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DOCTORAL SCHOOL „EDUCATION, REFLECTION,
DEVELOPMENT”**

***ENSURING SCHOOL SUCCESS AND LIFE
SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AMONG STUDENTS OF
DIFFERENT ETHNICITIES IN HIGH SCHOOL
AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN CARAȘ-
SEVERIN***

SUMMARY

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Summary of PhD thesis entitled

ENSURING SCHOOL SUCCESS AND LIFE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AMONG STUDENTS OF DIFFERENT ETHNICITIES IN HIGH SCHOOL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN CARAȘ-SEVERIN

Key words: life skills, school success, interethnic exchanges, Caraș-Severin education, interculturalsim, competency-based projects, equity

The motivation beyond choosing the topic

The contemporary society is characterized by complex transformations, a rapid pace of change, global interconnectedness, and heightened cultural diversity, which require profound adaptations within the educational system. In such a “knowledge society,” young people can no longer be prepared solely through the accumulation of knowledge and technical skills; instead, the development of non-cognitive competences, or LifeComp, becomes essential for socio-emotional and academic validation, autonomy, and success in personal and professional life. Phenomena such as globalization, migration, and accelerated digitalization require schools to educate students who are capable of adaptability, resilience, intercultural collaboration, and critical thinking-competences that are essential in the context of the modern labor market and of autonomous and responsible living.

Upper secondary education represents a crucial stage in the identity, cognitive, and emotional development of adolescents, during which schools must integrate differentiated, student-centered formative approaches that promote active learning, applied projects, and life skills. Particularly in multicultural contexts, the lack of structural projects that foster cohesion, equity, and intercultural integration constitutes a vulnerability of the Romanian educational system. This reality is further intensified by recent migration processes and the historical

diversity of minority groups, a phenomenon observed especially in western Romania, including Caraş-Severin County, where upper secondary schools and vocational institutions are characterized by a deeply multiethnic student population.

The relevance of the present research arises from the absence of a locally applicable reference framework that integrates the principles of intercultural learning and competence-based, project-centered approaches that have been tested and validated in international contexts. Such frameworks could equip teachers and school leaders with tools for preventing discrimination, promoting tolerance, and fostering inclusive educational environments, thereby supporting students' integration and adaptation to contemporary educational and social demands.

The intervention program "From Awareness to Relevant Outcomes and Competences in an Inclusive School Environment," implemented in a multicultural upper secondary school in Caraş-Severin County, has as its central aim the promotion of academic success and the development of life skills among students from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Grounded in project-based learning, the program seeks to support the holistic development of adolescents and to strengthen school cohesion by intensifying interethnic interactions and actively engaging students in projects with real-world relevance. Through this approach, the research addresses a pressing local need and aligns educational practices in Caraş-Severin with international standards, promoting integration, interculturality, and equity in multiethnic upper secondary and vocational education.

In brief, this study aims to address questions such as:

- How can students from diverse ethnic backgrounds achieve school success?
- How can we equip students from different ethnic backgrounds with the skills necessary for a high-quality life?
- How can the principles of intercultural learning be integrated into school life?
- Why are competency-based projects necessary?

Structure of the thesis:

The doctoral thesis, entitled *Ensuring Academic Success and the Development of Life Skills among Students of Different Ethnic Backgrounds in Upper Secondary and Vocational*

Education in Caraş-Severin County, is structured into two sections of balanced length: the section devoted to theoretical concepts (Chapters I–IV) and the section dedicated to the experimental research approach (Chapters V–VIII). These sections are preceded by the introductory part, and the thesis concludes with the Bibliography and Appendices.

CHAPTER I: THE CONCEPT OF SCHOOL SUCCESS, THE DIMENSIONS OF SCHOOL SUCCESS AT THE HIGH SCHOOL AND VOCATIONAL LEVEL

The concept of school success is analyzed as a complex, multidimensional construct situated at the intersection of psychological, pedagogical, social, and cultural factors. School success significantly transcends the sphere of quantifiable academic outcomes, being defined not only through performance, grades, or superior academic achievement, but also through students' capacity for school adjustment, emotional balance, motivation, social integration, and harmonious personality development.

The specialized literature highlights a significant conceptual evolution of this notion, shifting from a performance-centered academic perspective to a holistic one oriented toward the development of life competences. Thus, Bontaş defines school success as the optimal expression of students' performance, determined by the level of theoretical and practical preparation, while North American scholars such as Garbarino emphasize academic excellence understood as mastery of the curriculum and cognitive development. Contemporary perspectives extend this approach by incorporating dimensions such as emotional intelligence, self-regulation capacity, critical thinking, resilience, and empowerment. School success is correlated with the development of key competences necessary for socio-professional integration and with adaptation to the demands of a society shaped by globalization and accelerated technological change. Within this framework, the concept is redefined as a dynamic, relational, and contextualized process that entails aligning students' performance with their individual potential, institutional requirements, and the emerging needs of the socio-cultural environment. School success is thus conceptualized as an integrative construct that brings together cognitive, emotional, and socio-cultural competences, indispensable for a high-quality personal and social life.

The theoretical analysis of school success is complemented by the presentation of contemporary educational paradigms that contribute significantly to understanding and facilitating this process. Among these, growth mindset, empowerment theory, connectivism,

and intercultural learning stand out, all of which have increased relevance in multicultural educational contexts.

The growth mindset (Chapter I.2.1), formulated by Carol Dweck, represents one of the most influential contemporary theories regarding school success. It is grounded in the idea of the malleability of intelligence and individual abilities, asserting that cognitive, social, and emotional competences can be developed through sustained effort, effective strategies, and continuous learning.

Empirical studies demonstrate that adopting a growth mindset is associated with higher academic performance, increased intrinsic motivation, perseverance, and positive adaptation to failure. Educational interventions focused on cultivating a growth mindset, including short-term interventions, have proven effective in improving school outcomes, particularly in educational environments that support effort and active learning.

From a neuroeducational perspective, the growth mindset is associated with cognitive and motivational self-regulation, facilitating the transformation of extrinsic motivation into intrinsic motivation. This paradigm converges with constructivist approaches and active learning methods, such as project-based and inquiry-based learning, which stimulate student autonomy and engagement.

In multicultural contexts, the growth mindset acquires additional significance, being influenced by cultural factors and perceptions of intelligence. Cross-cultural studies indicate that the development of this mindset is closely linked to cultural intelligence and to students' capacity to navigate effectively among diverse cultural perspectives.

The empowerment theory (Chapter I.2.2) constitutes another essential pillar in explaining school success, particularly in educational environments characterized by cultural diversity. Empowerment is defined as the process through which individuals gain control over their own decisions, develop autonomy and responsibility, and enhance their capacity to leverage available resources.

Initially developed within organizational contexts, empowerment theory has been adopted and adapted to the educational field, where the emphasis is placed on student autonomy, active participation, and engagement in the learning process. Psychological empowerment is associated with motivation, school satisfaction, academic persistence, and the reduction of risk behaviors.

In education, student empowerment is facilitated by a positive school climate, equitable teacher–student relationships, and effective educational management. Empowerment-based

assessment, in which the evaluator assumes the role of facilitator, represents an innovative approach that supports self-reflection and student accountability.

Studies conducted in multiethnic urban high schools demonstrate that empowerment is correlated with higher academic performance, civic participation, reduced behavioral problems, and orientation toward higher education, confirming its central role in school success.

In multicultural contexts, empowerment is closely linked to inclusion, belonging, and school cohesion. Intercultural education and inclusive practices contribute to the development of a sense of belonging, the reduction of prejudice, and the strengthening of interethnic relationships.

Diversity-oriented educational leadership plays a crucial role in creating school environments that value cultural differences and promote equity. Educational programs focused on intercultural competence, communication, and collaboration contribute to shaping students as active agents of social change.

Unity and cohesion at the school level are determinant factors of school success, being influenced by students' perceptions of safety, mutual support, and equity. Instruments for assessing inclusion and empowerment in school environments provide valid frameworks for analyzing these dimensions.

The connectivism is presented as a learning theory specific to the digital age, redefining the ways in which knowledge is constructed and utilized. Learning is conceptualized as a process of creating and maintaining connections among informational, human, and non-human nodes. This paradigm emphasizes the importance of the ability to access, evaluate, and integrate information from complex networks, as well as the role of technology as an integral component of the educational process. Connectivism fosters collaborative learning, critical thinking, and adaptability—competences that are essential for school success in the twenty-first century.

