



ETHICAL AND CIVIC VALUES THROUGH ETWINNING IN INITIAL TEACHER TRAINING: CURRICULUM DESIGN FOR PRIMARY EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Education in values is a core element of European policies and, thus, included in common legal educational reference documents and national curricula. The promotion of values and their teaching from early childhood education help address current pressing social and political issues, especially by building resilience to radicalization leading to conflictive situations, violent extremism, wars and armed conflicts or polarization. Intercultural Communicative Competence is essential to appreciate one's own culture and understand the others' culture avoiding prejudices and stereotypes, or negative judgment (usually connected to biases) and adjusting linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic elements during communication accordingly. eTwinning is a safe, free, European platform to develop transnational collaborative projects among two or more European centers putting real teachers and students from different countries in contact. Considering this, this paper shows the results of the research on interculturality and a transnational cooperative project under the umbrella of an eTwinning project between Sweden and Spain on how to teach democratic values in Primary Education among future teachers of such stage. First, student teachers had to reflect on how they understood each assigned democratic value and created a 45-minute lesson teaching such value for Primary Education and then completed a digital form to reflect and evaluate the project itself and their gains in terms of European, democratic values and interculturality awareness. The findings allow understanding the selected values (forgiveness, inclusion, kindness, love, respect and unselfishness) under each country's perspective and curricula and ascertain strengths and weaknesses of this kind of project and interculturality development.

Keywords: eTwinning, Interculturality, education in values, primary education, European, democratic values

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BAŞLANGIÇ ÖĞRETMEN EĞİTİMİ SÜRECİNDE ETWINNING YOLUYLA ETİK VE YURTTAŞLIK DEĞERLERİ. İLKÖĞRETİM İÇİN MÜFREDAT TASARIMI

ÖZET

Değerler eğitimi, Avrupa politikalarının temel bir unsurudur ve bu nedenle ortak yasal eğitim referans belgeleri ile ulusal müfredatlarda yer almaktadır. Değerlerin teşvik edilmesi ve erken çocukluk eğitiminden itibaren öğretilmesi, günümüzde aciliyet arz eden toplumsal ve siyasal sorunların ele alınmasına katkı sağlamaktadır. Özellikle çatışma ortamlarına, şiddet içeren aşırılıklara, savaşlara, silahlı çatışmalara veya toplumsal kutuplaşmaya yol açabilecek radikalleşmeye karşı direnç geliştirilmesi bu bağlamda önem taşımaktadır. Kültürlerarası İletişimsel Yeterlik, bireyin kendi kültürünü takdir etmesi ve diğer kültürleri anlaması açısından vazgeçilmezdir. Bu yeterlik, önyargı ve stereotiplerden ya da çoğunlukla bilişsel yanlılıklarla ilişkili olumsuz yargılardan kaçınmayı ve iletişim sürecinde dilsel, sosyodilbilimsel ve pragmatik unsurların duruma uygun biçimde düzenlenmesini içerir. eTwinning, iki veya daha fazla Avrupa eğitim kurumu arasında ulusötesi işbirliğine dayalı projelerin geliştirilmesini sağlayan, öğretmenleri ve öğrencileri farklı ülkelerden doğrudan bir araya getiren güvenli ve ücretsiz bir Avrupa platformudur. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışma, İsveç ve İspanya arasında yürütülen bir eTwinning projesi çerçevesinde gerçekleştirilen ulusötesi işbirliğine dayalı bir proje kapsamında kültürlerarasılık üzerine yapılan araştırmanın sonuçlarını sunmaktadır. Araştırma, ilköğretimde demokratik değerlerin nasıl öğretileceğine ilişkin olarak bu eğitim kademesine yönelik öğretmen adayları üzerinde odaklanmaktadır. İlk aşamada öğretmen adaylarından, kendilerine atanan her bir demokratik değeri nasıl anladıklarını yansıtmaları ve bu değeri ilköğretim düzeyinde öğretmeye yönelik 45 dakikalık bir ders planı hazırlamaları istenmiştir. Ardından, projenin kendisini ve Avrupa değerleri, demokratik değerler ile kültürlerarasılık farkındalığı açısından elde ettikleri kazanımları değerlendirmek amacıyla dijital bir form doldurmaları sağlanmıştır. Elde edilen bulgular, seçilen değerlerin (affetme, kapsayıcılık, nezaket, sevgi, saygı ve özgecilik) her iki ülkenin bakış açısı ve müfredatları doğrultusunda nasıl anlaşıldığını ortaya koymakta; ayrıca bu tür projelerin güçlü ve zayıf yönlerini ve kültürlerarasılık gelişimini değerlendirmeye imkân tanımaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: eTwinning, kültürlerarasılık, değerler eğitimi, ilköğretim, Avrupa ve demokratik değerler

