical support, such as mentoring, supervision or professional learning communities, enabling teachers to experiment with new strategies and reflect collectively on the difficulties encountered.

*4.16. Teachers' attitudes and beliefs regarding inclusion.*

The extant literature consistently documents that teachers' attitudes towards inclusion are among the strongest predictors of the success of inclusive practices in the classroom, often exerting a greater influence than the material resources available (Ainscow, 2005). The correlation between a teacher's confidence in their ability to address diversity in the classroom and the efficacy of their practices, as well as the academic outcomes of their pupils, is positive.

The development of positive attitudes towards inclusion is not solely determined by theoretical training; rather, it is shaped by direct, sustained experiences of working with diverse pupils, complemented by support from colleagues and the school leadership. School cultures that

value collaboration between teachers and provide time for collective reflection on inclusive practices contribute significantly to the consolidation of such attitudes.

## 5. Discussions and conclusions

The following discussion addresses the challenges, barriers and prospects for development that have been identified.

### 5.1. *The issue pertains to the existence of structural and institutional barriers.*

Despite conceptual and regulatory progress in recent decades, the implementation of inclusive education continues to face significant structural barriers. In many cases, school infrastructure remains inadequate for pupils with motor or sensory disabilities, whilst class sizes – often disproportionately large in relation to the available teaching staff – limit teachers' ability to provide individualised attention.

The rigidity of the national curriculum and the pressure of standardised assessments also represent a significant barrier. The fear of 'wasting time' on differentiation, to the detriment of exam preparation, often discourages teachers from adopting practices which, in theory, they consider valuable. The inadequacy of support services has been reported as a consistent issue, particularly in rural or disadvantaged communities. This inadequacy is characterised by a shortage of support teachers, school counsellors, and speech and language therapists, relative to the number of pupils who would benefit from such services (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education 2022).

### 5.2. *Attitudinal barriers.*

Research consistently demonstrates that, beyond structural barriers, attitudinal barriers are among the most persistent. The implementation of the principles of inclusion is often superficial or inconsistent. This is due to a number of factors, including prejudices regarding the learning ability of pupils with disabilities, some teachers' fears about their own competence, and the resistance of some parents – both those of pupils with special needs and those of other pupils – to mixed-ability classes.

The phenomenon of stigmatisation, in its subtle forms, continues to exert an influence on the school experience of pupils perceived as 'different'. Manifestations of these barriers include labelling, low expectations from adults and social isolation, even within a formally inclusive class. These barriers cannot be eliminated solely through regulatory measures but require a sustained effort towards cultural change across the entire school community.

### 5.3. *The issue can be attributed to two key factors: limited resources and insufficient training.*

The inadequacy of financial resources allocated to inclusive education – specifically for teacher training, the development of adapted materials, the recruitment of support staff or the

provision of accessible infrastructure – is a recognised barrier in both international literature and analyses of the Romanian system. In the absence of adequate and predictable funding, regulatory commitments to inclusive education are at risk of remaining merely declarations of principle.

As previously discussed, insufficient training can act as both a cause and a consequence of these barriers. Specifically, a lack of robust training can engender a sense of insecurity among teachers, which, in turn, can result in increased resistance to practices that are perceived as excessively demanding in relation to the available resources.

*5.4. The following discourse will consider the question of good practices and prospects for development.*

Despite the presence of contextual differences, successful international experiences often converge on a set of common principles. Firstly, a consistent institutional commitment is required, underpinned from the level of national policies right down to the culture of each school. Such commitment must be reflected in the allocation of resources, systematic in-service training and effective mechanisms for monitoring the quality of implementation (UNESCO, 2009).

Secondly, systems that have achieved outstanding results have demonstrated a consistent commitment to the development of flexible and timely support structures. These structures include multidisciplinary teams, early intervention services and networks of support teachers who are organically integrated into classroom activities, rather than being present only on an ad hoc basis, ‘on a visit’. The effectiveness of interventions has been demonstrated to be contingent on close collaboration between classroom teachers and support specialists, through joint planning and constant communication (Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson 2006).

Thirdly, a successful implementation of initiatives underscores the significance of authentic family participation and the establishment of collaborative networks between educational institutions, thereby facilitating the dissemination of effective practices. Professional learning communities, in which teachers share their experiences and collaboratively develop teaching solutions, remain an effective mechanism for consolidating inclusive practices at the level of a school or a network of schools.

