

Non-formal education approaches in school organization methodological aspects and case study

Florentina IONESCU (CIULEI)¹

ABSTRACT

The integration and valorization of non-formal activities in school practice started from the findings that the educational act carried out in accordance with the directives of the formal curriculum is often rigid and static, not always connected to the social reality of learners' lives. The solution could be to offer an educational alternative, non-formal, complementary to the formal one, but integrated and valued in the organizational framework of the school, consisting of activities meant to motivate, to reveal the potential of each student, to encourage communication with oneself but also with others, to involve each individual in his own becoming through self-awareness and self-confidence, through the discovery of talents, aspirations with projection towards a potential professional career. The methodology of the present study consisted of rigorous analysis of the specialized literature and empirical research – a questionnaire-based survey. The main conclusions of the study refer to the decisive role represented by the concern of the school organization for the implementation in the educational act of non-formal activities in order to facilitate the multidimensional and complex development of the student, as a future citizen.

KEYWORDS: *non-formal education, school manager, school organization, teacher.*

¹ PhD Student, *Ion Creangă* Pedagogical State University, e-mail: ciuleiflorentina81@gmail.com

**NON-FORMAL EDUCATION APPROACHES IN SCHOOL ORGANIZATION
METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS AND CASE STUDY**

Florentina IONESCU (CIULEI)²

1. INTRODUCTION

The problems facing modern society are complex and cover various areas. Globalization, as a current social phenomenon, has led to an expansion of these problems worldwide. In these circumstances, education has the fundamental mission in preparing future generations to successfully adapt to the challenges of contemporary society. The formal dimension of education, carried out in the school organization, is extremely important, but it is not enough to guarantee a rapid adaptation of the current social dynamics. Therefore, "the role of non-formal education is to help the formal educational framework and together, through a holistic approach, to contribute to building a harmonious and creative personality of today's students, active citizens of tomorrow's society" (Marinescu, 2013).

Non-formal activities respond to the challenges of today's society, by leaving the rather rigid framework of the school organization, and by designing and implementing activities in which cooperation with the community, the interest of children / students and society, their real problems are prioritized. Through non-formal activities, the transition from classical teaching, to the transdisciplinary approach of learning contents interconnected with everyday situations and to a real communication with children / students is achieved. We consider that these activities represent reconfiguration directions of the education of the future.

² PhD Student, Ion Creangă Pedagogical State University, Moldova, e-mail: ciuleiflorentina81@gmail.com

2. THE NON-FORMAL IN THE EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

The beginning of the 1970s and 1980s is marked by the increased international orientation and concentration on *non-formal education and its formative values*. Numerous scientific approaches are proposed regarding the dimensions of non-formal education and its importance. According to Cozma (1998), the term *non-formal* refers to “a less formalized or non-formalized educational reality, but always with formative effects”. In “Toward a contextual definition of non-formal education”, Kleis (1973) presented the non-formal side of education as an “educational activity, intentional and systematic”, organized outside the traditional school being adapted to the context and needs of beneficiaries, to maximize learning and knowledge and minimize problems of the individual in the formal system.

Non-formal education became part of the international discourse on educational policy in the late 1960s and early 1970s, being correlated with concepts such as continuous learning and lifelong learning. While the latest concepts are related to the expansion of education and lifelong learning, non-formal education is about “recognizing the importance of education, learning and training that takes place outside educational institutions” (Tight, 1996, p.68). In many Nordic countries, the notion of non-formal education was not common in state policy debates, with preferred alternatives being community education and community learning, informal education and social pedagogy. It is known that the formal system has difficulties in adapting to social and economic dynamics. The important role in the formation of skills and abilities of life, necessary to adapt to social change belongs to other learning contexts such as non-formal education.

