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Rendering Intercultural Dimension of the Future Teacher Competence Profile: New Proposals and Training Models

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Abstract

The postmodern, contemporary society can be characterized by cosmopolitanism in what it concerns the ethnical, cultural and religious diversity and variety and all these determine special efforts to integrate, cohabit and create equilibrium between individuality and otherness. Therefore, education also has to aim to form future citizens from the perspective of accepting and respecting the specificity and values of other cultural, religious and ethnical communities. The intercultural education is one of the new dimensions of education, which plays an important role on the personality formation of the postmodern man. The present study aims to prove the necessity to educate children from the intercultural perspective. We consider that in order to achieve this goal it is important to firstly form the trainers.   Consequently, we aim to analyse the role of the intercultural education in shaping the competences for the didactic career, the competence profile of the future teacher. The fundamental hypothesis of the investigative approach implied to admit the need for training the students – future teachers from the perspective of the intercultural education. In order to prove the reliability of this hypothesis we used a sample of 110 students – future teachers, who take part in the program for teacher training, level II psycho-pedagogy. The research methods used were the opinion questionnaire and the focus-group interview, which meant to find the students' opinion on the possibility of developing the intercultural competence of the students – future teachers through the present Curriculum of the psycho-pedagogical programme. By means of the research instruments used we could also find out the students proposals for improving/completing the present Curriculum in order to develop the aimed competence. The results obtained confirmed the students' needs for training from the intercultural perspective. Pearson correlationindex allowed us to establish an obvious relationship between the characteristics, needs, society demands and the need to develop an intercultural competence. We have also analysed the students' proposals for improving the present Curriculum for the teacher training programme.

Keywords: *postmodernism, interculturalism, multiculturalism, intercultural education, pedagogical competence profile, intercultural competence*

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Theoretical aspects

Postmodernism brings important changes such as social and cultural ones or changes in the evolution of technique and in the way of projecting and carrying out education. Therefore, in this context, we present the main strategic guidelines of education in postmodernity (Macavei, 2001: 18): the real democratization of both the education system and education; the consolidation of anticipative (prospective) functions of the school – that is, to foresee and precede social changes; the expansion of extracurricular learning; the expansion of the community learning – in order to transform society into a real „educational fortress"; the development of change-adjustment skills; ensuring the freedom of thinking and of speech; capitalizing on competences, promoting meritocracy; articulating the levels of formal, non-formal and informal education; the international cooperation and collaboration.

In line with these guidelines, the author also specifies several criteria regarding the school curriculum (Macavei, 2001: 18-19): reassessment of the informative and formative functions of the school; reconception of syllabuses and school programs; elaboration of the curriculum in pluri-, inter-disciplinary, multi- and intercultural perspectives; Expansion of choice possibilities (optional and facultative subjects); use of means provided by the information technology (multimedia, virtual reality, long-distance learning); training of educators as organizers of learning, as managers of training and not as transmitters of knowledge (Macavei, 2001: 18-19). Taking a look at the guidelines and characteristics of postmodern education, we can see that one of the education's dimensions with a major importance in the formation of the individual's personality is the intercultural education.

The significance of the term „*intercultural*" can be established, firstly, starting from the meaning of the two words that compose it: *inter-* (which refers to interaction) and *cultural* – regarded from an anthropological perspective (Dasen, Perregaux, Rey, 1999). From an anthropological point of view, education can be considered both an enculturing process (of transmission and interiorization of cultural values and of formation of the cultural behavior) as well as an acculturation process (of reception and acceptance of the cultural values belonging to other cultural and ethnic communities (Dassen, Perregaux, Rey, 1999; Cucoş, 2000). When we say „intercultural", we take into account the following aspects: interaction, exchange, reciprocity, interdependence and solidarity (Marchiş, Ciascai, Costa, 2008).

At the same time, these characteristics mark the difference between interculturalism and multiculturalism. Hence, multiculturalism implies the presence, in the same time and space, of groups belonging to different cultures, with each group pointing out own characteristics and zero cultural interactions between them. On the other hand, the intercultural education promotes the interaction between the members of different cultures, hence, making possible the exchange of values and attitudes (Ionescu, 2011, apud Andronache, Bocoş, Budiu, 2011; Palaiologou, Dietz, 2012). Dietz and Cortés (2009) establish the difference between multiculturality /multiculturalism and interculturality/interculturalism by relating to two reference levels (see table 1).