Intercultural learning is analyzed as a fundamental dimension of school success in multicultural contexts. It entails the development of intercultural competence, cultural sensitivity, and the capacity for effective communication among individuals belonging to different cultural backgrounds.

Intercultural education is not conceived as an isolated subject, but rather as a transversal principle integrated into the curriculum and educational practices. Its purpose is to prepare students for harmonious coexistence, active citizenship, and responsible participation in a pluralistic society. European educational policies support the development of intercultural competence through the promotion of multilingualism, educational mobility, and inclusion.

Instruments for assessing intercultural competence and inclusion respond to the need for rigorous measurement of these constructs in educational research.

School success in multicultural environments is examined in relation to ethnic affiliation, cultural compatibility, and inclusion policies. Studies highlight that adapting educational practices to cultural diversity contributes to reducing inequalities and enhancing academic performance.

We have thus explained that school success results from a complex interaction among individual, educational, and socio-cultural factors. Growth mindset, empowerment, connectivism, and intercultural learning constitute essential theoretical reference points for building inclusive and effective educational environments capable of supporting students' holistic development.

We have also showed that the specialized literature emphasizes another aspect of school success, namely the determinant role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, educational interests, willpower, aspirations, and sustained effort—factors that gain increased relevance during adolescence, a developmental stage marked by significant cognitive and emotional growth. In this context, students' value systems, shaped by family, school, and community influences, represent a fundamental axiological component of school success.

The teacher-student relationship constitutes a central factor, as the quality of interpersonal interactions has a significant impact on engagement, motivation, and school adjustment. The application of principles of operant conditioning through positive feedback, encouragement, and emotional support contributes to the creation of an empathetic and inclusive educational climate, with particularly strong effects for students from disadvantaged backgrounds or belonging to ethnic minorities. In this regard, teachers' cultural competence becomes indispensable in multicultural contexts, facilitating integration and reducing linguistic and cultural barriers.

At the institutional level, organizational culture, psychosocial climate, and school leadership significantly influence educational success. Distributed leadership, continuous teacher training, and inclusive educational policies contribute to preventing school dropout and supporting students at risk. Furthermore, school–family–community partnerships, as well as interinstitutional collaboration, support a holistic approach to school success.

Finally, the relationship between school success and school failure highlights the need for constructive management of educational difficulties. The COVID-19 pandemic experience intensified the risks of failure but also generated opportunities for the development of blended

learning and resilience, shaping a vision of school success as a flexible, personalized, and inclusive process.

European educational policies emphasize the importance of inclusion, multilingualism, and educational mobility, promoting assessment tools that enable the rigorous measurement of intercultural competence and inclusion. In multicultural environments, school success is influenced by ethnic belonging, cultural compatibility, and the adaptation of teaching practices to student diversity, contributing to the reduction of inequalities and the improvement of academic performance. Thus, educational success represents the outcome of a complex interaction among individual, educational, familial, and socio-cultural factors, in which intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, sustained effort, aspirations, and students' values gain heightened relevance during adolescence.

The teacher–student relationship is an essential factor for engagement, motivation, and school adjustment, while the application of operant conditioning principles through positive feedback and emotional support facilitates the construction of an inclusive climate. In multicultural contexts, teachers' cultural competence becomes indispensable, contributing to student integration and the reduction of linguistic and cultural barriers. At the institutional level, school leadership, organizational culture, and school–family–community partnerships play a decisive role in educational success, dropout prevention, and the support of students at risk.

School success is not limited to academic performance, but also encompasses student well-being, socio-emotional and civic competences, the ability to manage conflict, and adaptation to unpredictable situations. In this respect, European policies and strategic frameworks (2015–2025) promote inclusion, the reduction of early school leaving, and the development of human capital. In Romania, with its regional specificities—including ethnic diversity and recent migration trends—these orientations are operationalized through differentiated policies adapted to local contexts, aimed at reducing educational risk and ensuring educational continuity.

Vocational education, reintroduced in the 2014–2015 academic year, represents an essential strategic intervention, providing viable educational alternatives for vocationally oriented students and contributing to the reduction of educational exclusion. At the regional level, including Caraș-Severin County, the success of these measures depends on schools' capacity to integrate inclusive approaches, develop intercultural competences, and support educational transitions across different systems and languages of instruction. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the vulnerabilities of disadvantaged students and the need for

differentiated interventions, while also creating opportunities for blended learning and resilience development.

We have concluded chapter I by emphasizing that school success at the upper secondary and vocational levels represents a multidimensional construct shaped by the interaction of individual, socio-cultural, and educational factors. Within this framework, the development of life skills, autonomous thinking, empathy, and intercultural abilities becomes essential, particularly in multicultural environments. The present study aims to investigate how educational interventions centered on project-based learning can support school success and the development of key competences among students of different ethnic backgrounds in upper secondary and vocational education in Caraş-Severin County, offering a model applicable to similar educational contexts in Romania and internationally.

CHAPTER II: THE INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION: CURRENT POLICIES AND APPROACHES

The second chapter analyzes intercultural education as a strategic dimension of contemporary educational policies, with a particular focus on its role in preserving ethnic and linguistic identities in Caraş-Severin County. The analytical approach is grounded in the convergence of local educational policies, the national normative framework, and European strategic orientations, which recognize education as an essential instrument for social cohesion, educational justice, and democratic participation. Within this context, the school is conceptualized not merely as an institution for knowledge transmission, but as a social actor responsible for managing cultural diversity and for fostering an inclusive educational climate.

The specificity of Caraş-Severin County derives from its status as a historically multicultural area, where diverse ethnic communities—Czech, Croatian, Serbian, Hungarian, German, Ukrainian, and Roma—coexist, each contributing to the shaping of a complex regional identity. This ethnic plurality does not represent a mere juxtaposition of groups, but rather a historically consolidated system of cultural interactions that has generated practices of coexistence, cooperation, and intercultural dialogue. The specialized literature emphasizes that this multicultural condition requires a differentiated educational approach capable of addressing both the need for identity preservation and the demands of adaptation to contemporary socio-economic changes.

The analysis of the educational system in Caraş-Severin County highlights the challenges and opportunities generated by ethnic diversity and by the demographic decline of the school-

age population. The reduction in student numbers, particularly in rural areas and among minority groups, intensifies the pressure on schools providing instruction in minority mother tongues, underscoring the need for an intercultural education capable of simultaneously ensuring the preservation of cultural heritage and the integration of students into a society characterized by mobility, digitalization, and global interdependence. The distinction between multiculturalism and interculturality is essential: while multiculturalism refers to the coexistence of cultural differences, interculturality implies interaction, dialogue, and the deliberate construction of communicative bridges between groups. In the Banat region, the school functions as a privileged space for transforming cultural diversity into an educational resource, while local policies seek to balance minority identity preservation with the development of competences for active participation in contemporary social life.

Plurilingualism constitutes a structural dimension of intercultural education. In Caraș-Severin, the presence of multiple languages within the school environment is not merely a reflection of social reality, but also a tool for students' cognitive, identity-related, and intercultural development. Institutions representing national minorities, together with administrative and cultural structures, support intercultural education through programs promoting civic responsibility and active participation, thereby strengthening the link between school, community, and cultural heritage. Diachronic studies highlight the evolution of minority education in relation to demographic, political, and institutional changes: while Czech-language education is confronted with a dramatic decline in the school population, Croatian-language education maintains relative stability through consolidated infrastructure and transnational partnerships. At the same time, instruction in minority languages contributes to inclusion and to the reduction of educational disparities, reinforcing community cohesion.

The structure of the county-level educational system for the 2022–2023 school year reveals a balance between general academic, vocational, and professional education, with particular attention to cultural and linguistic diversity. Bilingual upper secondary schools or institutions offering instruction in minority languages (German, Croatian, Czech, Serbian) ensure educational continuity and the affirmation of cultural identities. The enrollment plan for the ninth grade indicates a total of 75 classes, with a slight predominance of the technological track, reflecting regional socio-economic trends. Qualifications offered in fields such as mechanics, tourism, food services, or wood processing are aligned with labor market demands, while the high enrollment rate in both day-time upper secondary and vocational education highlights the attractiveness of technological and dual education programs.

The organizational culture of upper secondary schools in Caraş-Severin integrates cultural pluralism by promoting bilateral educational projects, student exchanges, and Erasmus+ programs, which facilitate intercultural dialogue and social cohesion. Emblematic examples include the Romanian–Croatian Bilingual Theoretical High School in Caraşova, the “Diaconovici-Tietz” National College in Reşişa, and the “Clisura Dunării” Technological High School in Moldova Nouă—institutions recognized for their intercultural management and for the integration of mother tongues into the educational process.