A series of characteristics of non-formal education are highlighted in the specialized literature by referring to its content and methodological dimensions:

- **holistic** - includes concepts, ways of intervention in various fields;
- **innovative** - open to novelty;
- **creative** - involves imagination;
- **dynamic** - involves active / interactive and diversified learning methods;
- **multicultural** - includes cultural differences as a form of diversity;
- **formative** - develops skills and abilities;
- **challenging** - causes change;

- **stimulating and unconventional** - opens the perception to new resources and original solutions;
- **applicative** - it is structured and organized, with clear learning objectives attached, implying an efficient management of resources;
- **adjustable** - expands the learning environment, space and time being diversified and flexible (Cebanu, 2014, p.26).

All these characteristics related to non-formal education, through appropriate educational policies and strategies, could create the favorable context for the development of the potential of each individual, in accordance with his personal abilities, dreams and aspirations. Implementing non-formal education in an educational context can provide viable solutions and alternatives for completing useful Information content for a pragmatic and creative educational system, beyond the theoretical aspects, based more on the instructive side than on the educational one.

3. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

The current Romanian education system seeks to integrate into the broader framework of the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy (2000) which addresses a pragmatic perspective on the development objectives of the European Union. A number of components of the Lisbon Declaration are crucial to achieving performance in both education and the economy. All this has or can be optimized through a significant component aimed at non-formal and informal education.

At the national level, the new National Education Law (2011) supports and makes accessible the fulfillment of European objectives in the field of non-formal education. The excerpts from this normative document regulate the role, purpose and specificity of non-formal education in relation to the other two forms of education, formal and informal.

The current National Curriculum implemented in school organizations in Romania also has a regulatory component, which allows openness to non-formal and informal learning contexts. Through its subcomponents, the curriculum presents the finalities of each educational cycle, the general competences organized on curricular areas - groups of disciplines that circumscribe the set of knowledge, abilities and attitudes targeted by various disciplines, studied integrated. In this sense, an analysis of the aims of education for each

level of education reveals the idea that they cannot be effectively achieved, unless they are supported by non-formal and informal education. In the *preschool and primary cycles*, the aim is the formation of the child's personality in his own rhythm of development, the creative relation to the social and natural environment. *Secondary education* focuses on developing the abilities to adapt and on forming positive attitudes in relation to the social environment: tolerance, responsibility, solidarity, etc.

The skills needed in a modern society, subject to rapid change, are further developed at the level of *high school education*, so that the young people can decide on his own career and actively integrate into social life. Either it is based on the communicative-functional model, designed to structure social communication skills, or on training the ability to build and interpret appropriate models and representations of reality, or on building hypotheses and verifying them through exploration and experimentation, or on acquiring values and attitudes for active social insertion, study disciplines are clearly compatible with non-formal education, do not impose limitations, but allow the valorization of their own experiences, the opportunity to integrate these experiences outside the formal, in the process of standardized training.

The framework plans for preuniversity education include, in addition to the compulsory curriculum and *the school decision-making curriculum*, those optional programs for in-depth study, extending existing disciplines or introducing new transdisciplinary disciplines. The relevance of this type of curriculum is given by the fact that it allows the teacher to develop, in the formal framework, the professional acquisitions, together with their own experiences consolidated in a non-formal and informal context. Also, *the curriculum in local development* is that component of education based on school projects in partnership with various institutions, organizations or economic units in the local sphere. The condition is that these projects focus on the areas of interest of the area and become true extensions of the acquisitions from the formal curriculum. This type of curriculum arouses the student's interest in learning, is easy to adapt to the student's learning needs and can capitalize on any area of activity specific to the area: administrative, tourism, agricultural, industrial, cultural, economic, research, etc.