Table 1. Multiculturalism/interculturalism

	Multiculturality	Interculturality
Factic level (or facts, that is, all that exists in reality)	Cultural, linguistic, religious diversity Multiculturalism	Interethnic, interlinguistic, interreligious relations Interculturalism
Normative level (or ethical and sociopolitical propositions, namely what it should be)	Recognizing the difference: 1. Principle of equality 2. Principle of difference	Coexistence in diversity 1. Principle of equality 2. Principle of difference 3. Principle of positive difference

The combination of the two ways gives birth to cultural pluralism.Ilie (2011) considers that there are two types of interculturality: *official* culturality –which encompasses academic programs developed within school; *non-official* culturality – having the same purpose as the official one, but carried out through different methods in information centers for the young, youth clubs, volunteer centers etc.The intercultural education is defined as a reflection on the educational policies and it contributes to different expectations of the society, being linked with school activities destined to help both the formation of a correct attitude of the members of a mingled society from an ethnic, cultural and religious perspective as well as the reduction of these conflicts generated by these differences (Banks, 2009 apud Polat, Barka, 2012). The above-mentioned differences can be the source of discriminative attitudes of individuals towards their peers. Hence, we come across racial, ethnic, sexual, political, religious, social or gender discriminations. Dulamă and Ilovan (2004) analyze these discriminations giving examples specific to the Romanian population.

The core of the intercultural education concept consists of the following pieces: dialogue of cultures; harmony between cultures; value and originality of each culture; concord between communities (Marinescu, 2013).At present, the concepts of intercultural education and intercultural pedagogy aim at covering social realities characterized by globalization and the necessity to create convergence in the context of cultural, religious and linguistic diversity (Portera, 2008).We mention a few fundamental particularities of the intercultural education (Marinescu, 2013): it is an antiracial education; it is a basic education; it is important for all students; it is comprehensive; it is the education specific to social justice; it is a process; it is a critical pedagogy.Munroe and Pearson (2006 apud Polat, Barka, 2012) have developed a model of multiculturalism, based on the taxonomy of Bloom and on Bank's transformational multiculturalist approach. According to this model the attitude of individuals towards multiculturalism is based on three dimensions: knowing, being aware, acting. The first dimension refers to the individual's need to know, have knowledge of different categories or social structures (gender, race, social status, religion, language, sexual orientation etc.). The second dimension refers to positive or negative assessments regarding different aspects of multiculturalism and it finds its expression in the individual's concern over the mentioned categories or social structures. The last dimension aims at the individual's actions to solve problems caused by these categories or social structures. The *goals* of the intercultural education are the following (Marinescu, 2013: 193): intercultural and international understanding; acknowledgment

of cultural differences and the respect for them; denial of racism and xenophobia; human and legal rights; equal educational opportunities; equal access to knowledge and education.

The main goal of the intercultural education is to prepare people to be able to live in a society whose important characteristic is diversity.Marinescu (2013: 193) presents several goals of the intercultural education which are based on some important axes such as: gaining knowledge in the field of culture in general and in the field of own culture in particular; being aware of the causes and roots of own cultural determinations, of stereotypes and own prejudices as well as identifying them with respect to the others; building positive attitudes in order to apply them in the case of a plural society: respect for diversity, for the identity of those perceived to be different and implicitly rejecting intolerant and discriminatory attitudes towards them; stimulating an active participation, that is to say, applying pluralist principles and fighting against racism, xenophobia and discrimination. Macavei (2001: 52-53) elaborates a list of goals of the education in and through culture, seen from the perspective of permanent education which is a necessity of the contemporary society just like the intercultural education: acquiring the fundamental skills for survival; assimilate elementary communication skills; assimilating the fundamental knowledge and the instruments of the intellectual activity (writing, reading, calculation, computing); assimilating basic elements from both the general culture and the specialty culture;assimilating cultural-national, ethnical and universal models; self-knowing, knowing of the other and developing identity and otherness needs; developing axiological competences; developing the cultural identity and cultural otherness; developing intra-psychic stability and states of inner peace; full development of own capacities; prevention and therapy of the alienation state of mind and of the "spiritual dessert" state of mind; assimilating self-learning, inter-learning and self-assessment methods; building pluralist attitudes and convictions; elaborating specific behaviors to engage in the struggle for a new quality of life; building and developing positive motivation for lifelong learning and for self-fulfillment at the highest possible level due to capacities, aspirations and social opportunities; developing communication skills with peers, other ethnic groups, other people and other nationalities; respect for differences and development of tolerance attitudes; fighting against snobbism and intolerance; knowing human rights, liberties, responsibilities and obligations and building a combative attitude to respect them; knowing the challenges of humans and the planet: peace, democracy, liberty, economic and political order and the involvement in order to solve them.Some authors (Maniatis, 2012) consider the intercultural education as a premise or necessity for the development of a country's educational system.