We have concluded **the second chapter** by showing that the intercultural education in Caraş-Severin County represents a key vector of social cohesion, intercultural dialogue, and the development of active citizenship. The county’s educational system stands at the intersection of minority identity preservation and adaptation to socio-economic and demographic changes, capitalizing on multiculturalism as a strategic resource. Through the diversity of educational pathways, labor market–oriented vocational guidance, and intercultural integration, schools in the county ensure equity, inclusion, and educational continuity, providing students with life skills and the capacity for active participation in a pluralistic society.

CHAPTER III: THE DEVELOPMENT OF LIFE SKILLS IN INTERCULTURAL SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS

The third chapter addresses the development of life skills from the perspective of equal opportunities, with a particular focus on students belonging to national minorities, proposing an integrated theoretical and curricular analysis of this construct, which is essential for quality of life. The starting point (**III.1.**) is an existential reading of the human condition, philosophically grounded and psychologically operationalized through the four dimensions of existence-physical, social, personal, and spiritual- which, when transposed into education, become pillars of harmonious development and of the formation of an autonomous and creative personality. Within this framework, life skills are conceptualized as a coherent set of transferable competences, indispensable for adaptive functioning across diverse contexts.

The analysis highlights the need to move beyond the paradigm of schooling centered exclusively on the transmission of disciplinary knowledge, emphasizing the role of education in transforming curricular acquisitions into behaviors relevant to everyday life. The specialized literature points out that a skill becomes a “life skill” only insofar as it is validated through inter-contextual transfer and empirically supported. From this perspective, the explicit inclusion

of life skills in the curriculum is associated with the development of well-being, psychosocial competence, school success, and subsequent social and professional adjustment—dimensions supported both by empirical research and by the reference frameworks of the WHO, UNICEF, and OECD.

The chapter also provides an analysis of recent Romanian curricular documents, highlighting the progress achieved through subjects and school-based curriculum offerings (CDEOS) oriented toward social education, counseling, digital competences, and socio-emotional learning, as well as the limitations of implementation generated by institutional inconsistencies and insufficient teacher training. In line with updated European frameworks (LifeComp, SDG4), an operational definition of life skills adapted to the upper secondary level is proposed, integrating the personal, social, and learning-to-learn dimensions. In conclusion, the chapter argues that life skills constitute the invisible infrastructure of personal and social success, and that for students from national minorities their development represents both a pedagogical necessity and an ethical obligation of the inclusive school.

Chapter III.2 presents a systematic analysis of the main taxonomies of life skills, highlighting their conceptual diversity and the lack of a quasi-universal consensus in the specialized literature. Starting from the classifications proposed by the World Health Organization and by Durlak et al., life skills are initially grouped into behavioral, emotional, social, and cognitive dimensions, later synthesized into broader areas such as interpersonal communication, critical thinking and decision-making, and emotion regulation. Other relevant contributions extend these categories by including practical skills or by adopting functional approaches centered on learning, adaptability, work, cooperation, and communication, emphasizing the dynamic and contextual nature of life competences.

A differentiated perspective is offered by studies that correlate life skills taxonomies with developmental stages, demonstrating the progressive increase in their complexity throughout childhood and adolescence. A study conducted in Romania (2011) illustrates this evolution by identifying an extended set of skills relevant to adolescents, including learning competences, communication, self-awareness, entrepreneurship, ICT use, and time management, confirming the need for an adaptive and differentiated educational approach.

Within this plural theoretical context, the European LifeComp framework emerges as an integrative model, bringing together personal, social, and learning competences within a coherent architecture compatible with the demands of contemporary education. LifeComp links socio-emotional learning with cognitive and metacognitive dimensions and is legitimately extended toward digital literacy through convergence with DigComp, especially in the post-

pandemic context. Recent literature highlights LifeComp's potential to support adaptability, resilience, collaboration, and self-regulated learning, while also pointing to the limited number of empirical studies validating its psychometric properties at the secondary education level.

Against this background, the section argues for the necessity of adapting and validating the LifeComp Self-Assessment Scale for upper secondary students, as an essential step in operationalizing the concept of life skills. The integration of digital competences, metacognition, and critical reflection is presented as a fundamental condition for the formation of a responsible digital culture capable of supporting social inclusion, civic participation, and individual autonomy in a rapidly changing society.

Chapter III.3 investigates the relationship between school success and life skills, with a focus on the multicultural context of upper secondary schools in Caraș-Severin County, addressing questions such as: “Do students of different ethnic backgrounds benefit from equitable opportunities for learning and personal development?” and “What is the pathway toward school success and the acquisition of life skills in a multicultural school environment?” The theoretical foundation is anchored in Sustainable Development Goal 4 of the 2030 Agenda (SDG4), which promotes inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all, regardless of ethnic background or place of residence. Targets 4.1, 4.3, and 4.7 are particularly relevant to this analysis, emphasizing access to free education, equal access to technical and vocational education, and the acquisition of competences for sustainable development while recognizing cultural diversity.

Within this framework, school success is understood as extending beyond the accumulation of knowledge, encompassing the development of competences defined as “a coherent and operational set of cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral resources necessary for the adequate and effective accomplishment of tasks, for solving real-life problems, and for adapting to new and complex situations.” This process is gradual, systemic, and interdependent on cognitive, emotional, motivational, social, and contextual factors, and is supported through appropriate pedagogical practices, meaningful feedback, and mixed and interdisciplinary educational experiences.

The relationship between school success and LifeComp competences (personal, social, and learning-to-learn) is bidirectional: the acquisition of these competences supports educational progress and can be transferred to real-life contexts, facilitating personal, professional, and social success. Non-formal and extracurricular experiences complement formal education by providing authentic opportunities for the development of creativity,

resilience, and initiative—skills that are essential in an increasingly interdependent and complex world.

International studies indicate that socio-emotional, behavioral, and life skills significantly influence academic performance and later success by fostering self-esteem, self-control, creativity, and critical thinking. The role of teachers and of educational programs centered on transversal competences is essential in consolidating these skills, thereby facilitating students' social integration and well-being. Evidence from various countries confirms that investment in life skills contributes to school success and to students' capacity to adapt to future challenges. OECD research demonstrates the link between socio-emotional skills and school outcomes using the Big Five model: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience (Chernyshenko et al., 2018).

Studies by Elias (1997), Soto et al. (2022), Napolitano et al. (2021), and Denham and Brown (2010) highlight that the triad of social, emotional, and behavioral skills contributes to school success, integration into school communities, and overall well-being. In Finland, skills such as self-control, confidence, optimism, and energy are correlated with school performance and success in life (Guo et al., 2023).

In conclusion, convergent literature confirms that school success and the acquisition of LifeComp competences are interdependent. The development of personal, social, and metacognitive competences constitutes the foundation of a holistic education capable of supporting students' social integration, autonomy, and adaptability in complex and global contexts. Prioritizing these competences in the curriculum and in non-formal educational experiences provides a coherent pathway toward school success and a high quality of life.

Chapters III.3.2 and III.3.3 explore the interdependence between socio-emotional learning (SEL), Social Learning Theory (SLT), and the LifeComp Framework, emphasizing their relevance for the development of personal, social, and learning competences in adolescents.

Socio-emotional learning (SEL) is defined as “the development of self-awareness, emotional regulation, and interpersonal skills” (Volet et al., 2009) and is integrated into competence-based education to support lifelong learning (Gordon & Debus, 2002). SEL promotes deep learning experiences, personal efficacy, and autonomy (Kaplan & Flum, 2009; Mavor et al., 2017), facilitating the development of identity, motivation, and engagement among students. Complementarily, Social Learning Theory (SLT), formulated by Albert Bandura, explains how the acquisition of behaviors and knowledge occurs through observation,

imitation, and modeling (Bandura, 1977). SLT introduces the concept of mediational processes-attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation-which facilitate behavioral transfer and the integration of learning into real-world contexts, including multicultural schools (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997; Marx & Ko, 2012). This demonstrates that school success depends more on students' ability to internalize social and emotional models than on cognitive acquisitions alone (Jones & Doolittle, 2017; Weissberg et al., 2015).