The introduction of non-formal education in school practice can be an opportunity to accomplish the new desideratum of lifelong learning, organizing thematically integrated, interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary teaching activities, thus integrating new communication technologies, at distance, capitalizing the skills acquired by the students in different learning

contexts. The articulation of formal and non-formal interventions are beneficial for both the student and the teacher, as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Integration of non-formal activities in the teaching process opportunities and benefits for students and teachers

	Students	Teachers
What can they do?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They can value, in the educational process, personal learning experiences from non-formal or informal education, which will stimulate the teaching approach. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They can value, in the training process, their own learning experiences from non-formal or informal education, emphasizing difficulties, satisfactions, sources of information, opportunities, etc.
How can they do that?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To share with colleagues, at the beginning of a topic / learning unit, what they know about the topic, what were the sources of information about an author, a historical event, a geographical area, a scientific experiment, etc; • To present, while studying a topic, their own non-formal or informal learning experiences associated with new acquisitions (what they have learned from volunteer activities, European projects, trips, travel, etc.); • Make connections between what they know, what they know how to do and what they have learned; • To develop the approached topic, from the perspective of their own learning experiences, accumulated in other contexts than the formal one: music, dance, sports, literary creations, plastic creations, films, photographic art, etc.); • To be actively involved in the valorization, in the formal education, of the new knowledge, skills, attitudes, acquired in their daily activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To capitalize, in lessons, on acquisitions acquired through non-formal and informal education: training courses, mobility, computer skills, own reading, etc. • To share their own learning experiences, which converge towards a positive attitude towards knowledge and towards an intellectual work style.
What can they get?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A continuum of the formal - the non-formal - the informal, materialized through self-confidence, valorization, effective communication with others, active listening, authentic learning, multiple perspectives of approaching a topic, clarification of one's own values and attitudes towards knowledge. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating a stimulating climate for students, the satisfaction of using their cognitive and metacognitive potential in the teaching process, global appreciation of teacher training, efficiency in teaching, recognition of the school and local community.

Source: the author

4. RESEARCH ON TEACHERS 'PERCEPTION ABOUT NON-FORMAL EDUCATION ACTIVITIES INTEGRATED AND VALUED IN THE SCHOOL ORGANIZATION.

The research design followed the stages for “analyzing the facts and educational processes at the systemic level and instructional process” by observing “certain requirements in conducting a research in order to get to a realistic representation of the researched subject” (Anghel, 2017, p .176). The present study analyzes teachers' perceptions regarding the status

and role of integrated and valued non-formal education in the school organization. The general objective of the research was *to highlight the role and importance of integration and valorization of non-formal activities in the perception of teachers in the preuniversity education system* and being detailed below according to the 3 specific objectives, from which derive 2 hypotheses of this research (Table 2.).

Table 2. Specific objectives and research hypotheses

Specific objectives of the research	Research hypotheses
<p>O1: identifying the level at which teachers/school managers conceptualize non-formal education;</p> <p>O2: highlighting the main features (advantages and limitations) of non-formal education;</p> <p>O3: establishing the main extracurricular activities that teachers implement / or would like to implement in the context of non-formal education.</p>	<p>H1: If we plan and systematically implement non-formal activities in the school organization, then the educational approach will become more effective, both in terms of concerns and involvement of preschoolers / students, and the contribution to the development of their personality.</p> <p>H2: If we integrate and value on non-formal activities in the school organization, we will contribute to the successful preparation and adaptation of the student for society.</p>

Source: the author

In order to carry out the research, the specialized literature was analyzed, for a good delimitation of the concept of non-formal education, with emphasis on its integration and valorization in the context of school organization but also of legislative documents in the international and national space, to have an image overall on the educational directives for the implementation of non-formal education in the educational act provided by the school organization. The quantitative method, questionnaire-based survey was applied, which is an efficient way to collect primary data (Dinu, Săvoiu, Dabija, 2017), being designed both objective and subjective items structured on 12 components related to:

- the level of conceptualization of non-formal education;
- the importance of non-formal education in the professional activity of the teacher / school manager;
- the main advantages and limitations of integrating non-formal education into school practice;
- the main advantages and limits of valorization on non-formal education in school practice;

- the characteristics of non-formal education; direct non-formal activities that can be capitalized on in school practice;
- indirect non-formal activities that can be valued on in school practice in support of student training;
- future non-formal activities;
- non-formal impact activities implemented in school organizations;
- the degree of participation in programs / workshops / training sessions / mobility / transnational activities on the topic of non-formal education / arranging the integration and valorization of non-formal education in the school organization.