In the context of Romania, the areas of development identified by practitioners and researchers in the field are as follows: the strengthening of the network of educational support services, with a particular focus on rural areas; the expansion of continuing professional development focused on practical skills; the development of truly flexible curricula and assessment tools; and the promotion of effective partnerships between schools, families and community services (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education 2022). Sustained investment in these areas, combined with a gradual yet consistent shift in school culture, remains the realistic prerequisite for the principles of inclusive education to move from regulatory text to everyday school practice.

### 5.5. Concluding remarks.

The analysis conducted in this article demonstrates that inclusive education cannot be regarded as a set of supplementary measures intended for a limited category of pupils. Rather, it signifies a reconceptualisation of the manner in which the educational process as a whole is conceived. The promotion of diversity, equity and active participation is evident at all levels of the teaching process, from curriculum design through to assessment, classroom management and teacher training.

It is evident that these three concepts do not function in isolation, but rather are characterised by a reciprocal relationship, whereby they are mutually dependent. It is important to acknowledge the value of diversity, however, it is equally crucial to recognise that this recognition is only valuable insofar as there are concrete mechanisms in place to ensure equity. If such mechanisms are lacking, the recognition of diversity may be reduced to a mere formal declaration. It is imperative to acknowledge that the active and genuine participation of all pupils is a prerequisite for the full realisation of equity. In the absence of a commitment to diversity, participation may, in fact, reproduce the mechanisms of exclusion that inclusive education aims to overcome, albeit in more subtle forms.

The barriers identified – whether structural, attitudinal or resource-related – confirm that the transition to truly inclusive education systems is a long-term process that goes beyond the scope of one-off reforms. Documented cases of best practice, both internationally and within the Romanian context, demonstrate the feasibility of this transformation and substantiate the merit of sustained investment in this domain. The advantages accrue to the pupils directly concerned, their peers, and society at large.

The concept of authentic inclusive education cannot be evaluated simply by the presence of all pupils in the same classroom. Rather, its true value should be determined by the quality of the learning experience each individual pupil undergoes. This involves ensuring that every child feels seen, supported according to their needs, and actively involved in their own learning journey. It functions as both a guiding principle for day-to-day teaching practice and a vision for education systems seeking to strike a balance between academic excellence and responsibility towards every pupil, regardless of their individual circumstances.

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## **SELF-AWARENESS, EMPATHY AND EMOTIONAL SELF-REGULATION. FUNDAMENTAL COMPONENTS OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE**

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### **Abstract**

Emotional intelligence has become one of the most productive constructs for understanding how human beings recognise, use and manage their own emotions and those of others. The present article examines three of its core components – self-awareness, empathy and emotional self-regulation – as an interdependent functional unit rather than as separate skills. The present paper proposes an integrative reading of the extant literature on emotional intelligence, with the aim of offering a more nuanced understanding of the factors that contribute to successful emotional regulation and empathic accuracy. To this end, the paper draws upon a range of models of emotional intelligence, including those proposed by Daniel Goleman, Salovey and Mayer, Petrides and Furnham, and Bar-On. The integrative reading proposed by the present paper positions self-awareness as the cognitive-affective foundation that enables both empathic accuracy and self-regulatory capacity. The article combines a conceptual-theoretical analysis with a qualitative synthesis of the relevant literature, with the aim of clarifying the mechanisms through which self-observation of one's own affective states supports the recognition of others' emotional states and the deliberate regulation of one's own emotional reactions. The discussion addresses the educational and professional relevance of these three competencies, arguing that their deliberate cultivation, rather than their innate presence, differentiates successful long-term adaptation from chronic emotional dysregulation. The paper concludes with the proposal of a three-tier integrative model – self-awareness, empathy, and self-regulation – as a practical framework for educational and organisational interventions aimed at developing emotional competence.

*Keywords: emotional intelligence; self-awareness; empathy; emotional self-regulation; emotional competence; personal development*

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## 1. Introduction

For over a century, psychology has been dominated by the intelligence quotient (IQ) paradigm, which has reduced human potential to a set of cognitive abilities measurable through standardised tests. While this perspective has proven beneficial in certain predictive contexts, it has been inadequate in elucidating the reasons why individuals with elevated IQs often encounter challenges in their interpersonal relationships, professional careers, and personal lives, while others with average cognitive abilities often achieve success in their relationships, professional careers, and personal well-being. Since the late 1980s, this discrepancy has given rise to a conceptual space for an alternative form of intelligence, centred not on the processing of abstract information, but on the processing of affective information.