1. INTRODUCTION

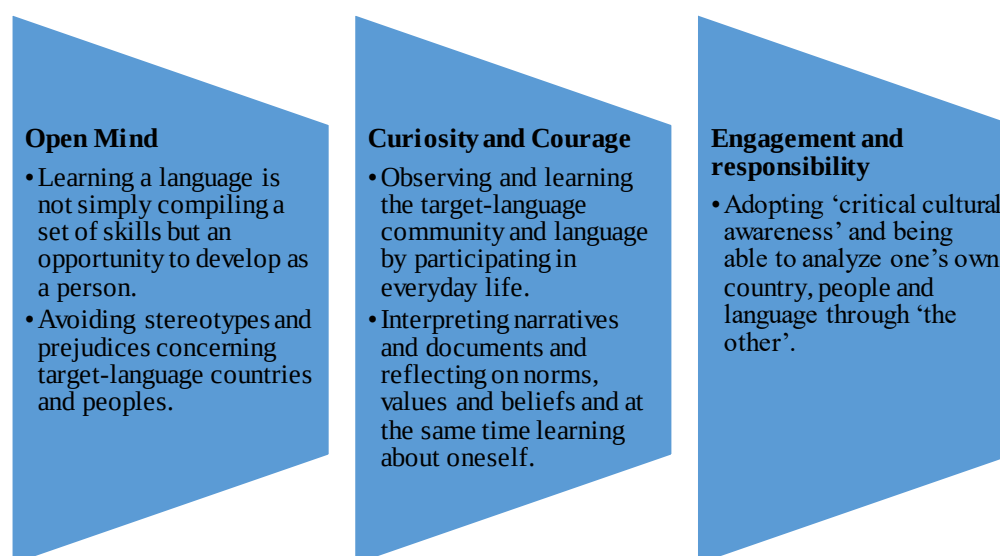
Education in values is of paramount importance; hence the Council of Europe (2021) published its *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture*, composed of three volumes: one offering the background to the origins and evaluation of the framework as well as the explanations of key concepts and theoretical assumptions accompanied by a glossary of key terms; the second one, describing the competences for democratic culture according to three levels of proficiency (basic, intermediate and advanced); and a third one, providing guidelines for implementing such framework in education systems, including orientations for curricula development, pedagogy planning and assessment design, among others. This framework “presents a comprehensive set of values, skills and attitudes for an appropriate participation in democratic societies” (Council of the European Union, 2018, p. 3), which is particularly relevant to address current pressing social and political issues, like building resilience to radicalization which leads to terrorism and violent extremism.

Considering the above, the aim of this paper is to show the development and results of the research on how to teach democratic values in Primary Education under the umbrella of an eTwinning

project as well as to examine students' gains and challenges during the project and its impact on their interculturality. This transnational project was carried out between University West in Sweden and the Faculty of Education in Albacete, University of Castilla-La Mancha in Spain among future teachers of Primary Education. Student teachers had to reflect on how they understood each assigned democratic value and created a 45-minute lesson teaching such value for Primary Education. Later, students had to complete a virtual form for the evaluation of the project and their reflection on interculturality by answering open-ended questions. This paper has the Social Research Ethics Committee of the University of Castilla-La Mancha's full approval under reference number CEIS-2024-25503.

Intercultural Communicative Competence (Byram, 2021: ix-x) is the "learners' ability to relate to and communicate with people who speak a different language and live in a different country" for which they must master three interconnected facets: an open mind, the curiosity and courage of the ethnographer, and the engagement and responsibility of the citizen. Figure 1 clarifies the implications of each of these facets.

Illustration 1. Implications Of the Three Facets of Intercultural Communicative Competence



This study starts with a review of the legal framework, including the European documents and the curricula of both countries, and how they are embedded in the transnational eTwinning project in which the research took place. The methods section follows. First, the research model, combining action research and mixed methods (through an online form and open-ended questions and students' self-reflections on TwinSpace), is explained; and then, the sample and instruments are defined. The findings are later presented, and the discussion and conclusion, along with the final recommendations and limitations of the study bring this paper to an end.

2. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

As referred in the introduction, democratic values are a priority in education for the European Union. The Council Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning (2018) describes a set of competences that promote the common values for the functioning of European societies. In fact, the abovementioned *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture* (2018) comprises a set of values, attitudes, skills and knowledge and critical understanding which form such competences and are needed in a culture of democracy and intercultural dialogue. These are also endorsed by United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals.

At a national level, Spanish non-university education is established by the Organic Act 3/2020 modifying Organic Act 2/2006 of Education, in Spanish *Ley Orgánica 3/2020, de 29 de diciembre, por la que se modifica la Ley Orgánica 2/2006, de 3 de mayo, de Educación*. For it, education is the best way for society to transmit its values. Education must be also based on acquiring knowledge and competence to develop the necessary values for common, democratic citizenship. In fact, in the third cycle of Primary Education (11-12 years old), there is an area called Education in Civic and Ethical Values, which especially deals with the knowledge and respect of Human and Infant Rights, acknowledged in the Spanish Constitution; education for sustainable development and world citizenship; the social function of taxes and tax justice; equality; respect for diversity as a value; critical thinking; peace and no violence culture; and respecting the environment and animals. Therefore, education in values, promoting common values, and emotions are considered pillars of democracy. Then, each of the 17 regions of Spain must comply with their own decrees, since the competence of education is delegated to each Autonomous Community. This study was done in Albacete, Castilla-La Mancha, Spain; thus, the *Decreto 81/2022* applies. This follows the national aim of contributing to pupils' physical, affective, social, cognitive and artistic development as well as education in values for coexistence, with a close collaboration with families. For that, educational counselling, tutoring action and education in emotions and values, promoting meaningful learning, autonomy and reflection, are essential. Moreover, comparing the national law to previous versions, the general principles established are gender equality, children's rights, inclusion and equity, digitalization and sustainability. And a new methodology, based on learning scenarios, cross-curricular projects, co-teaching and formative assessment is proposed. Finally, following the national act, new content, such as communication focusing on mediation, plurilingualism and interculturality are added. In short, the educational goals are based on sustainable development goals, cooperative learning, sexual-affective education, STEAM, real-world contexts, personalization and individualization, and creativity.