Adolescence is a critical period for the development of essential life skills, characterized by cognitive, emotional, and social transformations (Hazen, Schlozman & Beresin, 2008). The concept of competence in adolescents integrates personal, emotional, and interpersonal skills (Masten et al., 1995). Emotional, social competences, and self-determination support both school success and adaptation in complex contexts (Buckley, Storino & Saarni, 2003; Field, Hoffman & Posch, 1997). Resilience, defined as “the capacity to adapt successfully in the face of adversity” (Masten, 2007), constitutes a protective factor and a key element in promoting psychological well-being and academic engagement. Longitudinal studies indicate that early development of social and emotional competences has cascading effects on self-esteem, relationships, and stress regulation (Gomez-Lopez, Viejo, Romera & Ortega-Ruiz, 2022).

The LifeComp Framework (Sala, Punie, Garkov & Cabrera Giraldez, 2020) positions personal, social, and learning competences as essential transferable skills for school success, personal development, and professional achievement. LifeComp defines nine competences grouped into three domains:

- **Personal competences:** Self-regulation, Flexibility, Well-being
- **Social competences:** Empathy, Communication, Collaboration
- **Learning competences:** Growth Mindset, Critical Thinking, Learning Management

This model reflects a holistic, relational, and continuous approach to education, emphasizing the interdependence between cognitive, emotional, and social competences, as well as the role of school culture and a positive climate in adolescent development (Caena & Punie, 2019; Sala & Herrero Rámila, 2022). LifeComp has influenced European educational policies and practices, providing tools for curriculum design, assessment, and pedagogical innovation, yet it remains insufficiently empirically validated in secondary education, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe (Cacciamani & Fujita, 2023; Reis, Monteiro, Rodrigues & Barbosa, 2024).

In conclusion, integrating SEL, SLT, and LifeComp in education supports holistic adolescent development, preparing students for school success, social engagement, and

adaptation to the complex challenges of adult life, fostering competence-oriented, autonomous, and resilient education.

The analyzed chapters investigate how life skills are developed in multicultural upper secondary and vocational schools in Caraș-Severin County, highlighting the interdependence between the local context, ethnic diversity, and current economic-professional requirements. A diverse curricular offer, extracurricular programs, and partnerships with the local economic environment are critical factors in the development of students' practical and social competences. Initiatives such as the flexible "Second Chance" program contribute to reducing illiteracy and motivating young people from disadvantaged groups to continue their studies or obtain professional qualifications (level 3).

The Clisura Dunării region exemplifies the adaptation of education to cultural and occupational dynamics: tourism and food services are emerging sectors, while woodworking and traditional crafts (weaving, pottery, carpentry) remain relevant in certain communities. The educational offer combines theoretical, technological, and vocational tracks within multilingual contexts, while dual and vocational education prepares students for the real demands of the labor market. Romania's low PISA scores underline the necessity of focusing on life skills, not only on school performance (Cormann, 2021).

From a European perspective, the adoption of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the "learning outcomes" approach in vocational education promotes graduates' relevance and competitiveness, emphasizing the acquisition of transferable knowledge, skills, and competences. The implementation of active learning methods—Project-Based Learning (PBL), Design Thinking, Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL)—facilitates the acquisition of intrapersonal, social, and learning competences, preparing students for rapid adaptation to a dynamic and globalized labor market.

In multicultural contexts, life skills development intersects with the growth of cultural intelligence and intercultural competence. Collaborative experiences among students of different ethnicities, mixed projects, and community activities foster awareness of cultural diversity, respect for differences, and prejudice prevention. Developing LifeComp competences—personal, social, and learning—facilitates their transfer to future multicultural environments, whether in the workplace or social contexts.

The development of life skills in multicultural upper secondary and vocational schools depends on adapting the curriculum to local and global requirements, integrating practical and social competences, and implementing relevant projects and partnerships. PISA results and the analysis of life skills underscore the need to strengthen transversal competences, not just

theoretical knowledge, for students' personal and professional success. Life skills are closely linked to adaptability, resilience, and lifelong learning, which are essential in the context of current technological and economic transformations. In multicultural settings, education contributes to the development of intercultural competences and cultural intelligence, promoting tolerance, dialogue, and social integration. Active and experiential learning methods enable students to acquire practical, social, and cognitive skills that are transferable over the long term and useful for responsible participation in society.

The development of personal, social, and learning competences, according to the LifeComp model, represents an integrative strategy for strengthening adolescents' preparation for contemporary life, both professional and civic. Overall, **the third chapter** highlights that the educational and professional success of adolescents in multicultural schools depends on the interconnection between curriculum, practice, and intercultural experiences, underscoring the importance of competence-oriented and adaptability-focused education.

CHAPTER IV: MULTICULTURAL SCHOOLS AND PROJECT-BASED LEARNING

Chapter IV explores the application of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in multicultural schools, highlighting how it contributes to the development of 21st-century competences and transforms the educational environment into a culturally competent space. The proposed case study demonstrates how micro-projects conducted in multiethnic teams enable students to develop collaboration, problem-solving, critical thinking, and autonomy skills, impacting the overall school climate. PBL is not merely a supplement to traditional learning; it represents a student-centered approach with real-life relevance and practical applicability.

The roots of PBL can be traced to Italian Renaissance schools and the philosophies of Aristotle, Socrates, and Confucius, but it consolidated as a modern method through the works of William H. Kilpatrick (1922) and John Dewey, emphasizing student autonomy and teacher-student collaboration. Subsequently, PBL became essential for the school-to-work transition, proving more effective than traditional methods in applying knowledge to real-world contexts.

PBL is an active, student-centered form of instruction characterized by autonomy, constructive inquiry, collaboration, communication, and relevance to everyday life (Kokotsaki et al., 2016; Bell, 2010). Unlike a traditional school project, PBL emphasizes the learning

process, generates LifeComp skills, and aims for long-term success rather than immediate achievement. In PBL, problematization serves as the motivational engine of learning, while project complexity stimulates creativity, autonomy, and cooperation.

PBL can be implemented individually or in groups. The individual form fosters autonomy and personal responsibility but limits social interaction. The group form encourages collaboration, simulates real-world projects, and allows task distribution, though it may generate conflicts and requires effective coordination. Models such as the “PBL Gold Standard” (Dias & Brantley-Dias, 2017) and the “3C3R Problem-Based Model” (Hung, 2006) structure project stages, from problem identification to reflection and public product presentation, emphasizing relevance, authenticity, and student voice.

PBL develops critical and analytical thinking, problem-solving, time management, and the ability to accept feedback and failure—competences essential for school success and labor market readiness. The method is effective in multicultural schools as it facilitates intercultural integration and collaboration among students of different ethnicities, contributing to the development of cultural competence and social intelligence.

The success of PBL depends on teacher mentorship, with educators acting as facilitators who guide students through inter- and transdisciplinary projects, including STE(A)M initiatives. Consistent application and high-quality projects are crucial for PBL efficiency, and active teacher involvement enhances student motivation and performance.

Thus, PBL represents an integrative and pragmatic instructional method that transforms multicultural schools into active learning spaces and culturally competent environments, preparing students for real-life challenges and 21st-century educational and professional demands.

Empirical studies demonstrate PBL’s effectiveness in developing life skills and improving school success in multicultural and multiethnic contexts. Research from Minnesota (Meyer & Wurdinger, 2015) shows significant improvements in time management, communication, cooperation, and self-direction. Implementation in Hispanic-majority schools in the USA (Capraro et al., 2016) enhanced intercultural competences, collaboration, and literacy, reducing dropout risk. In Hong Kong (Wing-yi Cheng et al., 2010), heterogeneous groups achieved consistent performance, demonstrating that diversity does not hinder individual or group efficiency, and the quality of collective activity fosters substantial achievements. These findings support PBL integration as a strategic method for life skills development and school success in multicultural schools.

Chapters IV.4–IV.7 examine how PBL can be effectively implemented in multicultural schools, emphasizing project development stages, the use of makerspaces, and the integration of Design Thinking for 21st-century skills acquisition. Project-based learning, structured in clearly defined stages, provides a methodological framework that prioritizes student centrality, autonomy, practical relevance, and authentic problematization, distinguishing it from less application-oriented or less engaging alternative approaches. The classical Kilpatrick model, alongside subsequent elaborations by Chard (1999) and Thomas (2000), conceptualizes PBL in four main stages: posing motivating questions, investigation, generating conclusions, and evaluation. In practice, these stages correspond to problem identification, solution development, prototyping, and adjustment based on feedback, aiming for tangible results and real-world relevance (Blumenfeld et al., 1991; Krajcik & Shin, 2014).

