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## The Impact of Differences in Curriculum on knowledge Related to European Citizenship: a Comparative Analysis in the Case of Portuguese and Romanian Pupils

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### Abstract

Given the European socio-economic and cultural context of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the national educational systems must take into account both the local curriculum reforms and the European regulatory framework and developmental goals. The current research was conducted in Portugal and Romania, within the Comenius-funded ECLIPSE<sup>1</sup> project, seeking to investigate how curricular approaches are reflected on pupils European Citizenship knowledge. A comparative analysis of the curriculum on European issues and a knowledge test (pre and post) of European Citizenship were used. Totally, 189 pupils in compulsory education, ages between 12 and 17 years old participated. Findings show an average increase of 3/4 points between the pre and post-tests results in both countries. Further, placing these findings in the context of curriculum differences provides relevant insights.

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## 1. Introduction

In the last century, Europe has been faced with many challenges, among which democratic deficit (Birzea, 2005, p. 8), human mobility, developing a multicultural space, social and economics threats, millennium development goals (2020 Agenda). Within this context, the question on what will determine the citizens to remain united, as the European motto as such suggests (“united in diversity”) seems more legit than ever. A possible answer in this respect could be assuming and strengthening European Citizenship (EC), since it refers to “developing a sense of time, space and place in contemporary Europe, the skills and motivation required to be active agents for democratic change while participating in the building of Europe and providing the knowledge to make informed and future-minded choices within this context” (Kannelmäe-Geerts & Karsten, 2010, p. 34). Onward, citizens need a context to learn how “to act responsible, comprehend, judge critically and to decide deliberately which development of democracy and of political systems in Europe they will support or not” and school can provide such settings (Eis, 2010, p.14). Therefore, within the larger context of the ECLIPSE project, there was developed an EC curriculum for compulsory education. This study investigates different educational strategies used in implementing the materials developed considering the structure, contents and pedagogical approaches associated with the national curriculum in the case of Portugal and Romania.

The context of this study is given by the ECLIPSE Comenius Project. The project was implemented between 2011 and 2014. The aims were to develop, test and implement a programme of education for European citizenship, addressed students in grades 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> from compulsory education. ECLIPSE was implemented by 6 consortium members (Italy - University of Trento, England - St John’s Marlborough Academy, Germany - Leibniz University Hannover, Portugal - Institute of Education, University of Lisbon, Romania – National University of Political Studies and Public Administration and Spain - University of La Laguna, Tenerife).

## 2. Methodology

The design of the current research consists in a mixed methods approach. Firstly, a comparative analysis of the curriculum on European issues in Portugal and Romania was undergone. Secondly, the knowledge test on EU related topics was administered before and after the implementation of the materials developed within the ECLIPSE project. The main goal of the study was to investigate how various curricular approaches are reflected on pupils European Citizenship knowledge in the case of pupils from both countries. Further, the goal was operationalized in two research questions: (a) Did the differences in the national curriculum influence pupils knowledge on EC?; (b) Did the implementation of the ECLIPSE materials influence pupils knowledge on EC?

### 2.1 Participants

In Portugal, eighty 9<sup>th</sup> grade pupils, 34 girls and 46 boys, between 12 and 17 years of age ( $M=14.46$ ;  $SD=1.03$ ) answered the knowledge test (pre and post). These pupils came from three schools in the Lisbon metropolitan area. They were distributed into four different class groups attending compulsory education and pupils’ social and cultural background was similar. The sample was taken among the pupils of the 13 teachers participating in the ECLIPSE project. These teachers were professionals with at least 20 years of career in education and the curriculum areas taught by them were: History; Foreign languages (English and Spanish); Arts; Natural Science; Geography; Math; Physics and Chemistry.

The 109 Romanian pupils (59 seventh graders, 50 eighth graders; 49 boys, 60 girls) came from five different schools from distinct cities (3 from Bucharest, 1 from Brasov, 1 from Constanta). The social and economic background of the pupils was similar, differences being noted though considering the cultural features (different religion, nationality, and ethnicity) and the school’s educational performance reputation. The Romanian teachers came with different experience levels and within the ECLIPSE project they taught two curriculum areas, Civic education and History.

The criteria for selecting the participants, in the case of both countries consisted in the availability of the teachers to participate with their pupils in the action-research program proposed by the ECLIPSE project.