Other authors (Orgeret, 2012) underline the importance of the intercultural communication in a multicultural learning environment.Marchiş, Ciascai, Costa (2008: 70) suggest a few intervention ways which have in common all dimensions of the intercultural education in accordance with the European educational policies: integrating the intercultural education in the learning process; using a wide range of learning/training methods; supporting pupils in the self-knowledge process and in identifying own stereotypes as well as the ways to overcome them; combining individual activities with the ones carried out within the group; promoting partnership between pupils; using new communication and media technologies in the intercultural education; promoting the training of the teaching staff also from the perspective of the intercultural education.

According to some others (Bash, 2012), the intercultural education cannot be separated from the teenagers' history or their ongoing experiences.The intercultural

education takes place at three levels: at the level of the educational policies with respect to the formulation of purposes and educational objectives; at the level of institutions, in particular in the case of democratic systems, being materialized into the creation of open learning environments and inclusive policies; at the level of teaching, that is to say the approaches and methods which make up the substance of reference works. The strategy for the intercultural education (2010-2015) proposes a framework for this dimension of education. We enumerate the key components and specific goals (Intercultural Education Strategy, 2010: 57):

Table 2. A possible framework of the intercultural education

Key components	Goals
1. Leadership	Creating an intercultural environment at institutional level
2. Integration of dispositions regarding education	
3. Rights and responsibilities	
4. High aspirations and expectations	
5. Improvement of the quality of teaching	Consolidating the capacities of the education suppliers in order to develop an intercultural learning environment
6. Knowing the language (languages) in which the teaching activity is carried out	Support for pupils to become experts in the teaching language
7. Partnership and commitment	Encouraging and promoting an active partnership, engaging and conducting an effective communication between the suppliers of education, students, parents and communities
8. Effective communication	
9. Collection of data and research	Promoting and assessing collected data and monitoring so that decisions made be based on proofs
10. Action, monitoring and assessment	

Some authors (Koskarov, 2012) foster the importance of music in the context of the multicultural and intercultural education. Given that teachers play an important role in solving appropriately and efficiently the cultural diversity in the classroom (Lucietto, 2008; Leutwyler, Mantela, Petrović et al., 2014), we insist on the idea of training them in order to develop competences that are necessary to promote the intercultural education. The forms of achieving the intercultural education (Marinescu, 2013): general: common lessons, non-formal school activities; informal influences outside the school perimeter; types of activities: projects; research; surveys through interviews; classroom journals; reciting of poems, telling stories, interpretations of roles; acting; debating ideas starting from case studies; discussions on issues with an impact on the school life; possibility to negotiate and draw consensual decisions; exercises of critical and constructive reflection etc.; mass-media; sport; music. We mention also other ways of achieving the intercultural education (Dasen, Perregaux, Rey, 1999 apud Cucoş, 2000: 179-180): inviting outside professionals at school or in the educational environment; using libraries and audio-visual documentation centers which can be found in school or in the community; using new communication technologies; using journals that can replace the