The concept of emotional intelligence, first introduced into the scientific literature by Peter Salovey and John Mayer (1990) and subsequently popularised on a global scale by Daniel Goleman (1995), has precipitated a paradigm shift in the way personal and professional success is understood. Emotion is no longer regarded as a disruptive factor in rational thinking; rather, it has been recognised as a source of adaptive information, indispensable to decision-making, interpersonal relationships and behavioural self-regulation.

Of the numerous components of emotional intelligence, three occupy a distinct structural position: self-awareness, empathy and emotional self-regulation. Self-awareness is the foundational element of the entire framework, as it is an indispensable prerequisite for effective management. Empathy has been defined as the ability to understand the emotions of another person, and is therefore an extension of an individual's capacity for observation. Emotional self-regulation has been shown to transform the emotional information one is aware of – whether about oneself or others – into an adaptive, controlled and goal-oriented behavioural response.

The present article has three objectives. Firstly, the main theoretical models of emotional intelligence are to be systematised, with an emphasis on the mixed model proposed by Daniel Goleman. Secondly, an in-depth analysis of the three components in question – self-awareness, empathy and emotional self-regulation – is required from the perspective of their psychological mechanisms and the functional interdependencies between them. Thirdly, the proposal of an original, integrative model is posited, which positions self-awareness as the cognitive-affective foundation of the other two competencies. This has implications for educational practice and for personal and professional development.

The structure of this paper is predicated on the logic of the aforementioned objectives. Firstly, the theoretical grounding of the concept of emotional intelligence is provided. Then, the three components are analysed in turn. The methodology of the analysis is described. The results of the literature review are presented. Finally, the practical implications and limitations of the study are discussed.

## 2. Literature review (theoretical foundation)

*2.1. The following essay will explore the concept of emotional intelligence, examining the relevant conceptual frameworks and theoretical models.*

### *2.1.1. From multiple intelligences to emotional intelligence*

The conceptual roots of emotional intelligence can be traced back to the work of Edward Thorndike, who, in the 1920s, spoke of 'social intelligence' – defined as the ability to understand and act wisely in interpersonal relationships (Thorndike, 1922). Subsequent to this, Howard Gardner (1983) advanced the theory of multiple intelligences, which challenged the prevailing notion of logical-mathematical intelligence as the exclusive explanatory factor. This theory proposed seven distinct types of intelligence, among which were intrapersonal intelligence, defined as the capacity to comprehend one's own emotional life, and interpersonal intelligence, defined as the ability to discern and respond appropriately to the states, motivations and desires of others. These two forms of personal intelligence subsequently formed the conceptual framework from which the construct of emotional intelligence was to develop.

The term itself was first formulated in a systematic manner by Peter Salovey and John Mayer, in a seminal article published in 1990, in which emotional intelligence was defined as the ability to monitor one's own emotions and those of others, to distinguish between them, and to use this information to guide thought and action (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Although the article initially had a limited impact within the academic community, the publication, five years later, of Daniel Goleman's comprehensive work, *Emotional Intelligence: The publication of Why It Can Matter More Than IQ\** (1995) resulted in the transformation of the concept into a phenomenon of public discourse, with major implications for the fields of education, human resource management and personal development.

### *2.1.2. The ability model: Salovey and Mayer*

The model proposed by Salovey and Mayer, subsequently termed the 'ability model', was developed to distinguish it from the mixed models that followed. The model structures emotional intelligence into four hierarchically organised branches, ranging from the simplest processes of perception to the most complex ones of reflective management of emotions (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004). The initial branch, emotional perception, pertains to the capacity to discern one's own and others' emotions, manifested through facial expressions, voice, posture, or language. The second branch, the facilitation of thinking through emotion, concerns the manner in which affective states direct attention, generate alternative perspectives on problems and influence judgement and decision-making processes. The third branch, emotional understanding, refers to the ability to analyse complex emotions, to understand their causes and consequences, as well as the likely transitions from one emotional state to another. The fourth branch, emotional regulation, involves the ability to remain open to both pleasant and unpleasant

emotions, to reflect on them, and to regulate them according to the context, in order to achieve personal and interpersonal goals.