Project centrality and realism are essential, with students actively engaged in knowledge construction and curriculum generation through physical products, models, games, or prototypes. Repeated and consistent application of PBL in upper secondary and vocational schools facilitates the development of interdisciplinary competences, creativity, and innovation, opening opportunities for integrating STEAM concepts (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics) and transforming classrooms into “makerspaces”—dedicated spaces for experimentation, prototyping, and kinesthetic learning (Nadelson et al., 2020; Hughes, 2024). These environments enable students to develop both technical skills and soft skills, such as communication, collaboration, and resilience, which are critical for professional and social success (Hirudayaraj et al., 2021). The educator’s role is essential: mentors or “spacemarkers” balance guidance and student autonomy, facilitating experiential learning and consolidating LifeComp competences (Harron & Hughes, 2018).

Simultaneously, Design Thinking complements PBL through a systematic framework of analytical and creative thinking centered on the user, incorporating experimentation, prototyping, feedback, and continuous refinement (Razzouk & Shute, 2012). Advanced models, such as Human-Centred Design (HCD) and The LAUNCH Cycle, enable the application of design processes in schools and universities, combining critical analysis with practical implementation. Successive stages—from problem observation and investigation to product launch in the community—develop cognitive, social, and professional competences essential for the 21st century (O’Keeffe et al., 2021; Spencer & Juliani).

The interaction between PBL and Design Thinking, conceptualized by John Spencer as PBL by Design, highlights the complementarity of the two approaches: PBL emphasizes

autonomous inquiry and knowledge creation through collaboration and authentic products, while Design Thinking provides a structured, iterative prototyping framework emphasizing community relevance and real-world applicability. In PBL by Design, students start from community-centered questions, explore problems through research and interviews, build prototypes, test solutions, and launch and evaluate the final product outside the school setting, consolidating planning, collaboration, communication, and critical thinking skills (Spencer, 2023).

In conclusion, the consistent application of PBL, combined with Design Thinking and makerspaces, supports the development of students not only academically but also in life skills and labor market competences. This approach promotes autonomous thinking, genuine collaboration, and complex problem-solving, providing an adaptable and motivating instructional framework that meets the needs of students in multicultural schools within the contemporary informational society. By prioritizing student centrality, practical relevance, and creative activity, PBL becomes a strategic tool for preparing youth for 21st-century challenges, including emerging technologies and artificial intelligence, where critical reflection and authentic collaboration remain invaluable competences.

PART II EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

CHAPTER V. THE FORMATIVE EXPERIMENT UNDERTAKEN ON THE TOPIC: "ENSURING ACADEMIC SUCCESS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF LIFE SKILLS AMONG STUDENTS OF DIFFERENT ETHNICITIES IN CARAȘ HIGH SCHOOLS AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION"

In **the rationale for the experimental intervention**, it was demonstrated that the implemented research approach responds to the demands of coexistence in the contemporary multicultural world, transposed at the micro level into multicultural educational environments, which require mechanisms for cultural awareness and sensitivity. A thorough analysis of various educational systems, including the Romanian educational system, highlights the need for strategies that leverage cultural differences and for programs and projects that ensure equal opportunities for all students.

The research encompasses both quantitative and qualitative dimensions. The quantitative component consists of data collection and statistical processing, while the qualitative

component is based on the interpretation of these data, derived from the observation and analysis of relationships among variables. The collected data contribute to the theoretical and practical grounding of the present thesis and clarify key aspects relevant to school success and the acquisition of life skills.

Research topic: The impact of a project-based intervention program on school success and the development of life skills among students of different ethnicities in high school and vocational education in Caraş-Severin County.

Didactic aim: Ensuring school success and fostering life skills through the implementation of a project-based intervention program for students of diverse ethnic backgrounds in high schools and vocational schools in Caraş-Severin.

The following **research objectives** were formulated:

O1 – Define the concept of school success and present contemporary theoretical frameworks on academic achievement.

O2 – Conduct a bibliographic review on the acquisition of life skills in secondary education.

O3 – Design and implement a formative intervention aimed at developing LifeComp key competences in the target group.

O4 – Identify and describe the inclusive intercultural school environment.

O5 – Determine the extent to which a project-based intervention program applied to students in multiethnic high schools in Caraş-Severin contributes to school success and the development of LifeComp-related life skills.

O6 – Test the efficacy of the formative intervention program implemented in a multicultural school.

O7 – Propose the implementation of the model project-based intervention program in other multicultural schools, emphasizing LifeComp competences—personal, social, and learning—as essential skills for success.

Research questions:

Does the application of a project-based intervention program contribute to ensuring school success among students in the target group?

Does the application of a project-based intervention program contribute to the development of LifeComp life skills among students in the target group?

The primary hypothesis reflects the research problem and is supported by several subsidiary hypotheses. Considering the multicultural context of Caraş-Severin County, the general hypothesis was formulated as follows: the implementation of a project-based

intervention program for students in multiethnic high schools and vocational schools in Caraș-Severin significantly contributes to school success and the development of life skills.

Subsidiary hypotheses:

The application of a project-based intervention program in multiethnic high schools and vocational schools in Caraș-Severin significantly contributes to school success.

The application of a project-based intervention program in multiethnic high schools and vocational schools in Caraș-Severin significantly contributes to the development of life skills.

Variables of the study:

Independent variable: Implementation of the experimental program, i.e., a project-based intervention in a multiethnic high school in Caraș-Severin (Clisura Dunării Technological High School, Moldova Nouă).

Dependent variables:

- Degree of school success achieved
- Level of development of life skills

Sample groups: Students of different ethnicities were organized depending on the research instrument used:

Questionnaire-based surveys:

Direct beneficiaries: students

Indirect beneficiaries: teaching staff, school principals, school inspectors, parents, and representatives of local communities

A stratified random sampling technique was used, ensuring that the samples were relatively balanced regarding average capacity, as the thesis generalizes its findings to the overall student population. Samples included groups of students from high school (theoretical and technological streams) and vocational education.

The research focused on two groups: the experimental group (82 subjects) and the control group (82 subjects), representing segments of the target population during pre-testing, post-testing, and re-testing stages within the experimental framework. During this stage, an analysis of the real situation was conducted regarding ethnic composition, educational streams, profiles, and qualifications of students in the target group. Additionally, a questionnaire was administered concerning the school environment, participants' interests, proposed educational pathways, and hobbies. This stage was essential for conducting a rigorous diagnosis of the educational environment, identifying students' learning styles, interests, and the real context in which the intervention would be implemented. Such a foundation was necessary to develop relevant research instruments adapted to the characteristics of the sample.

Consequently, the target group comprised 82 participants from Clisura Dunării Technological High School, organized into mixed groups of 10–12 students of different ethnic backgrounds from high school and vocational education. From an ethnic diversity perspective, the groups were heterogeneous.

The research was structured in the following stages:

Scientific documentation and examination of the research domain in the specialized literature to develop research instruments, consulting national and international literature, scientific articles addressing the research topic, and key theoretical concepts. This initial stage aimed to identify potential evaluation models for both school success and life skills targeted in the thesis, ensuring consistency in the instruments. Clear models, adaptable in form and content to the sample, were identified. The research process employed various methods and instruments—including longitudinal document analysis, surveys, and interviews—to generate statistical data useful for evidence-based educational policy and intervention at both institutional and community levels.

Development of experimental instruments: This stage involved the creation of experimental tools and evaluation instruments necessary for the intervention: longitudinal analysis of curricular documents (framework plans, current curricula, optional subject curricula, Counseling and Guidance curricula, technological and vocational school curricula); an initial survey identifying the ethnicities of 82 students to form homogeneous multicultural groups; questionnaires on school environment, participant interests, educational pathways, and hobbies; Intercultural Competence and Inclusion in Education Scale (SCIIE); Inclusion and Empowerment in School Environments Scale (SIIMS); validation of LifeComp scale with behavioral anchors for evaluating personal, social, and learning competences (validated with 506 high school students in five western Romanian counties); experimental application of the LifeComp scale; observation and analysis tools for variables during program implementation; project-based intervention program for multiethnic students in Caraș-Severin; data collection instruments to examine dependent variables; questionnaires and observational tools to evaluate variables after implementation of Project IV; analysis of academic outcomes before and after the program.

Pilot testing of instruments followed the study’s methodological design. This process occurred in two phases, addressing the need to optimize the instruments. The first phase included two groups of 17 students each, aged 14–18, from a multicultural high school. The sample included students from high school streams, excluding the vocational stream, and vocational school participants. Pilot sessions focused on analyzing student experience regarding

participation and assessment. Results led to reducing group size from 17 to 14 and decreasing the number of initial projects from 7-8 to 5 complex projects, initiating the next phase: initial testing.