pedagogical material; participating in cultural events and local holidays, in different activities such as visiting museums and exhibitions; engaging in musical or coral activities; studying the reciprocal contribution of cultures, which can be done also beyond specific cultural events; organizing meetings between persons of different cultures as opportunities to establish friendship relations; reaction to local and international political events; fraternities which offer a real opportunity for interchange and solidarity; school correspondence, which can be carried out by all children through the exchange of drawings and audio and video cassettes; collaborating with local or international associations, especially with non-governmental associations whose goals are in relation with the international understanding and the intercultural education; visits, courses, study days or weeks centered on a certain aspect; participating in the activities suggested by some organisms etc.Within the structure of the intercultural competence we can include abilities, capacities and characteristics such as: (Buza, Tabaku, Mita, 2008): ability to communicate effectively with persons belonging to other cultures, empathy, flexibility, capacity for emotional control, intercultural sensitivity, capacity to be aware of the intercultural differences or the ability to manage stress. Ilie (2011: 112-113) considers that the intercultural competence consists of:types of knowledge: about the culture of one's own country and that of other countries; knowledge about the interaction within the society between people of different cultures at different levels;types of capacities: capacity to interpret a document or an event that is specific to a culture; capacity to gain new knowledge from another culture as well as to understand new cultural practices; capacity to use the knowledge in certain situations; capacity to adjust; capacity to solve conflicts generated by the misinterpretation of facts or events; relational capacity; capacity to negotiate;attitudes: openness, curiosity, empathy, availability, cosmopolitism, flexibility.The intercultural competence is a condition, a way to deal with intercultural interactions (Vilaça, 2008).Among the benefits of the intercultural education we mention the following (Ionescu, 2011: 395): encouragement of curiosity regarding the cultural and social differences; development of imagination through the normalization of the existing differences; development of critical thinking by encouraging people to investigate own intercultural practices and hence, modify their perspective on their own culture and practices; development of sensitivity to the challenges of interculturality; prevention of racism.

Methodology

The research was carried out for the 2014-2015 academic year on a group of 110 students enrolled in the program for the certification of teaching competences, 2nd level, within the University of Craiova.The purpose of this research was to identify the needs for developing the intercultural competence of the teacher-to-be students. In close connection with the above-mentioned purpose we also aimed at the following goals: find out the opinion of the teacher-to-be students regarding the importance of the intercultural education in their training as future practitioners; conduct a critical analysis of the curriculum that the training of future teachers is based on; provide ameliorative solutions for the training of the teaching staff, from the perspective of new educations in general and of the intercultural education in particular.We took into account the following *fundamental hypothesis:* The intercultural competence of the teacher-to-be students is important in the context of their competence's profile. Starting from this general hypothesis, two *particular hypotheses* began to take shape: in order to achieve the intercultural education we must correlate the formal influences with the non-formal and

informal ones; the program for the certification of competences in the teaching profession must take into account also the training of future teachers from the perspective of the intercultural education.

The variables of the research were the following: regarding the general hypothesis, our aim was to carry out a correlation between the need for the training of the teaching staff, materialized into the profile of pedagogical competence, and the importance of the intercultural competence in the context of this profile; concerning the first particular hypothesis, we took into account the analysis of the relation between the different categories of educative influences (formal, non-formal and informal) and the achievement of the intellectual education; the second particular hypothesis allowed us to reassess the possibility of the certification program of competences in the teaching profession to form the teacher-to-be students also from the perspective of the intercultural education.

Group of subjects

As stated above, the group of subjects was composed of students in their 1st and 2nd year respectively, enrolled in the 2nd level of the psychopedagogical training program within the University of Craiova. The students graduated previously from the 1st level of the psychopedagogical training program that corresponds to the Bachelor's degree and which allows them to exert their profession in the compulsory education and they are preparing to earn the certification of teaching competences also for the non-compulsory education.

### *Research instruments and the ways to capitalize on them*

The research instruments used consisted of a survey and a focus-group interview.