The merit of this model lies in its psychometric rigour: it treats emotional intelligence as a genuine cognitive ability, measurable through performance tasks (not merely through self-report), thereby reducing the risk of confusion with personality traits.

#### *2.1.3. Daniel Goleman's 'mixed model'*

The 'mixed model' proposed by Daniel Goleman is a departure from the narrow 'skills' model. In contradistinction to the latter, the 'mixed model' integrates a number of components. These components include not only the strictly cognitive aspects of emotional processing, but also personality traits, motivations and learned behavioural competencies. In his 1995 work, Goleman identified five fundamental domains of emotional intelligence, which were subsequently reconfigured in *Working with Emotional Intelligence* (1998), within a framework applied to the organisational context: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills (Goleman, 1995, 1998).

The distinguishing feature of Goleman's contribution is not the absolute novelty of the individual components, many of which had already been discussed in differential psychology and personality psychology, but the relational architecture he proposes. The five domains do not function in isolation, but rather in a developmental sequence, in which self-awareness is the prerequisite for self-regulation, and empathy mediates the transition from intrapersonal competence to interpersonal competence. The results of this sequence manifest themselves in social skills. Goleman himself emphasises, citing research in the field of affective neuroscience, the role played by the amygdala and limbic circuits in triggering rapid emotional reactions, as well as the role of the prefrontal cortex in inhibiting and modulating these reactions – a neurobiological argument for the need for the deliberate cultivation of emotional skills (Goleman, 1995).

#### *2.1.4. Bar-On's Model of Emotional and Social Intelligence*

A parallel contribution, developed independently, is that of Reuven Bar-On, who proposed the concept of emotional and social intelligence (ESI) and developed a method for assessing it using the EQ-i (Emotional Quotient Inventory) tool, launched in 1997 (Bar-On, 1997). Bar-On's model is structured around five domains: intrapersonal competence, interpersonal competence, adaptability, stress management and general disposition. The model has a clinical and predictive orientation rather than an explanatory one, having been originally designed as a tool for assessing a person's ability to cope with environmental pressures.

#### *2.1.5. The trait model: Petrides and Furnham (2001)*

This model proposes a fourth approach to the distinction between ability-based and trait-based emotional intelligence. The former is measured by peak performance tests, and the latter is defined as a constellation of emotional perceptions underlying personality. The latter is assessed

exclusively through self-report questionnaires. This methodological distinction is of considerable significance: while skill-based emotional intelligence demonstrates a modest correlation with classical measures of general intelligence, trait-based emotional intelligence exhibits partial overlap with the dimensions of the Big Five personality model, particularly with (negative) neuroticism and (positive) extraversion.

#### *2.1.6. A synthesis of the models*

When viewed comparatively, the four models presented – the skills model, the mixed model, the Bar-On model and the trait model – do not necessarily compete with each other, but rather complement each other. Each model captures a different facet of the same phenomenon: the human being's capacity to process affective information appropriately. For the purposes of this paper, Goleman's model remains the main point of reference, not because it is psychometrically superior to the others, but because it provides the most fruitful framework for understanding the functional relationship between self-awareness, empathy and emotional self-regulation – a relationship which forms the analytical core of this article.

*2.2. The ability to comprehend one's own emotional state is widely regarded as the cornerstone of emotional intelligence.*

#### *2.2.1. Conceptual Limitations*

Emotional self-awareness is defined by Goleman (1995, p. 43) as the ability to recognise an emotion at the very moment it arises. This ostensibly straightforward definition obscures a significant complexity: emotions are not invariably accessible to reflective consciousness in real time, either because they manifest at a diffuse physiological level (e.g., muscle tension, an increased heart rate), or because individuals have learned, throughout their development, to deny them, rationalise them or dissociate them from self-awareness. Emotional self-awareness is therefore not a passive state, but an active metacognitive skill – the ability to observe the flow of one's own emotional life without being completely absorbed by it. Goleman (1995) calls this a form of 'neutral attention', borrowing a term from the contemplative tradition.

#### *2.2.2. The Components of Self-Awareness*

In the refined version of the model, as presented in *Working with Emotional Intelligence* (1998), Goleman breaks self-awareness down into three sub-competencies. The concept of emotional awareness encompasses the ability to recognise one's own emotions and their impact on cognitive processes, behavioural patterns, and overall performance. Accurate self-assessment is defined as an honest understanding of one's own resources, inner limitations, strengths and vulnerabilities, without defensive distortions such as overestimation or underestimation. Self-confidence is the functional outcome of the first two components, namely a stable sense of one's own worth and abilities, which is not dependent on external validation.