Pre-experimental stage: Two scales: SCIIE and SIIM were applied to evaluate intercultural competence, inclusion, and students' perceptions of empowerment in school environments. These instruments identified areas requiring attention within the intervention program, highlighting cultural empathy, tolerance, multiperspectivity, mutual respect, and social cohesion. International literature emphasizes the active role of teachers, extracurricular activities, and inclusive school policies in consolidating interethnic relationships, promoting cultural pluralism, and increasing inclusion, demonstrating that multicultural schools can transform diversity into an educational resource for holistic student development. SCIIE and SIIMS application thus constitutes a crucial baseline for assessing and planning educational interventions centered on intercultural learning.

In the investigative phase, Chapter V.6.4.1. is dedicated to the application of the Intercultural Competence and Inclusion in Education Scale (SCIIE) as an initial study aimed at exploring differences in intercultural competence and inclusion between traditional and multiethnic high schools. The scale was translated and adapted to both high school and vocational education contexts, following the model presented in Appendix 1. The study involved 384 high school students from Caraş-Severin County, from both rural and urban areas, aged 17–18 years. With a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.721, SCIIE demonstrated strong reliability. Exploratory factor analysis revealed three distinct factors: Intercultural Opportunities and Activities, Comfort in Diverse Environments, and Reflection and Cultural Values. Significant differences were identified between traditional and multiethnic schools, and independent-samples t-tests on multiple items suggested that students from multiethnic schools perceived higher levels of intercultural competence and inclusion. These findings highlight the essential role of multicultural educational environments in fostering intercultural understanding and promoting inclusive attitudes. This study provides key insights during the pre-experimental stage and offers valuable information for policymakers, educators, and researchers in the field of education.

A second scale applied in the pre-experimental stage, serving as a benchmark for the design of the project-based intervention program, is the Inclusion and Empowerment in School Environments Scale (SIIMS). This study examines students' perceptions of inclusion and empowerment provided by educational environments among high school and vocational school students in Caraş-Severin, specifically in the school where the experimental phase of this thesis

was conducted. The intervention program was entitled: *From Awareness to Relevant Outcomes and Competences in an Inclusive School Environment*. Using SIIMS, the study surveyed 276 students, focusing on aspects such as interethnic appreciation, intercultural engagement, and school cohesion. Reliability analysis confirmed the scale's robustness and validity. Exploratory factor analysis identified three unique factors: School Cohesion and Unity, Intercultural Engagement, and Ethnic Integration, Appreciation, and Support. To evaluate the scale's structural validity and determine key items and inter-item relationships, a network analysis was performed. The results underscore the value of specialized teaching methods in promoting inclusion and intercultural competence, supporting the dissemination of educational policies that foster intercultural skills across diverse educational settings. SIIMS was employed to measure students' interethnic attitudes, engagement with the school's ethnic composition, intercultural participation, and development of high cohesion and identification with the school and local community. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was used to assess the internal structure of the scale, followed by network analysis to evaluate inter-item relationships.

Although the LifeComp framework has been widely discussed in educational policy and research, empirical validation studies remain limited, highlighting the necessity of validating it for secondary education students. LifeComp represents a significant advancement in competence-based education, integrating socio-emotional, cognitive, and metacognitive dimensions essential for student development. The present study aims to provide a psychometrically reliable and valid instrument for assessing LifeComp competences in secondary education. This validation contributes to the broader educational discourse on competence-based learning, self-assessment, and socio-emotional development, consolidating LifeComp's role in contemporary education.

The experimental phase comprised two distinct stages:

- **Consultative phase:** Conducted under **blended learning** conditions, combining online sessions with in-person meetings with participating students, both in small groups and plenary sessions for group formation. Projects were designed to be diverse and aligned with the methodological principles of **Project-Based Learning (PBL)**, and the content to be used during the study was established.
- **Formative intervention phase:** Constituted the launch of the experiment, establishing control and experimental groups, delineating the study period according to schedule, and selecting the content to be addressed.

- **Post-experiment phase:** Conducted after completing the intervention program. The **LifeComp scale** was applied to all participating groups at a defined interval after the activities to assess the impact of PBL projects on the development of students' **personal, social, and learning competences**. Additionally, the contribution of these projects to **school success** was evaluated by correlating progress in LifeComp competences with academic performance, providing an integrated view of intervention effectiveness and its relevance for holistic student development.

Research instruments commenced with the application of the LifeComp Self-Assessment Scale, evaluating the efficacy of a psychoeducational intervention designed to promote life skills among high school students. A total of 164 students (82 experimental, 82 control) completed all 26 subscales of the LifeComp model, covering personal, social, and learning competences. Each subscale included 3 items and demonstrated good internal consistency (Cronbach's α between 0.72 and 0.84).

The intervention, conducted during the final module of the 2022–2023 school year and throughout the 2023–2024 school year, encompassed 28 school weeks and 56 hours of educational activities, addressing key aspects of personal, social, and learning development. Paired-samples t-tests revealed statistically significant improvements ($p < 0.05$) in the experimental group from pretest to posttest, and compared to the control group, in the following subscales:

- **P1.3** – Optimism, resilience, and purpose
- **P2.2** – Adaptation to new contexts
- **P2.3** – Transition management and goal setting
- **P3.1** – Awareness of healthy behaviors
- **P3.2** – Use of preventive health services
- **P3.3** – Sustainable lifestyle and social support

No significant changes were observed in the control group or in other subscales.

The program spanned 28 weeks, comprising 56 hours of extracurricular formative activities, integrated with the teaching–learning–assessment triad and community-based interethnic awareness actions. These activities combined interactive teaching methods, formative and summative assessments, and non-formal educational initiatives, aiming to foster students'

social and intercultural competences and to create an inclusive and diversity-sensitive educational and community framework. The research period covered two academic years, beginning with the final module of 2022–2023 and extending through 2023–2024, including projects executed both within the school environment and in non-formal or cultural settings. The intervention is most effective when working groups are multiethnic, comprising at least four ethnicities per group, in six groups of 12–14 students each.

The program is justified from multiple perspectives:

- **Multicultural environment perspective** – promoting intercultural learning
- **Initiative and entrepreneurship perspective**
- **Digital competence perspective**

The conceptual model of the proposed program includes the fundamental components forming the basis of the intervention:

- **Multicultural school environment**
- **Project-based learning → School success**
- **Student teams → Inclusive networks**
- **Targeted life skills: personal, social, and learning competences**

Adjustments were required both in form and content, including the integration of community interventions as essential components of implementation. The update also considered the contribution of the teaching staff as facilitators of extended project-based learning (PBL). The projects were designed to facilitate learning and contribute to academic success through significant improvements in personal, social, and learning competencies.

At each stage, the aim was to develop projects capable of generating ideas, growth, and learning, while also producing tangible outputs, either at the group or project level. Accordingly, a total of five group projects were selected following preliminary meetings to identify students' interests and form mixed-ethnicity groups. The administration of the ethnic affiliation questionnaire via Google Form (Annex) enabled the formation of groups containing at least three national ethnicities plus Romanian students in each group. Ultimately, six working teams were formed, each consisting of 11–12 students, characterized by ethnic heterogeneity.

The staging of the projects broadly followed the logical structure of “The Project Approach”, as formulated by Chard (2009), with the corresponding steps:

Problem/Driving Question

Investigation

2.1. Field documentation: visits, interviews with adults, parents, grandparents, or other community members

2.2. Consultation of specialized literature

2.3. Sharing, group discussions, and presentations

Formulation of conclusions and presentation of the product to the school or local community, including the wider target audience

Coordinator feedback and evaluation of the product/project

Project I, implemented with mixed groups from the subject sample, involved the inventory of local crafts and their presentation in 2–3 regional native languages, regardless of ethnicity, resulting in a final product of an alphabetically organized craft map. Each of the six groups consisted of 14 students, except Group 2, which included 12 students. The main objective was the development of LifeComp competencies—personal, social, and learning—through the identification of traditional crafts within families and local communities, reinforcing individual responsibility and promoting inter-ethnic awareness. Students produced both individual and collective outputs, including lists of crafts and trades, registration sheets, maps, and joint inventories. The collected data were disseminated in both the school and local communities, in the languages of the ethnic groups involved. The project contributed to the development of personal skills through introspection and cultural root appreciation, social skills through collaboration and empathy within teams and with community members, and learning skills through the analysis of family and community experiences and reflection on successes and failures. Participation in practical and intercultural activities promoted inclusion, respect for diversity, and a strengthened sense of belonging, contributing to academic success through the integration of cultural and occupational experiences into the educational process.