The survey applied to students aimed at finding out their opinion regarding the importance and role of the intercultural education as well as the ways in which the latter can be capitalized on in the didactical activities. The instrument was conceived so that students cab express their personal points of view and personal options. Hence, it comprised also 3 subjective items besides the other 7 objective/semiobjective items. Some items aimed at exploring the students' opinion on the importance of the intercultural education in forming the individual's personality in relation with the other dimensions of education framed in the category of "new educations" (items 1 and 3) while other items demanded the enumeration of the advantages of the intercultural education (item 2) and the ways considered to be efficient in the training of pupils from the perspective of the intercultural education (item 6) or the ways in which this dimension of education can be achieved (item 5). Items 7 and 8 aimed at conducting a critical analysis of the curriculum of the program for the certification of competences for the teaching profession from the perspective of promoting the intercultural education. The competence profile of the future teacher and the intercultural competence were the final point of discussion of the last two items of the survey. The focus group interview was composed of questions related to the benefits of the intercultural education, the ways considered to be more efficient for the promotion of the intercultural education in school as well as the development methods of the intercultural competence. The interview was carried out with 12 teacher-to-be students in their final year of the program for the certification of competences in the teaching profession.

Findings and discussions

The subjects' answers registered following the use of the research instruments allowed to depict an image regarding the challenges of the intercultural education in the context of the current Romanian education and today's society. We present the students' answers to the survey. In the case of items with open answer, which questioned the students' opinion on the advantages of the intercultural education or the ways they consider to be most effective for the promotion of the intercultural education in school as well as the ways in which the teacher-to-be students can exert their intercultural competence, we mention also the answers given by the participating subjects in the focus-group interview.Hence, in item 1, regarding the importance of the intercultural education, the majority of subjects consider this dimension to be important (graph 1).

Graph 1. Subject's opinion on the importance of the intercultural education
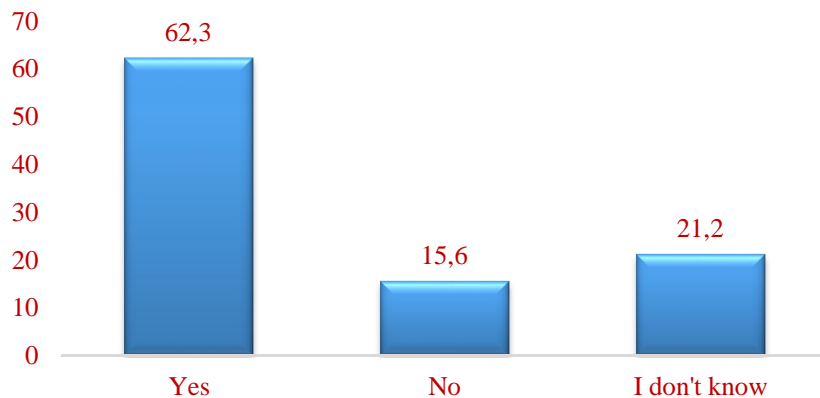
One of the items with open answer asked students to mention the advantages of the intercultural education. We run over the most frequent answers of the subjects: development of skills for social inclusion; development of civic spirit; preparation of pupils for the European space (interaction with other cultures, awareness of the discrimination phenomenon); promotion of tolerance; promotion of the need to understand the others; favoring of a better social life; development of relational and adjustment capacities; a better development of the pupils' personality; opportunity to learn easier a foreign language; possibility to get familiar with other religions and different ethnicities; stimulation of the creative mind; possibility to adjust easier to the intercultural environment; advantages on the labor market, that is to say, the possibility to find a job easier.

The subjects made a hierarchization of the education's dimensions mentioned in item 3, from the perspective of the attributed importance. Therefore we present this hierarchization as a result of the accumulation of points offered in table no.3 and graph no.2.