It is imperative to underscore the interdependence of these three sub-components, which are inextricably linked. The efficacy of an accurate self-assessment is contingent upon the presence of functional emotional awareness, and the cultivation of authentic self-confidence – as distinguished from defensive, compensatory self-confidence – is predicated on a realistic self-assessment.

### *2.2.3. Psychological and neurobiological mechanisms*

From a neuroscientific perspective, emotional self-awareness is theorised to involve the activation of circuits that connect the limbic structures – which are responsible for the rapid generation of affective reactions – with the prefrontal cortex, which is involved in monitoring and interpreting these reactions (Goleman, 1995). Antonio Damasio has demonstrated, through a substantial corpus of research that intersects with the domain of emotional intelligence, that the somatic states concomitant with emotions – which he designates 'somatic markers' – function as expeditious, pre-rational signals that guide decision-making prior to its articulation at the cognitive level. Emotional self-awareness can therefore be defined as a process of decoding concrete, physiologically anchored bodily signals, rather than being merely an abstract introspective exercise.

### *2.2.4. The Significance of Self-Awareness in Emotional Intelligence*

In the context of the framework proposed by Goleman, self-awareness is not merely one of the five components of emotional intelligence; it is the logical and functional prerequisite for the other four. It is impossible for an individual to self-regulate an emotion of which they are unaware, just as it is unlikely that a person incapable of recognising their own emotional states will develop genuine empathy towards the emotional states of others – rather than a purely imitative or superficial form. Research conducted on alexithymia — the inability to identify and verbalise one's own emotions — has indirectly confirmed this hypothesis, demonstrating consistent correlations between elevated levels of alexithymia and deficiencies in empathy, in addition to challenges with emotional regulation (references to numerous clinical studies can be found in the literature from the 1990s onwards, which are also summarised by Goleman, 1995).

According to the literature specialising in this field, individuals who possess a high level of emotional self-awareness have been shown to exhibit a more realistic decision-making style. They also demonstrate an increased ability to recognise their limitations without allowing them to become sources of paralysing anxiety. Furthermore, they exhibit a greater openness to constructive feedback. These characteristics are all prerequisites for sustained professional performance over time, not merely for individual psychological well-being.

*2.3. The concept of empathy is defined as the ability to understand the feelings of another individual, which is derived from the emotional resonance that occurs between two or more people.*

#### *2.3.1. A multifaceted skill*

Whilst self-awareness concerns the intrapersonal dimension of emotional intelligence, empathy is associated with the interpersonal dimension. Goleman (1995, 1998) defines empathy as the ability to perceive others' emotions, even when these are not explicitly expressed. Empathy is a concept that has been extensively researched in the domain of psychology. Conventional wisdom in the field distinguishes at least three distinct facets of empathy, which are not equivalent and may vary independently from one person to another. These three facets of empathy are cognitive empathy, affective (or emotional) empathy, and empathic concern.

Cognitive empathy is defined as the ability to intellectually understand another person's perspective, i.e. to 'read' their thoughts and intentions, without necessarily experiencing the same emotions. This component is closely linked to what developmental psychology calls 'theory of mind', namely the ability to attribute mental states distinct from one's own to another person. Conversely, affective empathy is characterised by a direct attunement with another's emotional state, involving a process of 'feeling along with' the other person. This phenomenon occurs through a mechanism that engages the mirror neuron system, as initially described by Giacomo Rizzolatti's team and subsequently explored in the literature on emotional intelligence as a potential neural basis for interhuman affective resonance. Finally, the concept of empathic concern introduces a motivational dimension to these two components, characterised by the active desire to respond to another person's suffering or need through an act of support.

#### *2.3.2. Empathy in Goleman's Model*

In the 1998 version of his model, Goleman (1998) categorises empathy into five interconnected sub-competencies. Firstly, 'understanding others' involves recognising the feelings and perspectives of others and taking an active interest in their concerns. Secondly, 'developing others' involves recognising the developmental needs of those one interacts with and supporting their skills. Thirdly, 'service orientation' involves anticipating, recognising and meeting the needs of beneficiaries or clients. Fourthly, 'leveraging diversity' involves cultivating opportunities through diverse types of people. Finally, 'political awareness' involves reading the emotional currents and power dynamics within a group or organisation.