In Sweden, compulsory school education shall empower pupils to develop their ability to seek knowledge independently; foster pupils' personal development, for them to make active life choices; promote well-rounded contacts and social interaction; and provide a good foundation for active participation in civic life and lifelong learning. Swedish Primary Education (or *grundskolan*) is also

ruled by two main frameworks. First, the Swedish Education Act, *Skollag* 2010:800 entrenches human rights as both a basis for education and as an element that is to be learned and adopted through education. This act does not only imply the active promotion of human rights and prevention of any form of offensive treatment (EASNIE, 2023) but also resting education on democratic principles from a value-oriented perspective. And second, *Nya kurs- och läroplaner* (Lgr22) is the mainstream curriculum for compulsory schools, pre-school classes and recreation centers. In its first chapter, this document explicitly states that the national school system is based on democratic foundations; therefore, schools must impart and establish respect for human rights, actively promote democratic values—which must be not only taught but experienced in daily school life through pupils’ decision-making processes, open discussion and critical thinking and promoting an environment of dialogue, pluralism and respect for differing views—, uphold the equal value of all people, support gender equality, support inclusion and diversity, and encourage solidarity between people by law as established in the curriculum. All this aligns with core European values like human dignity, equality and democracy.

Both curricula advocate for active learning methodologies, in which pupils learn through competences to apply their knowledge with creativity and critical thinking and fostering reflective processes. Regarding languages, interculturality and mediation are prioritized. And in bilingual education programs, the implementation of strategies and techniques like scaffolding and CLIL is recommended. In fact, the 4Cs of CLIL should go beyond and towards pluriliteracies. This means that students should be able to apply any knowledge and competence acquired in any language, in a way that their learning processes feed back in each language and so the connections between communication, content, cognition and culture are more tangible (Meyer et al., 2015).

Moreover, one of university missions is internationalization, which can be done through different measures like virtual exchange, collaborative online international learning (COIL) and other actions fostering internationalization at home or transnational priorities. The European initiative of eTwinning is perfect for that, since it is a free, safe platform allowing for the creation and searching of projects to be carried out between two or more countries around any topic and any age the founders wish and in any of the European languages.

Considering the above, the common values chosen to be developed in this transnational project were forgiveness, inclusion, kindness, love, respect, and unselfishness. It must be noted that, in the teaching of values, these should not be understood as moral commandments, but translated into legally observable conduct; and thus, be defined rationally in terms of how people treat one another, operationalized through rights, obligations, and practices; and separated from religious or doctrinal meaning to guarantee non-denominational teaching and learning, at least in state schooling.

3. METHODS

This section starts with the research model employed in the paper, focused on action research and a mixed methods approach. An explanation of how dimensions were operationalized in the data

collection process is also offered. Then, the participants section starts by setting the context of the project to move on to the demographic information of the population comprising the sample of the study.

3.1. Research Model

Action research is a legitimate and a valuable form of research (Mertler, 2019, p. 5) as it engages teachers “in the praxis of educational reform” and in the improvement of the teaching-learning process (Bersabal Barcelona, 2020, p. 517); in fact, quality action research also helps to feed back the connection between theory and practice in the educational field. This methodology is also perfect to improve one’s performance, which is extensive to any group or organization (Hien, 2009).

This paper employed action research and a mixed methods approach in which the qualitative data were collected in two ways, through open-ended questions in a survey and through the students’ reflections on their posts on the project TwinSpace. This information was complemented through quantitative data gathered through a virtual form, which complied with the required research ethical standards attested by the abovementioned approval from the ethics committee. Thus, students participated anonymously and voluntarily in this study after giving their consent.

In order to classify students’ answers both to obtain qualitative and quantitative findings, first an individual thematic analysis and taxonomy, following the questionnaire’s questions, was done by each researcher. The part of the questionnaire for the evaluation of the project consisted of the following 12 questions:

1. Did you enjoy working with this eTwinning project?
2. Did you like the topic on values?
3. Did you meet any challenges during your collaboration?
4. Was it easy/difficult to understand each other’s English?
5. Did the 3 Zoom-meetings help you to proceed with your group work?
6. What were the pros and cons in this eTwinning project?
7. What did you personally gain from this experience?
8. Are you going to use eTwinning in your own future career?
9. What benefits do you think eTwinning has both at university and in Primary Education?
10. Have you learnt something new about your culture when comparing yourself with the other students?
11. Have you found anything surprising, either about your/their culture and language, in this project?
12. Do you know what mediation is? If so, can you name an example you found during your collaboration?

Then, the researchers’ thematic categorization was contrasted and triangulated with a third expert. Finally, themes were selected to respond to the questionnaire’s questions considering three axes: the project and eTwinning initiative, their gains regarding intercultural communicative competence, and finally education in values.