Table 3. Students' opinion on the importance of ,,new educations''

No.	Dimension of education	Points
1	Nutritional	423
2	Ecological	347
3	Intercultural	323
4	Integrated/inclusive	301
5	Sexual	295
6	For communication and mass-media	124
7	For family life	111
8	**For peace**	**96**

Graph 2. Students' opinion on the importance of ,,new educations''
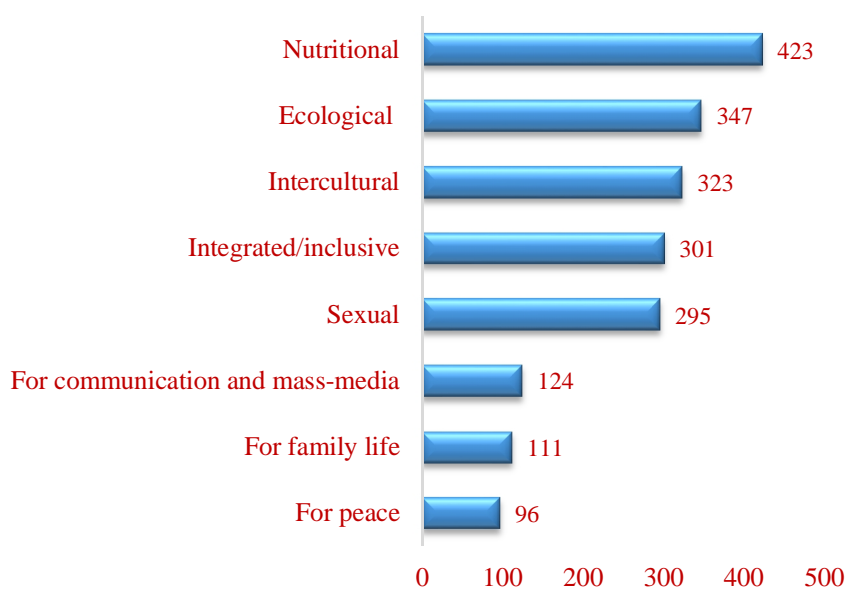

As we can notice from the above table and graph, students appreciate that the nutritional education is the most important of the dimensions presented, followed by the ecological education.

The role of mass media in promoting the nutritional problems or the ones related to the environment as well as the promotion of the ecological education in school (especially within the non-formal activities) can justify the students' option.

The intercultural education is in third place in the hierarchy made by students. Also, in the subjects' opinion, the integrated/inclusive education is considered important, and in this respect, an important role is played by the pedagogical practice carried out by students in different schools and classrooms in which there are numerous examples of integrated children.

A big part of the surveyed subjects consider that the Romanian education promotes the intercultural education to a small extent (graph 3).

Graph 3. Students' opinion on the promotion of the intercultural education in the Romanian educational system
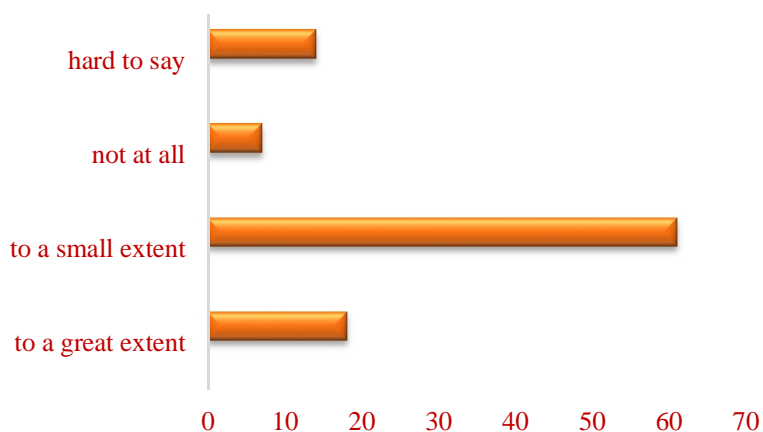

Out of the ways in which the promotion of the intercultural education can be carried out, students appreciate that school activities are in first place, followed by extracurricular activities and the ones carried out in the family and through mass media. The findings are presented in table 4 and graph 4.