## 2.2 Instruments and procedure

For the comparative analysis of the curriculum on European issues, both Portuguese and Romanian partners used the national framework (e.g. curriculums, legislation). The knowledge test (pre and post) consists of 24 multiple choice items. These items comprise six main multi-dimensions: (a) Human rights today and responsibilities; (b) Identity (at local, national, European and global level), social and cultural diversity; (c) What the EU is; Europe in daily life; (d) European citizenship; (e) History of the European cooperation process, and; (f) The work of the European Institutions. The knowledge on EU related topics was tested before and after the implementation of the materials developed within the project. There were differences regarding the moment of the administration, since the Romanian partner signed the agreement in July 2013. In Portugal, the knowledge pre-test was applied in October 2012 and the post-test in May 2013. Romania intensively implemented the materials from October to December 2013, with the testing materials being used before and after the implementation. The work with the EMCs took place in normal hours, as well as after classes (the Romanian case).

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Main differences and similarities on European Citizenship learning

In order to answer the first research question (a. Did the differences in the national curriculum influence pupils knowledge on EC?), the compulsory curriculum in both countries regarding EC topics in different subject areas of study was analysed. This analysis revealed that in Portugal there is no specific curriculum regarding EC. The Portuguese team researched a set of 9<sup>th</sup> grade school curriculum framework to identify possibilities or weakness to the infusion of the European dimension into citizenship education. After perusing several curriculum contents and common textbooks of some subject areas, findings show that references to the European Union or its institutions are scarce. No references of explicit knowledge about the EU, its values, rights and freedoms were identified.

The assumptions stressed by the Portuguese Education System Act (LBSE) from 1986, integrated Citizenship Education (CE) into the school curriculum. Since then, CE has a horizontal nature as a component of the curriculum. Its central objective is to contribute to the construction of identity and to the development of a civic consciousness in students (Afonso, 2007). Since July 2012, a new curricular revision took place (Decree-Law n. ° 139/2012) and new guidelines on CE have emerged. According to this new revision, CE and learning in education should be developed mainly by pupils' and teachers' engagement in activities and specific projects and also should mobilize parents or other members of pupils' family (Recommendation of CE n°1/2012). The transversal topics of CE are infused in the curriculum, in which it is possible to develop themes either across, or through the curriculum.

The Romanian educational system has a distinct philosophy. There is specific compulsory curriculum about citizenship in specific subjects like Civic education, Civic culture even History from a specific and quite rigid curricular area "man and society" (Birzea, 2005). The curriculum content was incrementally changed since Romania became a candidate state for European integration (2000-2007) and along with the new national law on education in 2011, the main aim of the Romanian educational system is to develop active citizens in the European and global context, but still, the explicit references to EC do not include European values, aims, institutions or policy. The specific curriculum comprises only 1-2 lessons on some subjects. However, the schools have the possibility to organize extra-curricular activities and teachers have the opportunity to propose to the national authorities new optional subjects. In Table 1 specific characteristics of the curriculum in several subject areas on the state of European Citizenship are highlighted.

Table 1. Examples of characteristics on Portuguese and Romanian curriculum in several subject areas on state of European Citizenship (EC)

Subject areas	Portuguese Curriculum Contents	Romania Curriculum Contents
Geography	- Population and demographics: world population - The mobility of populations: immigrants and emigrants; Cultural Diversity - Economic Activities	-The geography of the European states, EU integration, population and demographics, economical aspects, tourism
History	- Topics from the 10 <sup>th</sup> to the 19 <sup>th</sup> century	- European ancient and modern history
Natural Sciences/Physics and Chemistry	- Sustainable management of resources	- Sustainable management of resources
Mathematics	- Statistics	- Statistics
English	- Social Issues (e.g.: Travel)	- Social and Cultural issues
Catholic Religious and Moral Education (optional character)/ Orthodox Religious	- Love, Diversity, Freedom, Ecology	- Love, Freedom, taking decisions
Civic culture (RO)		- Democratic citizenship, human rights

The participating teachers in both countries had difficulties of integrating the ECLIPSE contents in their classes, as most of them had only one class per week and already too much content to teach from their own subjects. In Portugal, the 13 participating teachers worked in an interdisciplinary approach providing a collaborative planning. Therefore, it was more feasible to integrate EC learning in their disciplines. In Romania, the teachers used different strategies. They created a 15 minutes moment “The European Union Moment” or developed extracurricular debates, contests, workshops totalizing 10 hours.

### 3.2 Knowledge pre-test and post-test by difficulty

In order to answer to second research question ((b) Did the implementation of the ECLIPSE materials influence pupils knowledge on EC?), firstly, we analysed both the pre and post-tests of the items difficulty. Results are reported in the following tables.