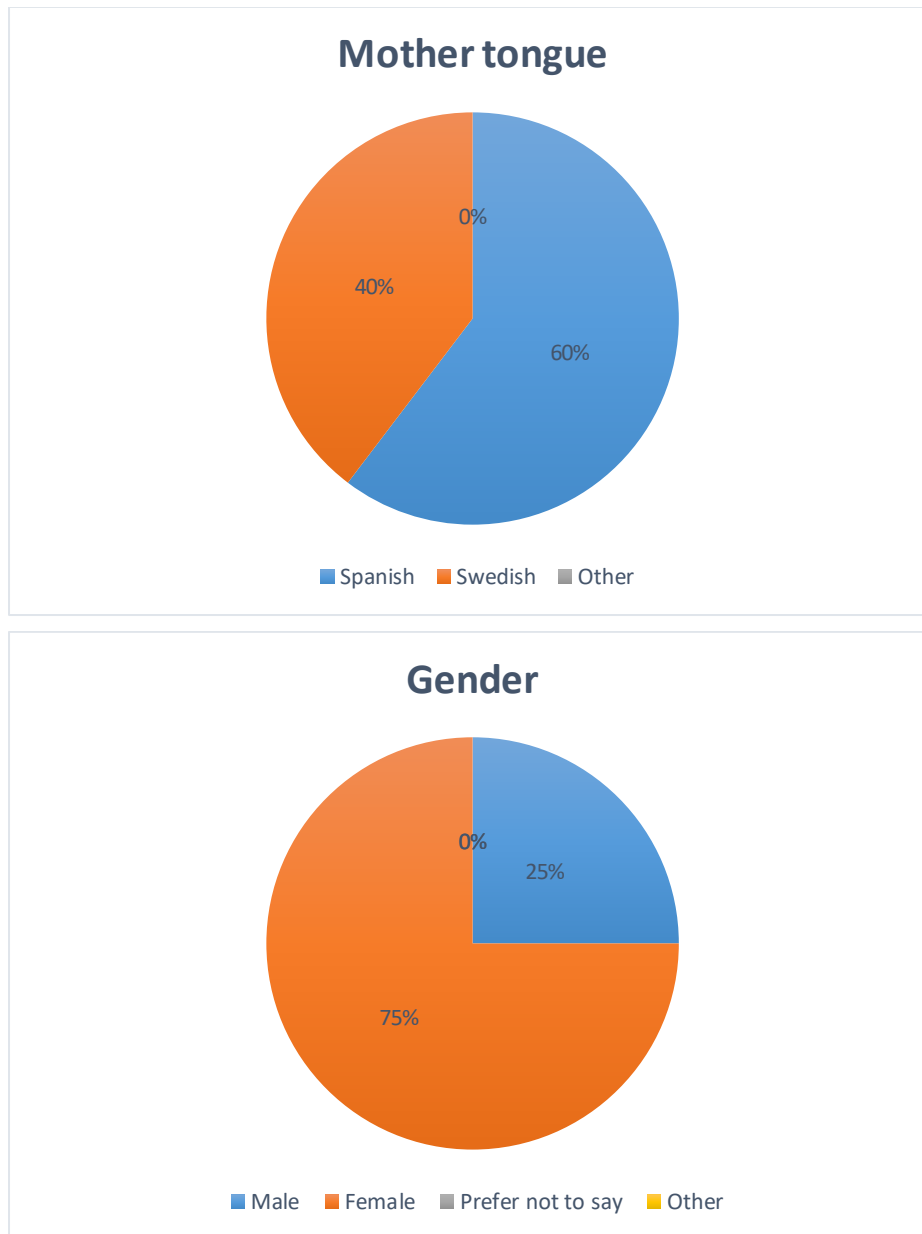
Moreover, the findings are presented in two forms: first, with a quantitative summary table; and second, through a thematic analysis of the open-ended responses for which standard qualitative research procedures as defined by Braun and Clarke (2021)—comprising the six phases of familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report—were followed.

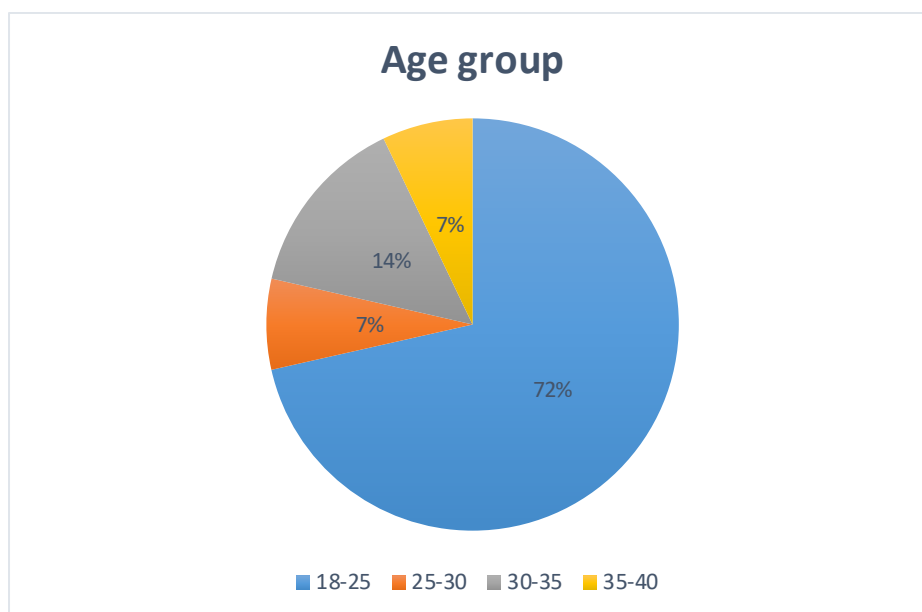
3.2. Participants

eTwinning is a safe and free European initiative embedded into European School Education Platform (known as ESEP) in which centers of two or more countries can create collaborative online projects on any topic, in any European language and at zero cost. After two institutions found the project and national support organizations approve it, a virtual space called TwinSpace is automatically created for students and teachers to publish materials, share posts and create pages, among others.