Table 4. Ways to promote the intercultural education

Ways to promote the intercultural education	Points
a) school activities	358
b) extracurricular activities	235
c) in the family	301
d) mass media	112
e) other ways	96

Graph 4. Ways to promote the intercultural education

other ways — 96
mass media — 112
in the family — 301
extracurricular activities — 235
school activities — 358
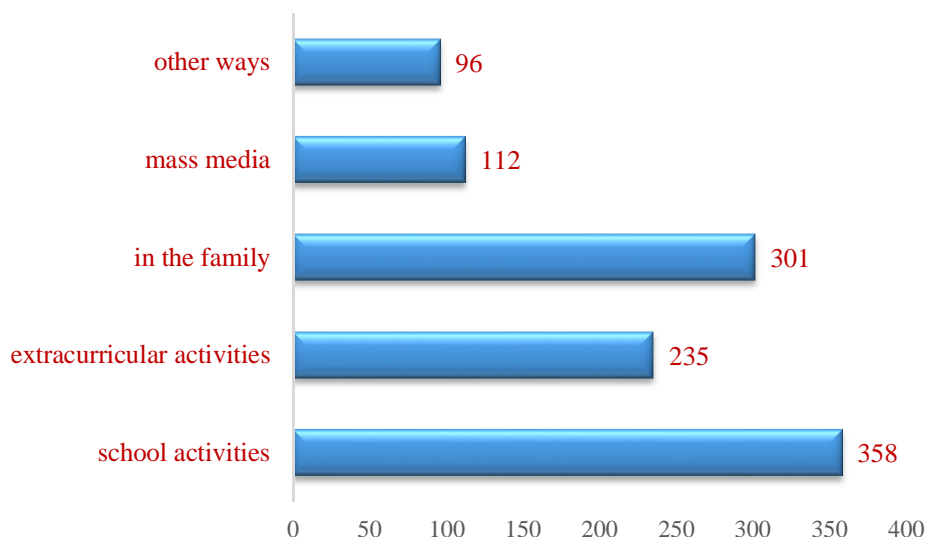
The subjects' answers confirm one of the particular hypotheses of the research regarding the role of the informal influences in promoting the intercultural education. Item 6 asked the subjects to present at least 3 ways that they considered to be effective in forming pupils from the perspective of the intercultural education. We mention several of the students' answers including the ones from the interview: exchange of experiences; organizing school activities on intercultural topics; increase in the number of extracurricular activities on intercultural topics; correlation of extracurricular activities with curricular activities; easing the interaction between pupils and other cultures; mass-media; publications in the field; organizing contests on cultural topics in order to motivate the pupils who want to get familiar with other cultures; intercultural reunions; informative meetings for pupils on the topic of intercultural education; involving pupils in different projects on the topic of the culture of different people.

The analysis of the curriculum, that is to say, of the syllabus of the program for the certification of competences in the teaching profession from the perspective of the possibility to stimulate the intercultural education, pointed out, on the one hand, the subjects/topics/ways in which this goal could be achieved (for students who chose "YES" for an answer), and on the other hand, the suggestions for the improvement and completion of this goal (for students who chose "NO" for an answer). Hence, for the first-case scenario, the students mentioned the following suggestions: subjects such as Pedagogy, Classroom Management and Pedagogical Practice which are tangential to the challenges of the intercultural education; addressing topics on the new dimensions of education; teachers' attitude towards the intercultural differences;giving examples from the real life that suggest the importance of respecting the cultural diversity. In the second category, we mention students' suggestions regarding the possibility to improve the syllabus of the program for the certification of competences in the teaching profession:inclusion in the syllabus of optional subjects on the topic of interculturality;developing within the existing subjects topics on the intercultural education;involving teacher-to-be students in projects

on the topic of intercultural education;participation of students in different scientific events (symposiums, conferences) on the topic of intercultural education;intensifying the exchanges of experiences and students' mobility through different programs (example: Erasmus); promoting the intercultural education within the activity of pedagogical practice; determining students to get involved in different extracurricular activities related to the intercultural education; the majority of the surveyed subjects consider the intercultural competence to be important for a future teacher (see graph no. 5).