Table 2. Knowledge pre-test items by difficulty

Items least difficult	Pre-test		Items most difficult	PT % correct	RO % correct
	PT % correct	RO % correct			
3. Which of the following constitutes "discrimination"?	90	95	6. What is the [approx.] % of immigrants in your country?	14	7,3
2. The Charter of fundamental rights of the European Union (2000)...	85	88	22. [Identify] a member of the European Parliament from [each country]?	16	3
15. We can respect public property and the common good by...	74	92	14. Where do you discover EU regulations in the daily life of the European Citizens?	30	31
7.The European Union is formed by: (Number of countries)	81	90	10. Each country in the European Union: [sovereignty]	39	29
18. ...the mission and core values of the European cooperation process?	73	84	21.The members of the European Parliament are:	28	-

Table 3. Knowledge post-test items by difficulty

Items least difficult	Post-test		Items most difficult	PT % correct	RO % correct
	PT % correct	RO % correct			
2. The Charter of fundamental rights of the European Union (2000)...	86	-	2. The Charter of fundamental rights of the European Union (2000)...	-	41
4. What does "having prejudice" mean?	88	96	6. What percentage of immigrants is there in your country?	14	62
7.The European Union is formed by: (Number of countries)	82	93	9. What does "free circulation of goods" mean?	49	65
13. If you are working /studying in another country of the European Union, when you have a health problem (...):	83	97	14. Where do you discover EU regulations in the daily life of the European Citizens?	30	6
18. ...the mission and core values of the European cooperation process?	85	95	21. The members of the European Parliament are:.....	28	55

Data show similarities in terms of difficulty between the two countries. On the one hand, the easiest items in the case of both pre and post-tests refer to: the objectives of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, the definitions of “discrimination” and “prejudice”, and the core values of the European Project. On the other hand, the most difficult items include: the estimation of the number of immigrants in both countries, how members of the European Parliament are selected, the identification of national members of the European Parliament and sources of information about the EU. However, differences between Romanian and Portuguese pupils can be noted in terms of frequency of the correct or wrong answer. Thus, there is a general tendency for the Romanian pupils to answer correctly on both moments of the testing. Concerning the most difficult items, whereas the Portuguese pupils performed better than the Romanian ones in the case of the pre-test, results for the post-test show a greater increase in the case of the Romanian pupils.

### 3.3 Differences between pre-test and post test

To answer the first research question, we used the *t* test. The Portuguese descriptive data for the 24 pre-test and post-test items show a significant improvement from the pre-test to the post-test ( $t(79) = -2.81, p = .006$ ). The Romanian descriptive data also indicate a significant improvement from the pre-test to the post-test ( $t(108) = -10.34, p = .005$ ). In an exploratory analysis, gender was also considered. In the case of the Romanian pupils there were no significant differences between boys and girls, but in Portugal girls ( $M=13.3$ ) performed overall better than boys ( $M=11.7$ ) on the test ( $t=2.05, p < .05$ ).

## 4. Discussion and conclusions

Results are consistent with previous studies (e.g.: Torney-Purta, 2001; Eurydice, 2005, 2012; Kerr, Sturman, Schulz, & Burge, 2010) that report poor student knowledge about EU institutions and point the way for focused teacher education. Nonetheless, the findings that suggest a better response rate in the case of the Romanian pupils when considering the difficulty of the answers could be supported by the fact that, according to 2013 Eurobarometer Flash Survey, Romania had one of the high answer rates at the question about what does the concept of citizen of the EU mean - about 94% of the respondents (Rădulescu, 2011).

The most difficult question asked pupils to approximate the percentage of immigrants in Portugal and Romania. In Portugal only 14% of the respondents answered correctly, with more than a third of the pupils underestimating the figure and nearly half overestimating the proportion of immigrants residing in Portugal. In Romania, this question was also problematic because EU lacks official numbers of the Romanian immigrants, and any available data comes from national institutions and organizations, which do not use a common approach on operationalizing the concept. Further, this could be seen as an example about the differences in views about citizenship, advising for the necessity to adopt a common curriculum on EU related topics at European level.

The ECLIPSE project in both countries contributed to the development of a sense of European citizenship based on understanding of and respect for human rights and democracy, while encouraging tolerance and respect for other

people and cultures. The developed action-research created a special opportunity to identify new strengths and limits of traditional and innovative pedagogical approaches in the field of compulsory education. Thus, we can conclude that in Portugal and Romania the ECLIPSE project significantly impacted the pupils' knowledge. Improvements regarding factual and daily life European issues were noted. However, this knowledge would need to be more thorough when it comes to the European institutions and their work into offspring of their citizens.

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