Given that initial online meetings were held for project preparation, students were already acquainted at the start of the project; thus, only minor adjustments were necessary within the groups. Subsequent meetings focused on familiarizing students with Project-Based Learning (PBL), Design Thinking and Innovation, and Makerspaces. Students subsequently proposed project ideas, held group meetings, and participated in online sessions with all 82 students, during which driving questions with project potential were formulated.

Continuing the focus on self-discovery and understanding personal identity to progress toward more complex topics transcending local identity, **Project II**, implemented with the same mixed groups, involved creating a shared product: a collection of Christmas customs specific to Serbs, Romanians, Czechs, Roma, Hungarians, and ethnic Germans from the Danube Gorge, presented in native regional languages and in English. The “Christmas Memory Journal” aimed to develop LifeComp competencies (personal, social, and learning) through the documentation and sharing of Christmas traditions and customs. Students collected memories from grandparents, parents, and personal experiences, compared and consolidated them in groups, and created registration sheets, inventories, and a Project Memory Book, producing both individual and collective outputs. The activity, conducted through PBL, involved intercultural interaction, active communication, collaboration, and reflection on traditional values, fostering self-knowledge, mutual awareness, and a sense of belonging to the extended community, while promoting individual responsibility, critical assessment, and collaborative competencies. Results will be disseminated through cultural tourism events, strengthening the link between local heritage and intercultural education.

After the first two projects focused on producing outcomes as a result of self- and inter-ethnic knowledge, **Project III**, conducted between December 2023 and January 2024, centered on non-formal learning environments, involving moderators from other European countries and promoters of local ethnicities. The event had two sections: one for debates between students/six project groups and another for Q&A sessions with specialists. Both the debate and the conference aimed to create a database of cultural tourism elements, included in post-event reports and serving as a starting point for subsequent projects. The YOUrope for Youth debate was structured into six teams, each presenting arguments for or against European and local cultural tourism topics, conducted in English, Czech, and Serbian, with specialized moderators and evaluation through votes and feedback. Students developed communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and self-assessment skills, producing individual and collective outputs such as argument lists and reports. The subsequent conference included guest presentations and Q&A sessions, enabling students to receive constructive feedback, consolidate knowledge of

cultural tourism, and plan future local development directions. Materials generated were later used in community actions, such as the Danube Day event, fostering both student autonomy and the development of intercultural and leadership competencies in real-life communication contexts.

Project IV – “A Journey Around the Multiethnic World” represented an advanced stage of the PBL program, combining Project-Based Learning with PBL by Design and Design Thinking, culminating in a public performance on May 21, 2024, for World Cultural Diversity Day. Students explored multiethnic communities in Morocco, Texas, Iran, Australia, Malaysia, and Belgium, analyzing historical structures, cultural harmony, and ethnic interactions from a diachronic perspective. The project aimed to develop LifeComp and SEL competencies, emphasizing collaboration, expression, reflection, and responsibility within an intercultural and inclusive framework. Project stages included random assignment of communities, formulation of driving questions, focus group research, project management, creation of individual and group prototypes, self-directed learning, and public product launch. Evaluation was conducted through feedback from teachers, minority representatives, and parents, as well as student questionnaires, fostering reflection on personal performance and development of socio-emotional competencies. The project strengthened both intercultural knowledge and student autonomy, creativity, and responsibility in complex learning and public presentation contexts.

Project V -“Our Danube”, conducted at the end of the 2023–2024 school year for Danube Day (June 29), applied Design Thinking in a community context. It aimed to raise awareness of environmental protection and the sustainable use of the Danube, integrating UN Sustainable Development Goals (clean water, green energy, responsible consumption, aquatic life) and EU environmental protection directives. The project followed the EIARC steps: Empathize, Imagine, Act, Reflect, Communicate, with students exploring the Danube’s value for the community, generating ideas, creating prototypes (logos, multilingual flyers), evaluating and refining them through feedback, and distributing them for community testing. The project targeted the development of LifeComp competencies at the personal, social, and learning levels, including emotional regulation, self-efficacy, context-adapted communication, intercultural collaboration, and critical thinking. Evaluation involved questionnaires and direct observations, ensuring product refinement for future Danube Day editions. The project combined civic education, digital competencies, and socio-emotional development, providing students with a practical, responsible, and community-relevant learning environment.

The program highlighted temporal and logistical limitations, such as the relatively short implementation period, participation challenges for rural students, and the time required to form

inclusive multicultural teams. Challenges also included managing group cohesion, selecting the experimental cohort, and ensuring continuity of PBL projects, underscoring the need for constant and well-planned interventions to develop students' socio-cultural and cognitive competencies.

CHAPTER VI: PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS OF THE PRELIMINARY STUDIES

The analysis and interpretation of the results in **Chapter VI.1** were structured into three distinct sections, corresponding to the three preliminary studies conducted: the Intercultural Competence and Inclusion in Education Scale (SCIIE), aimed at identifying the characteristics of multicultural schools; the School Inclusion and Empowerment Scale (SIIMS), designed to examine aspects such as interethnic relationships and appreciation, intercultural engagement, and school unity; and, finally, the validation of the LifeComp Self-Assessment Scale. The validation of the LifeComp Scale was intended to enable analysis of the extent to which Project-Based Learning (PBL) influences the development of students' personal, social, and learning competencies. The first study involved 384 students from both a multicultural and a traditional school, the second included 276 students, and the LifeComp validation involved 506 students from five counties in western Romania.

It is noteworthy that the **chapter VI.3. SCIIE** study contributes to the existing literature by highlighting the significant role of school population composition in shaping students' perceptions of intercultural diversity and inclusion. The findings emphasize the need for educational policies promoting diversity and inclusion across school environments. Understanding the impact of the school setting on intercultural attitudes and behaviors enables teachers to implement targeted interventions to enhance cultural understanding and support collaboration among students. Despite its contributions, the study has limitations. While it

focuses on students' perceptions, future research could explore the perspectives of teachers and parents to provide a broader understanding of how initiatives promoting racial and ethnic diversity are perceived and implemented within school communities.

Regarding the application of the SIIMS Scale from **chapter VI.4.**, the study demonstrated that providing a valid tool to measure students' perceptions of their school environment represents a substantial contribution to multicultural education. By assessing intercultural engagement, ethnic appreciation, and school unity, the scale informs the design of PBL intervention programs within the same high school and vocational education context, supporting school inclusion and empowerment. In the long term, this study provides educators and policy makers with the opportunity to improve methods and policies that foster inclusion and empowerment in multicultural high schools. The results guide specialists and decision-makers in implementing projects and educational policies aimed at enhancing equity and intercultural competencies.

The validation of the LifeComp Self-Assessment Scale confirmed its psychometric robustness and applicability in secondary education for measuring students' personal, social, and learning competencies. The scale's high internal reliability and satisfactory model fit provide empirical support for its use as a competency-based assessment tool, enabling teachers and educational decision-makers to integrate structured evaluations of socio-emotional learning (SEL) into curriculum design and student development programs. Despite demonstrated reliability, the scale's longitudinal validity and intercultural applicability require further exploration. Future research should examine how students' competencies evolve over time and across different educational contexts. Expanding validation efforts across diverse cultural and linguistic settings would enhance the generalizability of the scale and provide deeper insights into the universal applicability of the LifeComp model. Moreover, the integration of technology-based assessment methods, such as digital self-assessment tools and adaptive learning analytics, could provide real-time insights into students' competency development. These advancements would support personalized learning pathways and targeted interventions, ensuring that competency-based education remains dynamic and responsive to the individual needs of each learner.

CHAPTER VII: PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS OF THE CONDUCTED EXPERIMENTAL STUDY

The intervention was explicitly designed to address all LifeComp competencies through learning activities, discussions, and reflective exercises aligned with the 26 subscales of the framework. Accordingly, the assessment captured potential changes across the full spectrum of personal, social, and learning domains, providing a comprehensive overview of student development.

The main objective of the research was to examine the potential of the intervention to generate significant improvements in LifeComp competencies among the experimental group compared to the control group. The guiding hypothesis was that students in the experimental group would report statistically significant improvements from pretest to posttest across all LifeComp subscales, whereas the control group would not demonstrate significant changes.