Graph 5. The importance of the intercultural competence for a future teacher
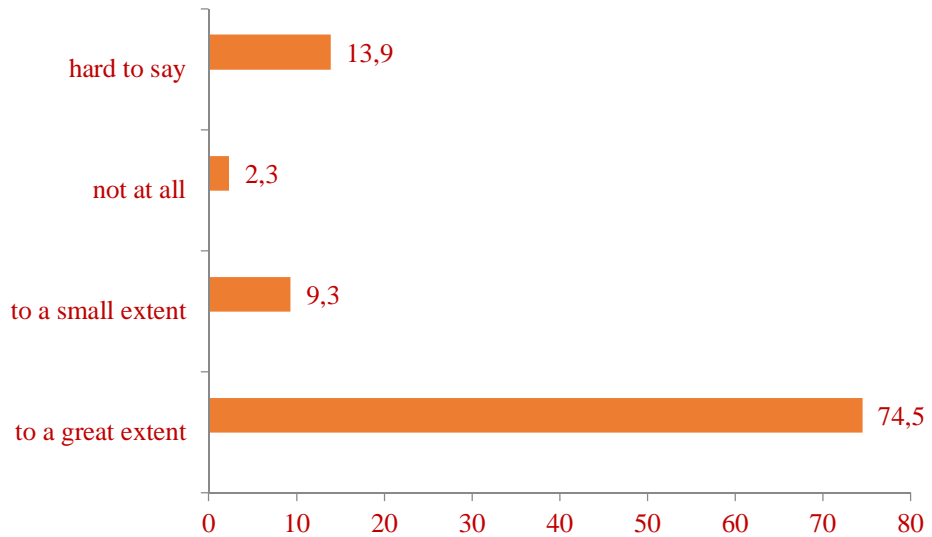
Following the answers given by subjects for the last item of the questionnaire, we were able to identify the characteristics and capacities that compose the intercultural competence. Table no. 5 presents these characteristics/capacities depending on the value of the Pearson correlation coefficient which establishes their relevance level for the structure of the intercultural competence (depending also on the significance level we relate to).

Table 5. The values of the Pearson correlation coefficient for the component elements of the intercultural competence

Characteristic/Capacity	Pearson value
Tolerance	**,532**[**]
Capacity to be aware of the intercultural differences	**,458**[**]
Relational capacity	**,475**[**]
Adjustment capacity	**,211**[**]

Capacity to solve conflicts generated by the misinterpretation of some facts and events	,213[*]
Capacity to adjust	,147[*]
Empathy	,111[*]

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Out of the capacities composing the structure of the intercultural competence, students consider to be important the capacity of being aware of the intercultural differences (correlation coefficient value being r=,458, at a 0.01 significance level), the relational capacity (r=,475, at 0.01 significance level), the capacity to solve conflicts or the capacity to adjust (r=,211, 0.01 significance level). Also, the capacity to solve conflicts generated by the misinterpretation of some facts and events as well as the capacity to adjust, they both occupy an important place in the competence structure (r values being ,313 and ,147 respectively, at a 0.05 significance level). The important characteristics are tolerance (r=,532, at a 0.01 significance level) and empathy (r=,111, 0.05 significance level).As any other competence, the cultural one can also be practiced. The propositions formulated by students within the focus-group interview can be synthesized as follows: within the seminar activities by using methods for the simulation of real situations (such as role play); involvement in extracurricular activities on the topic of the intercultural education;within the carried out activity of pedagogical practice;involvement in different projects on the topic of the intercultural education.

Conclusions

The intercultural education represents one of the essential dimensions of today's education. Its importance is also recognized at the level of programs certifying the competences in the teaching profession. Future teachers consider that the intercultural education must be promoted in school and they appreciate the importance of the intercultural competence in the general context of the teacher's profile of pedagogical competence. They conduct a critical analysis of the syllabus of teacher training programs pointing out first of all, the disciplines within/through which the intercultural education is promoted, but also different situations or real ways. At the same time, students make suggestions for the improvement and completion of the current syllabus or of the methodological ways used at present. Hence, we insist on the idea that one of the directions to promote the intercultural education must be, first of all, that of the instruction and instructors who are regarded as teachers-to-be and who, in their turn, must promote this dimension of education in schools.The development of the intercultural competence of the future teachers must be achieved both from a theoretical point of view (students' propositions to introduce new disciplines centered on the topic of the intercultural education being very expressive in this respect) as well as from a praxiological perspective (in this respect we point out the insistence in the subjects' answers on the organization of the pedagogical practice also from the perspective of promoting interculturality). In conclusion, in our opinion, the intercultural competence is an important condition for the cohabitation in a multicultural society.

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