The eTwinning project presented in this paper was entitled *Spain and Sweden: Let's share our values!*, and it was compulsory for both the Spanish and the Swedish students. There were 28 Spanish students (10 male and 18 female) and 12 Swedish students (4 male and 8 female); yielding a total of 40 students within the project. For ethical reasons, participation must be voluntary and never linked to the evaluation of the course, and preferably questionnaires must be done outside class time. For that reason, only 28 responses to the virtual form were finally obtained. From them, 60.7% were Spanish and 39.3% were Swedish and 75% were female and 25% male. Regarding age, 71.4% were between 18 and 25; 7.1% were between 25 and 30; 14.3% were between 30 and 35; and 7.1% between 35 and 40. The following graphs show all participants' mother tongues, genders and age groups:

Illustration 2. Demographic Information Of Research Participants





4. FINDINGS

This section includes the results of the project both collected during students' productions and reflections of each task and their completion of the virtual form, focused on evaluating the eTwinning project and reflecting on their Intercultural Communicative Competence (Byram, 2021) and interculturality awareness. It must be also noted that the discussion of the results concerning the appraisal of each value (forgiveness, inclusion, kindness, love, respect and unselfishness) will be included in section 5. Now the results retrieved in the virtual form of the project are presented in both quantitative and qualitative terms. First, Table 1 shows the quantitative results considering the analytical categories of 'positive, negative, mixed, variable and moderate', since the open-ended or semi-open-ended responses of the questionnaire limit strict statistical aggregation, classified by the following dimensions.

Table 1. Analytical Interpretations of Results

Dimension	Predominant Trend	Students' Quotes	Number of Students/ Answers
Overall satisfaction with the project	Mostly positive	"Good idea and it was a good way to exercise speaking and hearing capabilities/intelligibility". "I enjoyed having contact with people of other country (sic)". "It was an interesting project that allowed sharing ideas and enriched us". "I enjoyed a lot because I like having friends from other countries, practice English and know more about cultures". "It [the project] has been instructive". "Working with people of other countries is always interesting, as you are able to learn about different cultures".	Enjoyed working with eTwinning: Yes: 17 Mixed-feelings, but focusing on the positive side: 4 No: 7

		Many no answers resorted to the same reason: "collaboration was lacking and the time was not enough for the tasks as we had other obligations".	
Interest in values-based topic	Positive	"Yes, it has been interesting to work with". "Yes, it is interesting to see how other countries view the curriculum". "Yes, I think that values are essential, not only for teaching them to children, but to grow as individuals. Values are the ones that allow us to evolve as a society". "Yes, I would have liked them to be related to interculturality". "Yes, but the topic did not help us in sharing cultural similarities/differences". "No, it was good idea, but it is difficult to work on". "No, I think there are several better topics than values to work with foreign people".	Interested in the topic of values: Yes: 23 Yes and connected to others: 3, interculturality (2), clearer instructions (1) No: 2, not much connection to curriculum (1), other better topics (1)
Challenges during collaboration	Mixed	"The main difficulty was finding time to work together". "We didn't have time to talk properly". "People were not really engaged in the project so sometimes I had to keep insisting". "We are used to different communication channels". "Connection failed, but we switched platforms and that worked very fine". "It was unclear what we were supposed to do in the tasks". "The most challenging part was the coordination and communication at first". "No, everything worked correctly".	Challenges during collaboration: None reported: 7 Simply yes: 2 Main ones³: -Finding time: 5 -Lack of collaboration: 3 -Communication problems: 4 -Decision-making problems: 2 -Lack of commitment: 2 -Means of communication: 2 -Confusion with instructions: 2 -Connection and internet problems: 4
Ease of communication in English	Mixed	"We all had a good enough English level" "It was easy, I think we understand each other well". "Sometimes we had to repeat what we said but we didn't have any serious trouble". "Some was easy to talk to some more difficult". "Easy. At least one in the group spoke clear English". "We both have accents, so it was good to analyze speech as a task before we got introduced for this project". "Easy most part of the time". "That was the easiest part of the project". "I suppose it will always depend, but with the people I have worked, we could understand each other well".	Understanding each other's English: Easy: 11 Good level of English: 2 Understandable: 2 No serious trouble: 1 Sometimes difficult: 5 Only with some: 4 Different accents, but fine: 3

³ This is a summary of the main problems reported by students, but numbers do not correspond to one student only. Some students reported several problems at the same time. Thus, challenges have been categorized and counted as they were mentioned, not per student.