In the context of the epidemiological situation caused by the spread of SARS-CoV-2, the questionnaire was submitted online, via isondaje.ro, between 1 and 10 May 2020. This type of online questionnaire-based survey has advantages, such as: selecting the most appropriate online distribution channels, lack of costs, sufficient time for the respondents to formulate the answers, lack of stress in formulating them.

4.1. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

To carry out this research, the questionnaire was applied to a number of 40 teachers and school managers in preuniversity education in Dâmbovița, with an average age of 44.7 years, of which 92% women and 8% men, of which 32 work in urban and 8 in rural areas, 26 are teachers for early education, 6 work in primary education, 4 in high school and with equal value, 4 respondents work in high school. Of the 40 teachers surveyed, 16 did not hold managerial positions during their teaching career and of the 24 teachers who had or currently have, as the case may be, school manager positions in school organizations, 13 are in the first manager mandate, having an experience between 0-5 years, 5 respondents are in the range of 6-10 years of managerial experience, 4 respondents have between 11-15 years experience and 2 of the managers have a management experience of over 25 years .

The first section of the questionnaire aimed at analyzing the level of conceptualization of non-formal education by teachers. Although the item that called for the definition of non-formal education was opened, with free answers from teachers, most demonstrated knowledge of the concept and the elements that define it. The recorded responses revolved around three main ideas. In this regard, 25 of the respondents considered that non-formal education is *that form of education that takes place outside the school*

organization through extracurricular activities, 10 of the respondents considered that it is a *form of education that combines theory with practice* and 5 saw it as *on a continuous training activity*.

Although respondents did not provide a definition of non-formal education according to the literature, most of them can define it by their characteristics and usefulness: it is a recreational and interactive educational approach; creates learning contexts outside the strict rules of traditional education; completes formal education; ensures an additional contribution of skills gained by each child / student, without being subject to instruction, stress grades and imposed homework; offers the student maximum freedom of expression, pleasure / motivation to know and develop; ensures access to activities and actions that correspond to the interests, skills, desires of preschoolers / students; it is indispensable for the formation and development of the child's / student's personality; contributes to the development of strong interpersonal relationships, positive social behaviors and deep self-knowledge. We believe that such an approach is not wrong, as long as the proposed definition contains all the specific features of non-formal education.

In the second section of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to rank from a given set of 5 advantages attributed to the integration of non-formal education in school practice, the first 3 which they consider fundamental for the success of a non-formal education activity. Below is the distribution of the number of mentions for each advantage. As can be seen in Figure 1., which shows the cumulative percentages of mentioning **the important advantages of integrating non-formal education in school practice**, from the perspective of teachers, with the highest frequency is *training of new communication technologies, distance learning* (24%), followed by *the achievement a student-oriented approach, with an emphasis on the learning process and not on teaching, a differentiated approach of the participants and the application of knowledge acquired in the classroom in real situations, everyday contexts*, with an equal value of 22 %. Looking, at the same time, the advantages least mentioned by teachers, it can be seen that the last two places are occupied by *the use of participatory, interactive, collaborative techniques / methods to determine motivating and constructive interactions between students* (17%) followed by *the creation of a stimulating and relaxing learning climate for students* (15%).