This theoretical framework extends empathy beyond the strictly emotional sphere, towards a complex social competence applicable in a variety of contexts, including but not limited to organisational, educational and community settings. These contexts encompass a wide range of relationships, such as those between teachers and pupils, managers and employees, and doctors and patients.

### *2.3.3. The Limitations and Risks of Empathy*

Recent research on empathy, although conducted after the period covered by Goleman's model, has also brought to light its less favourable aspects. Excessive empathic activation, unchecked by effective emotional self-regulation, can lead to compassion fatigue. This phenomenon has been frequently documented among helping professions, including healthcare professionals, social workers, teachers and psychologists. This finding corroborates, from a complementary standpoint, the central hypothesis of this article: that empathy cannot function adaptively in the absence of a functional capacity for emotional self-regulation, which enables an individual to feel another's suffering without being completely overwhelmed by it.

### *2.3.4. Empathy as a Mediator between Self-Awareness and Social Competence*

A closer inspection of the relationship between self-awareness and empathy reveals a generative nature. Research on mirror neurons and body simulation suggests that the mechanism by which we recognise another person's emotion is based, at least in part, on the activation of our own bodily representations of that emotion. That is to say, we relate to another person's emotion by 'reading' it through the filter of our own internal emotional experience. A person with poor emotional self-awareness is likely to have a poorer internal repertoire of affective 'models' against which to relate the emotional signals of others, which limits empathic accuracy – a key distinction between genuine empathy and the mere behavioural imitation of compassion.

*2.4. The process of emotional self-regulation is defined as the transition from impulsive behaviour to a more adaptive response.*

#### *2.4.1. Definition and Adaptive Function*

Emotional self-regulation is defined by Goleman (1998) as the ability to manage one's own inner states, impulses and resources. Contrary to the common misapprehension in non-specialist discourse, self-regulation is not synonymous with the suppression or denial of emotions. Rather, it is an active process of modulating the intensity, duration and mode of expression of an emotion, depending on the context and the individual's goals. An unregulated emotion does not simply disappear; rather, it is released uncontrollably or becomes somatised. Similarly, a suppressed emotion is not regulated, but merely postponed, often at a high cognitive and physiological cost.

#### *2.4.2. The components of self-regulation in Goleman's model*

The 1998 model categorises self-regulation into five sub-competencies. Self-control can be defined as the effective management of disruptive emotions and impulses. Trustworthiness is defined as the maintenance of standards of honesty and integrity. The concept of conscientiousness is predicated on the assumption of individual responsibility for one's own performance. Adaptability is defined as the capacity to demonstrate flexibility in the face of change. Innovativeness is defined as a personal trait denoting a propensity to embrace novel concepts, methodologies and data.

A salient observation that emerges from this compendium is that emotional self-regulation, as conceptualised by Goleman, is not confined to the regulation of negative impulses – although this remains its most visible and most frequently studied component – but also encompasses a proactive dimension, oriented towards adaptation and innovation; that is, the ability to utilise emotional energy as a resource, not merely to contain it.

#### *2.4.3. Cognitive Mechanisms of Self-Regulation*

From the perspective of cognitive psychology, emotional self-regulation is theorised to operate through at least four relatively distinct mechanisms. These mechanisms are as follows: situation selection (deliberately avoiding or seeking out contexts that elicit certain emotional states), situation modification (actively changing a context to reduce its negative emotional impact), redirecting attention (voluntarily shifting attention away from the emotional stimulus towards other aspects of the situation) and cognitive reappraisal (reinterpreting the meaning of an event to alter its affective impact). Of these, cognitive reappraisal is considered, in the literature following Goleman, to be the most effective long-term strategy, being associated with healthier psychological functioning than the expressive suppression of emotion. Whilst this reduces the visible manifestation of affect, it does not reduce its internal physiological activation and may negatively affect interpersonal relationships through the perception of inauthenticity it generates.

*2.4.4. The concept of self-regulation can be defined as a synthesis of self-awareness and empathy.*

Emotional self-regulation cannot be understood in isolation from the two components analysed above. The absence of self-awareness in the individual results in a paucity of information regarding the precise elements that require regulation and the direction in which they should be directed. In the absence of empathy, the capacity for self-regulation becomes susceptible to an overly individualistic framework, with the emphasis on the regulation of one's own state while demonstrating a lack of consideration for its impact on others. To illustrate this point, consider a person who has mastered the art of managing their anger, yet fails to cultivate a genuine sensitivity to the consequences of their past actions on those in their vicinity. Authentic, mature self-regulation is defined by the integration of information about oneself with information about others, in a behavioural response that simultaneously serves one's own needs and the quality of the interpersonal relationship.