Usefulness of synchronous meetings	Mostly positive	“Yes, we mainly organized through these calls”. “Yes, but we would have needed more; we couldn’t find a time that fit all outside those three meetings”. “I wanted more scheduled time”. “It would have been better if everyone come”. “It was helpful to a start then we switch platform”. “It was good to meet and do a check”. “Sometimes not too much [helpful], it was a little bit difficult because of the connection of the internet”. “They were helpful but not always easy to go through with”. “The meetings were great to know each other’s faces”. “Yes, but sometimes we had to organize everything since they had problems getting in at agreed time”. “More meetings would have been good”.	Synchronous collaboration inside class time: Helpful: 8 Helpful, but more meetings were needed: 2 Helpful, but not everyone attended: 2 Helpful, but needed to switch platform: 3 Helpful, but extra time for autonomous work required: 1 Kind of helpful: 4 Connection problems: 2 Problems with agreeing time to collaborate: 2 Too few meetings: 1 Difficult to agree with partners: 3
Future use of eTwinning	Highly variable	“I think it could be a fun and educational experience”. “I have been inspired to do some kind of work with a class form another school or another country”. “I feel like it [eTwinning] can give students a huge motivation boost”. “Yes, I maybe use eTwinning in my future classes as a teacher to work with students from other countries, to have new friends, to know more about the culture and the country and to continue talking in English with other students in other parts of the world”. “I find it [eTwinning] enriching for future students”. “If I had the chance, of course, I think that it [eTwinning] is a really useful and enriching tool for teachers and students, but I think that its organization requires a lot of effort”. “I can definitely imagine it, but I need a lot of support”. “If the platform improves and becomes more user-friendly, I will probably do [use eTwinning]”. “I’m uncertain of this at this time. Perhaps when I am more comfortable and experienced in my teacher role”. “Probably not. The homepage was very slow, did not work properly, not friendly to navigate”.	Use of eTwinning in their future career: Yes: 5 Yes, with support: 1 Probably: 9 Only if it becomes more user-friendly: 2 When I become a more comfortable and experienced teacher: 1 Not sure: 3 Not think so: 4 No: 2
Intercultural learning (own culture)	Moderate	“Some things about the curriculum” “The chance to compare and talk about our cultures”. “The status of a teacher”. “It is pretty much the same values”. “I’ve learnt about their curriculum and some strategies, like APE: working alone (A), then in pairs (P), and finally with everyone (E)”.	Learning about the own culture: Nothing: 4 Yes: -Curriculum and methodology: 5 -Comparing cultures: 3

Intercultural surprise (other cultures)	Low–moderate	“The values we worked with are quite similar”. “There are both similarities and differences in school culture”. “Some things are more prioritized in our country than in others”. “I think we share some main values due to the fact that we are both European countries”. “Yes, we compared the different educative systems”.	-Teachers’ role: 1 -Same values: 3 -Similarities and differences: 3 -Countries’ priorities: 1 -Habits and customs. 5 -Simply yes: 3
		“The educational system works differently”. “I was very familiar with Spanish L1s speaking English due to my previous work”. “Aspects of the curriculum”. “Speaking very fast in English with an accent is sometimes hard to hear, but they really made themselves understood”. “They have different timetables”. “We pronounce a lot of English words very differently”. “Our different insights in our culture and theirs”. “I found that Spain is very focused on including everyone and providing all the best possible education regardless (sic) their culture, beliefs, socioeconomic situation, etc.”. “Maybe there are applications that we use every day, and they don’t know about them”. “In general, it always was quite similar to our culture”.	Surprising elements about cultures and languages: No: 3 Not really: 4 Yes: -Simply yes: 2 -Education systems. 7 -Familiarity due to personal experience: 2 -English accents: 3 -Timetables: 3 -Different insights in cultures: 2 -Inclusion: 1 -Use of apps: 1

Table 2. Descriptive Interpretations of Quantitative Results

Dimension	Predominant Trend	Evidence From Data	Interpretation
Overall satisfaction with the project	Mostly positive	Majority of responses express enjoyment or conditional approval	Students generally valued the experience
Interest in values-based topic	Positive	Few negative remarks; topic perceived as relevant	Topic aligned with educational expectations
Challenges during collaboration	Mixed	Frequent mentions of coordination issues, time management and platform difficulties	Collaboration across contexts created friction
Ease of communication in English	Mixed	Some report difficulty (accent, speed), many others report successful understanding	Language competence varied but communication was generally achieved
Usefulness of synchronous meetings	Mostly positive	Meetings mentioned as necessary but sometimes insufficient	Synchronous interaction supported progress but did not fully solve issues
Future use of eTwinning	Highly variable	Responses range from rejection to conditional acceptance	Strong dependence on usability and prior experience
Intercultural learning (own culture)	Moderate	Many “yes, but limited” responses	Awareness increased but depth varied
Intercultural surprise (other cultures)	Low–moderate	Many “no” responses; some specific insights	Perceived cultural proximity (European context) reduces surprise

These quantitative analyses, as explained in Tables 1 and 2, assist in the categorization of qualitative data and help to ascertain students’ gains in the three areas examined (eTwinning projects, ICC and education in values). Now the results of the qualitative analysis examined through inductive thematic analysis are presented. The steps to carry out this enterprise were familiarization, initial coding,

theme construction and review and refinement. In order to triangulate results and ensure their validity, the coding and classification was done and reviewed by three experts. Six themes were identified: intercultural awareness with limited depth, educational system comparison as a core learning outcome, collaboration challenges and structural constraints, communication in English as both barrier and enabler, perceived value as opposed to practical limitations of eTwinning, and limited understanding of mediation. A detailed explanation of each theme, including a description based on students' answers; representative patterns illustrated by students' own quotes marked within quotation marks in the table; and a possible interpretation of these results are offered in Table 3.