With reference to **the advantages that can be attributed to the valorization of non-formal education in school practice**, the first 3 that the respondents consider fundamental

for the success of a non-formal education activity, as can be seen in Figure 2. which presents the cumulative percentages of mentioning the important advantages of valorization on non-formal education in school practice from the perspective of teachers, is the most valuable: *applying the knowledge acquired in the classroom in real situations, everyday contexts* (23.8%), followed by *the achievement of a student-oriented approach, with an emphasis on the learning process and not on teaching, a differentiated approach of the participants* (21.8%) and *the use of participatory, interactive, collaborative techniques / methods to determine motivating interactions and constructive among them* (19.8%). Following, at the same time, the advantages with the lowest value mentioned by the teachers, we notice that the last two places are occupied by *the training of new communication technologies, distance learning* (17.8%) and *the creation of a stimulating and relaxing learning climate for students* (16.8%).

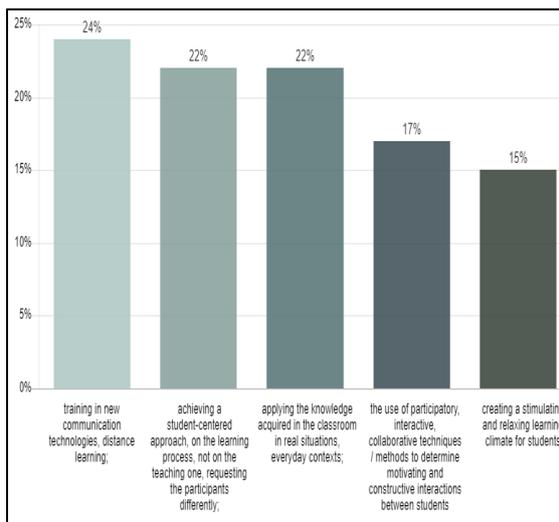


Figure 1.

The respondents' perception on advantages of integrating non-formal education into school practice

Source: the author

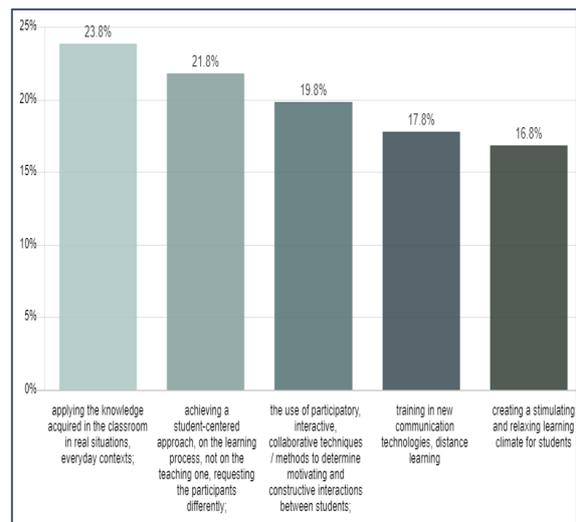


Figure 2.

The respondents' perception on advantages of valuing non-formal education into school practice

Source: the author

In the fifth section of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to rank from a given set of 5 limits attributed to the integration of non-formal education in school practice, the first 3 which they consider real obstacles to the success of a non-formal education activity. Below is the distribution of the number of entries for each limit. As can be seen in Figure 3., Which shows the cumulative percentages of mentioning **the important limits of integrating non-formal education in school practice**, from the perspective of respondents, with the highest frequency and a value of 23% is *insufficient involvement of teachers* followed by *insufficient*

involvement of the local community in supporting the school organization (21%) and lack of accreditations and certificates useful for the future personal and professional career of the student (20%). Following, at the same time, the limits least mentioned by the teachers, we notice that the last two places are occupied by *insufficient student involvement (19%) and unfavorable environmental conditions (17%).*

With reference to **the limits of valuing non-formal education in school practice**, the first 3 that the respondents consider real impediments in the success of a non-formal education activity, as can be seen in Figure 4. which presents the cumulative percentages of mentioning the limits of valuing non-formal education in school practice from the perspective of teachers, are: with the highest value *insufficient involvement of students (24.8%)*, followed by *insufficient involvement of teachers (22.8 %)* and *the unfavorable environmental conditions (18.8%)*. Following, at the same time, the limits considered of lower value, we notice that the last place are occupied by *the lack of accreditations and certificates useful for the future personal and professional path of the student and the insufficient involvement of the local community in supporting the school organization (15.8%).*