*2.5. The following paper sets out an integrative model which synthesises the concepts of self-awareness, empathy and self-regulation as a functional system. This model is the original conceptual contribution of the paper, as evidenced by a synthesis of the literature analysed in the previous sections. The three components – self-awareness, empathy and emotional self-regulation – should not be regarded as discrete items in a list, as they frequently appear in summaries of Goleman's model, but rather as a functional system with a sequential and, concurrently, circular architecture.*

In the initial phase of the system, self-awareness furnishes the fundamental informational elements: namely, the awareness of one's own emotional state, whether in real time or through subsequent reflection. Absent this stage, the system remains at the level of automatic, unreflective reactions. In the subsequent stage, this capacity for self-observation is expanded through mechanisms of emotional resonance and cognitive inference to the decoding of others' emotional states – empathy. This is not an automatic extension; rather, it necessitates an active exercise of 'stepping outside' one's own perspective and simulating the other person's perspective. This exercise is facilitated, as has been demonstrated, precisely by the richness of one's own emotional repertoire, cultivated through self-knowledge. In the third stage, the information generated by the first two components – about oneself and about the other person – is integrated into a regulated behavioural response: emotional self-regulation.

The inherent circularity of the system is predicated on the phenomenon that the regulated response, in its capacity to generate internal feedback, in turn engenders new affective information concerning the consequences of one's own reaction. This, in turn, serves to inform self-awareness, thus engendering a cycle of progressively refining emotional competence. In practice, an individual who successfully regulates their anger in an interpersonal conflict gains additional information about their own control resources as a result of this successful regulation. This additional information will enrich their emotional self-awareness for similar future episodes.

Despite the fact that this model is founded upon a synthesis and reinterpretation of extant literature as opposed to original empirical research, it possesses significant heuristic value within the domain of education. The model posits the hypothesis that interventions designed to cultivate emotional intelligence should adhere to a didactic sequence. The cultivation of empathy or self-control in a pupil or adult is predicated upon the initial investment in systematic exercises in emotional self-awareness (e.g. emotional journaling, exercises in identifying and naming emotional states, applied mindfulness techniques).

### **3. Methodology**

The methodology employed in this study is of a theoretical and conceptual nature. A qualitative literature review has been applied to a corpus of sources deemed to be representative of the field of emotional intelligence. The corpus comprised two distinct categories of works. Firstly, it included the seminal works on the concept, namely the article by Salovey and Mayer

(1990), as well as the two reference volumes by Daniel Goleman (1995, 1998). Secondly, it also encompassed works that are complementary to or offer alternatives to Goleman's model. These alternative works drew on the tradition of the skills model (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004), the tradition of Bar-On's model of emotional and social intelligence (Bar-On, 1997), and the tradition of the trait model (Petrides & Furnham, 2001).

The selection of sources was guided by two criteria: theoretical relevance, defined as the pioneering nature of the works, which are frequently cited in the field's review literature, and conceptual complementarity, defined as the ability of the sources to contrast and nuance the central reference model. The literature review was organised thematically, rather than chronologically, to allow for a direct comparison of how each model addresses the three competencies under consideration – self-awareness, empathy and emotional self-regulation.

The analysis procedure consisted of three successive stages: The following three steps were taken in order to analyse the three competencies under review. Firstly, the definitions and components associated with these competencies were extracted from each source. Secondly, these definitions were compared in order to identify conceptual convergences and divergences between models. Thirdly, the results were synthesised into an original integrative model, which is presented in the fifth section of the paper. The methodological limitations of this approach are discussed in the final section of the article, including the absence of an original empirical basis and the risk of subjective selectivity in the sources.

#### 4. Results

A comparative synthesis of the four theoretical models analysed reveals a high degree of conceptual convergence, despite terminological and methodological differences. Table 1 summarises how each model addresses, explicitly or implicitly, the three central components of this paper.