Table 3. Qualitative Results

Theme	Description	Representative Patterns	Interpretation
Intercultural awareness with limited depth	Increased awareness of differences (e.g., curriculum, schedules), but frequent emphasis on similarities rather than deep intercultural reflection	“Values are quite similar”. “Both European countries”. Observations focused on surface-level differences: Timetables, teacher status and educational systems	Development of ICC is present but remains at a descriptive/comparative level, not fully critical or transformative
Educational system comparison as a core learning outcome	A dominant learning outcome is the comparison of pedagogical practices and curricula	Sub-themes: -Teaching strategies (e.g., APE method) -Inclusion policies -Classroom organization (e.g., circle seating, no homework)	Strong alignment with professional identity development as future teachers, which indicates applied intercultural learning, not just cultural curiosity
Collaboration challenges and structural constraints	Frequently reported organizational and technological difficulties. Key issues: -Unequal participation -Platform usability (eTwinning) -Coordination problems between groups -Lack of clarity in task distribution	“Chaotic and problematic”. “Spanish students handled submissions”. “We did our parts” (fragmented collaboration). “It seemed we received different directions”.	Collaboration was functional but not fully integrated, which implies a need for stronger scaffolding and task design
Communication in English as both barrier and enabler	English functioned as a <i>lingua franca</i> with variable success	Observed issues: -Accent comprehension difficulties. -Speed of speech. -Uneven proficiency levels. Good note: Students consistently report that communication was ultimately achieved. “I had to use my English which has developed me as a person to dare to speak”. “I developed my English; I had to find words when I got stuck and explain in other ways which made me gain a higher vocabulary (sic)”.	Confirmed development of strategic competence (key component of ICC). Communication challenges contributed positively to learning

		"I had the chance to practice English". "I gained better pronunciation and some cool information about the other country".	
Perceived value as opposed to practical limitations of eTwinning	Students' distinctions between conceptual value (positive) and practical implementation (problematic)	Response spectrum: -Positive: motivation, international collaboration, authentic communication. Students' quotes: "I got to use my English for real, which is good for developing and maintaining it". "I was able to solve problems". "It [the project] made me feel more fluent in English". "I recommend this experience for everybody because it is a good experience to have more friends, to know about other cultures and countries and for practicing another language". "I had never had the chance to experience and understand differences. Thanks to this experience, I was able to keep first contact with different education systems and their values". "I learn social skills". "It [the project] was culturally enriching". -Negative: usability, access limitations, lack of training Students' quotes: "We need to work on patience". "I learnt the importance of planning and having a clear structure before starting a project with another group of people". "I feel that I had to learn to take up a bigger place in a group".	Adoption and ultimately full integration depend on: digital competence, institutional support and platform usability
Limited understanding of mediation	Responses to mediation show: partial understanding (conflict resolution and communication support) and confusion or lack of knowledge	Some define mediation correctly (facilitating communication). Students' quotes: "We had to translate some parts of the curriculum to	Revealed insufficient explicit instruction on mediation as a CEFR construct, constituting an important gap in ICC-related training

compare with ours and then discuss about it”.

“Mediating is providing other people with information they might be interested in but is unknown to them. We had to mediate to reach a common definition for our topic”.

“Mediate a solution in meeting half way, making an adaptation of the original exercise to make both parties happy”.

“[Mediating is] to explain something you are seeing to someone who doesn’t know what it is about”.

“Mediation means to come to a solution”.

“It is the process by which we solve conflicts through dialogue and understanding”.

Others: “I don’t understand the question”.

“Not sure”.

“I know what it is, but I cannot think of examples”.

“I haven’t worked with mediation”.

“I don’t find any example of mediation”.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

After assessing students’ productions and reflections, the following conclusions can be drawn regarding each selected value; that is, forgiveness, inclusion, kindness, love, respect and unselfishness. First, forgiveness is neither mentioned in the Spanish nor Swedish curricula. However, both legal frameworks do mention taking measures against degrading treatment, being accountable and responsible and taking an active role within society, including cases of bullying. On the part of teachers and centers, safe and orderly learning environments should be provided. Spanish education law emphasizes the peaceful resolution of conflicts, which in both countries should be addressed through restorative and preventive practices as opposed to moral forgiveness as a virtue. The focus, then, lies on repairing relationships and restoring trust and so forgiveness must be a personal, voluntary achievement reflecting the principle of respect for individual integrity. Moreover, the CEFR (2020) includes mediation as one key mode of communication, which should be worked on and assessed in any subject regarding the teaching and learning of a foreign language. Despite this, some students did not know what mediation was or could not find examples. It is relevant to include mediation in teacher training, since it is key for communication and not only in a foreign language, but also in one’s mother tongue. Furthermore, it is

of paramount importance to assist in reducing polarization and in avoiding perpetuating prejudices and stereotypes; thus, the explicit teaching of mediation contributes to Intercultural Communicative Competence directly.

Second, according to both countries'—Spanish and Swedish—legal frameworks, inclusion is neither optional nor aspirational, but a legal obligation to structure school life so that all pupils belong in a way they are not just integrated into a dominant norm. In fact, in Spain, the law explicitly mentions that lessons must follow the Universal Design for Learning (CAST, 2026). Moreover, considering education in values and citizenship, exclusion undermines pupils' right to participate in shared decision-making; thus, inclusion is a condition for democracy—and so a democratic need—and not just a supplementary social aim.