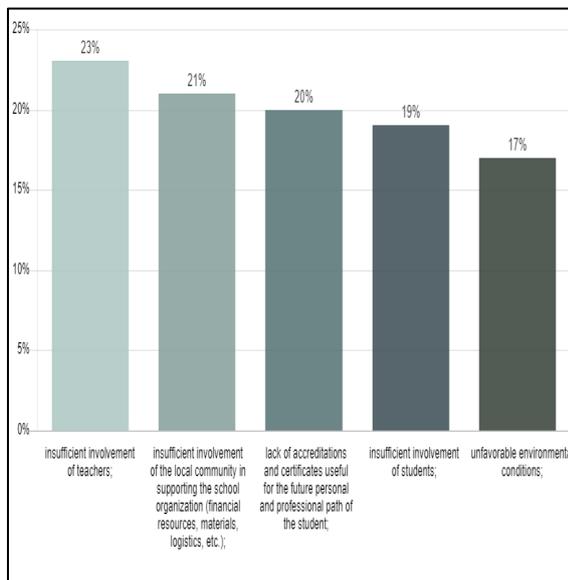


Figure 3.
The respondents' perception on limits of integrating non-formal education into school practice
Source: the author

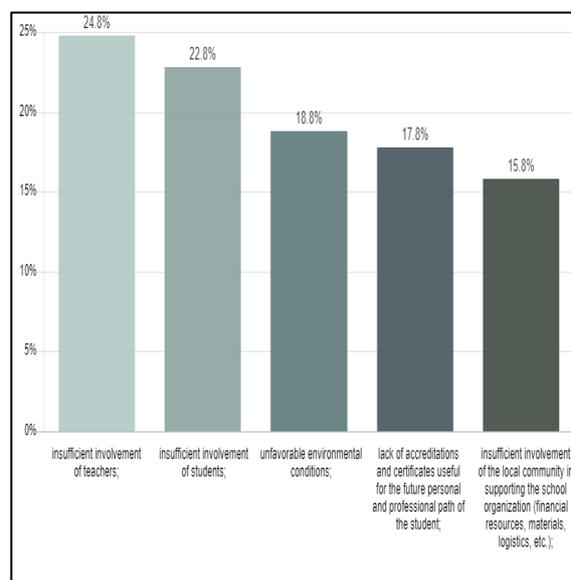


Figure 4.
The respondents' perception on limits of valuing non-formal education into school practice
Source: the author

Another aspect investigated concerns the characteristics of non-formal education, a ranking of them according to the importance they have in the successful integration of a non-formal activity in school practice. From the perspective of the respondents, as can be seen in Figure 5., a non-formal activity of impact in the school organization must be characterized by

innovation (11, 9%), with the same frequency of responses and the same value (10, 9%) a non-formal activity must *develop skills and abilities* and *be creative*. The distribution of answers is in the same place, with the same value (9.9%), as features of an non-formal activity of impact in the school organization: *stimulating and unconventional, holistic, applied and dynamic*, followed by *adjustable, challenging and multicultural* with a value of 8.9%.