**Table 1.** *The treatment of self-awareness, empathy and emotional self-regulation in the main models of emotional intelligence*

| Theoretical model                    |                    | Component equivalent to self-awareness | Component equivalent to empathy                         | Component equivalent to self-regulation |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Salovey and Mayer (the skills model) | (the skills model) | Emotional perception (branch I)        | Interpersonal emotional perception (branch I, extended) | Emotional regulation (branch IV)        |
| Goleman (the mixed model)            | (the mixed model)  | Self-awareness                         | Empathy                                                 | Self-regulation                         |
| Bar-On (ESI model)                   | (ESI model)        | Intrapersonal competence               | Interpersonal competence                                | Stress management                       |

| <b>Petrides and<br/>Furnham (the<br/>model)</b> | Emotional self-<br>perception (trait) | Empathy (trait) | Emotional<br>regulation (trait) |
|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|
|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|

An analysis of this table reveals an important initial finding: although none of the four models was constructed on the basis of the hypothesis of an explicit sequential relationship between the three components, all four implicitly treat them as distinct but interdependent domains of the same broader capacity for processing affective information. This structural convergence supports the plausibility of the integrative model proposed in section five of the article.

The second finding concerns the central position of self-awareness. In all four models, the component equivalent to self-awareness is placed – either explicitly or by the order of presentation – before the components associated with empathy and self-regulation – a further indication, of a structural-descriptive rather than causal nature, of its fundamental role.

The third finding concerns the difference in the treatment of self-regulation between Goleman's model, which breaks it down into a relatively diverse set of sub-competencies (self-control, adaptability, innovation), and Bar-On's model, which reduces it, to a large extent, to stress management – a more restrictive conception, oriented predominantly towards the reactive, defensive dimension of emotional regulation, rather than its proactive dimension.

## 5. Discussions and conclusions

The present analysis corroborates the hypothesis that self-awareness, empathy and emotional self-regulation are not three discrete components of emotional intelligence, but rather three stages of a unified process of adaptive processing of affective information. The process is founded upon self-awareness, from which empathy is derived, extending the process beyond individual boundaries into the affective domain of the other. Self-regulation is then instrumental in transforming this empathy into an appropriate behavioural response, both for the individual and for the interpersonal relationship in which they are engaged.

This standpoint carries direct practical ramifications for the domain of education. Programmes for developing emotional intelligence in a school context – known in the English-speaking literature as SEL (Social and Emotional Learning) – would, according to the argument developed here, be more effective if they followed an explicit pedagogical sequence. This sequence would entail exercises in identifying and naming one's own emotions, which should precede exercises in understanding the emotions of others. Exercises in understanding the emotions of others, in turn, should precede exercises in the behavioural management of conflicts and impulsive reactions. An intervention that commences with rules of behaviour, such as "control your anger", without first developing the pupil's capacity to recognise and articulate their

emotional state, may engender only superficial compliance, without fostering enduring emotional competence.

The implications of this phenomenon extend beyond the confines of the educational sphere. In an organisational context, managers who invest in their own emotional self-awareness – through systematic feedback and structured reflection on their own reactions in high-pressure situations – lay the foundations for empathetic leadership. This kind of leadership is capable of discerning the team's actual state of affairs, rather than merely its formal communication. Consequently, teams guided in this manner have been observed to cultivate a more stable emotional climate, which, in turn, has been shown to facilitate performance and staff retention.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of the paper. Firstly, the theoretical and conceptual nature of the approach does not allow for direct empirical validation of the integrative model proposed in Section 5; at this stage, it remains a working hypothesis derived from a qualitative synthesis of the literature, rather than a conclusion supported by the author's own experimental data. Secondly, while the corpus of sources analysed is representative of the foundational models of the field, it does not exhaust the diversity of contemporary research on emotional intelligence, particularly developments over the last two decades in the fields of affective neuroscience and positive psychology.

It is recommended that future research endeavours focus on empirically testing the hypothesis of sequentiality proposed in this study. This can be achieved by designing longitudinal studies that track the simultaneous development of the three competencies over the course of educational intervention programmes. Additionally, the use of validated measurement instruments for each of the three dimensions is advised. The present study posits that research in this area could serve to either corroborate or refine the generative relationship proposed in this article between self-awareness, empathy and emotional self-regulation. It is contended that these three components, far from being mere descriptive labels, represent, as Daniel Goleman's work demonstrated over three decades ago, the essential resources through which an individual builds both their inner balance and the quality of their relationships with others.

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