Third, while kindness is not explicitly mentioned in legal regulations, school activities must foster pupil wellbeing and individual development along with the promotion of empathy, understanding and solidarity. Therefore, kindness must not be understood emotionally, but functionally and institutionally. That is, teachers are expected to master professional care and attentiveness, respectful interaction and the prevention of harm, humiliation and any kind of bullying within their professional skills.

Fourth, while the concept of love is absent from both countries' legal documents, both curricula advocate for non-denominational schooling, at least in state education centers, which must be also based on objectivity and impartiality. Love is thus transformed into professional care,—not emotional attachment—which is shown through commitment to pupils' development and protection of dignity as teachers' legally regulated duties.

Fifth, respect is one of the clearest and most explicit values both in Spanish and Swedish education law. Among others, schools must impart respect for human rights and individual differences, uphold the equal value of all people and protect individual freedom and integrity. Respect is the foundational value from which other values derive and it is reflected in the recognition of each pupil as a rights-bearing individual, the acceptance of diversity of opinions, identities and backgrounds; and the creation of conditions for pupils to form their own standpoints and to foster their critical thinking. Respect is both ethical and constitutional and the best catalyst for democracy.

Finally, unselfishness is depicted through the explicit mentioning of solidarity among citizens. Pupils are urged both to learn to take responsibility for shared environments and common decisions, especially connected to mediation in English learning settings; and participate actively in democratic processes. While unselfishness is not explicitly named in legal texts, it is understood as the capacity to act with regard for the common good, the willingness to engage in collective processes over prioritizing individual advantage—hence the importance of cooperative work and not just collaboration—, and the acceptance of shared responsibility within a community (again tapping to two elements of cooperation: individual accountability and positive interdependence). It is important to note that education law does not require self-sacrifice, but rather mutual responsibility within a democratic, *glocal* society.

In short, inclusion and respect are explicit legal mandates; kindness and unselfishness are translated into teachers' professional duties and citizens' democratic active participation; and forgiveness and love are deliberately avoided as normative demands both to safeguard autonomy and objectivity and non-denominational education. However, all the six are intended not as moral virtues imposed on pupils, but democratic competencies cultivated through law-regulated practice. In fact, in both countries, values should be taught implicitly through practice, daily interaction, participatory pedagogy and in a cross-curricular way. Teachers should interpret values professionally and pragmatically and not morally or doctrinally. Inclusion, kindness and unselfishness are framed as necessary conditions for democratic interaction; forgiveness and love are not normative demands but reframed as relational repair and professional care; and finally, respect acts as the central, legally grounded value which must guide all others.

Regarding Byram's Intercultural Communicative Competence, the project revealed students' positive attitudes, a moderate impact on knowledge, mixed feelings on communication strategies and skills and limited critical cultural awareness. And concerning the evaluation of the project itself, friction points included platform usability, coordination issues and unequal participation. Thus, considering both the quantitative and qualitative findings of the evaluation of the project and students' intercultural awareness, we could claim that this kind of projects yields both positive outcomes and aspects to improve. On the one hand, some strengths deduced from the integrated interpretation of results mentioned in the previous section are students' positive perceptions of intercultural, transnational collaboration; the development of pedagogical awareness; and the authentic use of English for a real purpose. On the other hand, some of the weaknesses include a superficial intercultural reflection due to the short time of the interaction and lack of time for extensive exchange and reflection, some structural or organizational issues—not only related to intercultural differences but also to a lack of time and feeling of overload when tasks are different from typical academic assignments—and limited understanding of mediation. Thus, while students reported high satisfaction and positive engagement, which shows the motivational impact on transnational projects, communication difficulties—considering English as a barrier at times and as an enabler at others—reveals the necessity to develop strategic competence. Moreover, cooperation issues arose within groups, which shows structural constraints that must be addressed through better instructional design.

Finally, this project also aligned with the CEFR, and three modes of communication and two competences were especially stood out by students. First, reception—that is, understanding different accents and communication styles—was prioritized and valued positively as well as interaction reflected in managing communication in English as a *lingua franca*. On the contrary, mediation has been revealed as underdeveloped, since there was limited evidence of facilitating understanding between participants. Regarding competences, two were highlighted: pluricultural, through the awareness of similarities and differences between cultures; and strategic, overcoming communication breakdowns.

6. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Apart from the weaknesses described in the previous section, the study presents some limitations. First of all, the limited practice both in terms of the fact that students had to design just a 45-minute lesson and that the project basically lasted for three months; thus, they had a short-time intercultural exchange and just restricted to both European countries. Moreover, the sample was also narrow, since only 28 responses were collected. The nature of the questionnaire, with open-ended or semi-open-ended questions, also constrained statistical aggregation. While the data provide revealing insights from students' experiences on the eTwinning platform, Intercultural Communicative Competence and education in values, longer studies—with extended intercultural exchanges—and bigger samples, including more countries, would help to contribute to generalizing these findings.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the abovementioned findings, from the presented evidence four recommendations can be deduced: one, a need to enhance scaffolding of intercultural reflection that allows moving from comparison to critical reflection; two, the necessity to explicitly teach mediation as established by the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2020) through guided tasks and examples; three, a need to improve the design of tasks by stating clear roles, instructions and deadlines and fostering positive interdependence between groups and stressing the importance of cooperation not just in class but for real life; and four, providing more technical and pedagogical training in eTwinning beyond simple one-day seminars.

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