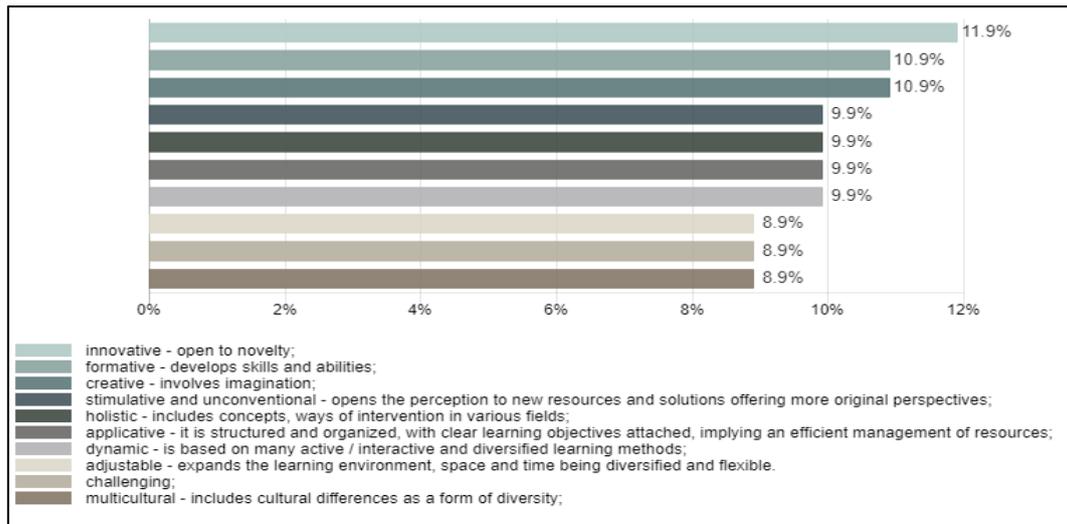


Figure 5.

The respondents' perception of the characteristics of non-formal education integrated in school practice

Source: the author

In the eighth section of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to specify the direct non-formal activities that can be integrated into school practice. According to the respondents' options, most frequently are organized *cultural-artistic activities* (21, 2%), followed as a frequency by *educational-recreational activities* (18, 2%), *sports activities* (17.2%), *educational activities organized in school circles* (16, 2%), *volunteer activities* with a frequency of 15, 2% and *activities of the Student Council* (12.1%).

Regarding the non-formal education activities they would like to carry out in the future with the group of children / class of students, the respondents listed: creative and recycling workshops, shadow day jobs, greening actions, outdoor lessons, activities and promotion campaigns for a healthy lifestyle, personal development courses, defense / survival skills training activities, reading activities / mobile library.

In the tenth section of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to specify the activities/programs of non-formal education that they consider to have a great impact on the school organization in terms of improving the skills of adaptation to daily life of preschoolers/

students. The non-formal activities/projects integrated in school practice, listed from the teachers' answers, through the approached topic can be distributed on the fields presented in the normative acts that regulate at national level the non-formal activities carried out in the school organization, as follows:

- **Artistic field:** "Intermezzo Spring" Festival - National visual arts contest, "Spring Festival", National contest "Winter Holidays", National contest "Eminescu - the legend of the Romanian soul";
- **Ecology and environmental protection field:** "Earth Day" - County Contest "Friends of Nature", "Green Parade", "Recycling Patrol", "Zero Waste" Schools;
- **Civic education, volunteering, charitable projects field:** National Strategy for Community Action, "Ambassadors of Europe", National Contest "My anti-drug message", National Contest "Online safety in your school!", National Creativity Contest "Domestos claims hygiene of 10 ", National Contest "Skilled Sanitarians", National Contest "To Grow Big and Strong! ", Christmas Fair," Tedi - School of Safety";
- **Sports and tourism field:** "Cycling Tour", "DHS Cup".
- **Technical field:** National robotics contest "Chindia Cup".
- **Scientific field:** National contest "Computer, game and education".

In the next section of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to specify the frequency of indirect non-formal activities used in school practice in support of training and education of preschoolers / students. According to the respondents' statements, the most frequently organized are *the meetings with parents* (24%), followed by *meetings of the Teachers' Council* (22%), the *Parents' School or the National Program "We educate like this!"* and *lectureships with parents*, in order to prevent, improve the undesirable behaviors of students in the school and social environment with the same frequency (19%). The rarest are organized *meetings with personalities*, representatives of some institutions, models for the student (16%).

The last aspect investigated concerns the programs/ workshops/training sessions/ mobility/transnational activities on the topic of non-formal education/management of integration and valorization of non-formal education in the school organization in which the respondents participated in the last five school years. According to the statements, 20 of the

respondents participated in at least one training program that addresses or integrates topics in the field of non-formal education, both accredited programs: *Non-formal education - Management and good practices, Non-formal education in a different school, Parent education for students* and approved programs: *Development of organizational culture through quality extracurricular educational activities, The role of non-formal activity in increasing the quality of the organization by obtaining successful extracurricular activities, Education for a healthy development of adolescents, Parent education "We educate like this!"* provided mainly by the Dâmbovița Teaching Staff House but also training activities within the Erasmus + program: *Creativity and Innovation in teaching and training, How to use music, art, ICT and sports in education, Quarter Mediation, Make it visible - STAR, Innovation through Creative Arts.*

5. CONCLUSIONS

A first conclusion of this study would be that all respondents correctly understand the meaning of "non-formal education", considered a form of education conducted outside the formal school curriculum. Even if they did not provide a definition at a very high academic level, teachers were able to correctly identify certain specific grades, advantages or limitations of non-formal education. The options for non-formal activities that can be carried out outside of formal education are based on the tradition of the school organization, the human and material resources available and also on the ease of their implementation. The most common non-formal activities organized are: cultural-artistic activities, visits and excursions, but teachers would like to implement other activities that contribute to the adoption of a healthy and balanced lifestyle, self-awareness and personal development, management career, the development of communication and social skills, the management of emotions and the development of fundamental life skills that facilitate the adaptation and integration of the student, the future citizen, to the rigors and dynamics of today's society.

The activities / programs of non-formal education that teachers consider to have a great impact on the school organization from the perspective of improving the ability to adapt to daily life of preschoolers / students, some are initiated by school organizations in partnership with various institutions in the community, local or national: County School Inspectorate, Environmental Guard, Public Health Directorate, County Library, Police Inspectorate, National Anti-Drug Agency and most are organized by NGOs working in the

field of education or various economic agents that promote healthy lifestyle, personal hygiene, cleanliness and environmental protection. It can be seen that the examples listed are lacking scientific and technical activities, although the first options of teachers regarding the advantages of implementing non-formal education in school practice is the training of new communication technologies.

There is a concern for teachers to acquire design skills and implement non-formal education, but certainly the degree of participation would be higher if the programs were free or supported by local community funds, weak community involvement in supporting non-formal activities being identified in teachers' opinions as a limit to the integration of non-formal education in school activity.

In carrying out the pedagogical research we started from the premise that non-formal activities can be integrated and capitalized in school practice. The non-formal activities, as it emerged from the analysis and interpretation of the teachers' opinions, successfully complete the knowledge and skills of the children / students acquired in the formal setting. In this sense, the methodological approach of research highlighted the idea that confirms the stated hypothesis, namely that the integration and valorisation of non-formal activities in school practice will increase the involvement of preschoolers / students, will develop their personality traits, and the process educational will be more effective and correlated with their needs and interests. Regardless of the variety of forms of non-formal activities integrated and valued in the school organization, the priority is to increase the quality of education, so that the main beneficiary is the student, able to integrate effectively into the society in which he lives, thus validating the second hypothesis.

Following the research, in order to streamline non-formal education activities / programs in our educational system, at the level of the school organization, we consider that it would be appropriate to achieve a real educational partnership with all educational actors (parents, local community, NGOs, businesses) within the initiatives aimed at the development of students, by carrying out non-formal activities but also the elaboration at the level of the school organization, of flexible, unitary, integrated non-formal education programs, with continuity from one school level to another, which can be permanently adapted to the needs of students and the school community, through an effective articulation of teachers' interventions;

In the future, we intend to research in depth the issue of non-formal activities in the school organization by achieving a double perspective, through studies on identifying the perspective of school counselors and students on non-formal activities implemented in the school organization.

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