This overarching hypothesis allowed for an exploration of the intervention's overall impact, acknowledging that observed effects may vary depending on the alignment between competencies and the content of the intervention program. The hypothesis was tested using paired-samples t-tests, and the results were analyzed to determine both overall efficacy and specific areas of impact, allowing for a nuanced interpretation of the intervention's effectiveness and the empirical support for the LifeComp framework in adolescent education.

The activities included in the formative program were conducted outside regular school hours, following the daily curriculum, in the form of training workshops, initial organizational meetings, and complex PBL projects. Data collection was carried out online, followed by processing and analysis using statistical software. All analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics (v.28).

Participants were aged 16 to 18 years ($M = 16.9$, $SD = 0.62$), with a balanced gender distribution (51% female, 49% male), ensuring representativeness across key demographic variables. To determine the reliability of the instruments, the internal consistency of the 26 subscales was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, with values ranging from .72 to .84, indicating satisfactory to good reliability across all dimensions. Descriptive statistics for the entire sample ($N = 164$) showed a composite mean score of $M = 3.61$ ($SD = 0.47$) for all items, suggesting a moderate to high level of self-perceived competencies.

The full instrument was administered to both the experimental and control groups in two distinct phases - pre- and post-intervention - allowing for the evaluation of changes across all subscales.

The topics addressed through the intervention program and the five major projects included, but were not limited to: self-awareness and interethnic knowledge, aimed at fostering the development of personal, social, and learning skills such as stress and transition management (P1.2, P2.3), optimism and purpose development (P1.3), flexible thinking (P2.2), health and sustainability (P3.1–P3.3), active listening and dialogue (S2), inclusive teamwork (S3), and metacognitive reflection (L3).

Data were analyzed using paired-samples t-tests to evaluate within-group changes from pretest to posttest for both experimental and control participants. The central aim was to identify statistically significant changes across the LifeComp subscales. The significance threshold was set at $p < .05$, and results were interpreted alongside effect size estimates (Cohen's d) where relevant, providing an additional perspective on the magnitude of observed effects.

To assess the impact of the LifeComp-based intervention, a series of paired-samples t-tests were conducted for each of the 26 subscales within the experimental and control groups, comparing pretest and posttest scores. Descriptive statistics for all subscales were calculated prior to inferential analyses. Table 2 presents the means (M), standard deviations (SD), t-values, and p-values for each of the 26 subscales within the experimental group.

Subscale	Pretest M (SD)	Posttest M (SD)	t(81)	p
P1.1	3.51 (0.59)	3.56 (0.58)	0.89	.376
P1.2	3.47 (0.63)	3.52 (0.61)	0.96	.341
P1.3	3.42 (0.64)	3.87 (0.58)	4.91	< .001
P2.1	3.50 (0.60)	3.57 (0.59)	1.14	.259
P2.2	3.38 (0.61)	3.81 (0.53)	4.76	< .001
P2.3	3.41 (0.66)	3.90 (0.60)	4.63	< .001
P3.1	3.53 (0.57)	3.88 (0.55)	4.22	< .001
P3.2	3.47 (0.60)	3.85 (0.50)	4.15	< .001
P3.3	3.39 (0.63)	3.79 (0.59)	4.07	< .001
S1.1	3.54 (0.62)	3.59 (0.60)	0.84	.405
S1.2	3.52 (0.60)	3.58 (0.57)	0.93	.355
S1.3	3.48 (0.64)	3.53 (0.61)	0.79	.434
S2.1	3.55 (0.65)	3.60 (0.63)	0.82	.416
S2.2	3.49 (0.61)	3.55 (0.59)	0.91	.365

S2.3	3.50 (0.63)	3.54 (0.60)	0.77	.442
S3.1	3.46 (0.67)	3.52 (0.66)	0.87	.387
S3.2	3.43 (0.65)	3.48 (0.64)	0.74	.460
S3.3	3.41 (0.62)	3.47 (0.59)	0.88	.383
L1.1	3.57 (0.60)	3.62 (0.58)	0.85	.399
L1.2	3.52 (0.61)	3.56 (0.59)	0.81	.421
L1.3	3.48 (0.65)	3.53 (0.62)	0.76	.450
L2.1	3.44 (0.66)	3.50 (0.64)	0.93	.356
L2.2	3.46 (0.61)	3.51 (0.58)	0.85	.398
L2.3	3.41 (0.64)	3.47 (0.62)	0.91	.364
L3.1	3.48 (0.60)	3.54 (0.58)	0.95	.344
L3.2	3.42 (0.63)	3.48 (0.60)	0.88	.384
L3.3	3.46 (0.61)	3.52 (0.59)	0.90	.372

**Table No. 2.VII. t values and p values for each of the LifeComp subscales
(experimental group)**

As presented in Table 2.VII, statistically significant improvements ($p < .05$) were observed in six subscales, all belonging to the Personal domain of LifeComp. These results provide partial validation of the study hypothesis and confirm the effectiveness of the LifeComp-aligned intervention in fostering personal competencies and well-being among high school and vocational school students.

The most substantial improvement was observed in P1.3 – Optimism, Resilience, and Purpose, where scores increased from $M = 3.42$ ($SD = 0.64$) at pretest to $M = 3.87$ ($SD = 0.58$) at posttest, $t(81) = 4.91$, $p < .001$. This change suggests that students became better able to maintain optimism, respond to adversity with resilience, and develop a goal-oriented perspective-psychological resources essential for adolescent well-being and long-term life satisfaction.

For P2.2 – Adaptation to Changing Contexts, the mean increased from $M = 3.38$ ($SD = 0.61$) to $M = 3.81$ ($SD = 0.53$), $t(81) = 4.76$, $p < .001$, indicating a significant enhancement in flexibility, openness to new ideas, and the capacity to adjust to novel or uncertain situations.

A similar improvement was observed in P2.3 – Transition Management and Goal Setting, with scores rising from $M = 3.41$ ($SD = 0.66$) to $M = 3.90$ ($SD = 0.60$), $t(81) = 4.63$, $p < .001$, reflecting an increased ability to set personal goals and manage transitions—central skills for identity development and academic motivation in adolescence.

In the well-being subdomain, students demonstrated significant gains in:

P3.1 – Awareness of Health-Related Behaviors, with scores improving from $M = 3.53$ ($SD = 0.57$) to $M = 3.88$ ($SD = 0.55$), $t(81) = 4.22$, $p < .001$, indicating greater awareness of physical and mental health behaviors.

P3.2 – Use of Health Information and Services, increasing from $M = 3.47$ ($SD = 0.60$) to $M = 3.85$ ($SD = 0.50$), $t(81) = 4.15$, $p < .001$, suggesting that students became more proactive in seeking and applying reliable health information.

P3.3 – Sustainable Lifestyle and Social Support, which increased from $M = 3.39$ ($SD = 0.63$) to $M = 3.79$ ($SD = 0.59$), $t(81) = 4.07$, $p < .001$, reflecting a heightened appreciation for sustainable behaviors and the importance of providing and receiving support within one’s social environment.

These six areas—resilience, adaptability, goal orientation, health awareness, proactive behavior, and sustainable living—represent essential competencies in the psychological development of the target group. The significant results indicate that the structured interventions contributed to meaningful personal growth directly aligned with the LifeComp framework, relevant both to academic performance and psychosocial functioning.

In contrast, no equally significant improvements were observed in the other 20 subscales within the Social domain (empathy, communication, collaboration) or the Learning competencies (growth mindset, critical thinking, and autonomous learning). These competencies may require longer interventions, experiential immersion, or contextualized application to produce measurable changes. It is also possible that these skills are latent and develop progressively through repeated exposure and reinforcement over an extended period rather than through isolated projects or modules, even if included in an extended program.

The control group showed no significant differences between pretest and posttest, reinforcing the conclusion that the gains observed in the experimental group can be attributed to the intervention rather than maturation, practice effects, or external events.

All in all, the results support the effectiveness of LifeComp-based psychoeducational interventions. The program effectively enhanced specific personal and well-being competencies, demonstrating the value of integrating structured, reflective, and interactive modules into high school and vocational curricula. These findings align with broader

international educational objectives promoting life skills, resilience, and student engagement, and encourage the future expansion of such interventions to other LifeComp domains using long-term, multi-level approaches.

Regarding hypothesis testing, the results provide clear evidence of the effectiveness of a structured LifeComp-aligned psychoeducational intervention in supporting the development of personal competencies in adolescents. Statistically significant improvements were observed in six subscales: Optimism and Resilience (P1.3), Adaptability (P2.2), Goal Setting and Transition Management (P2.3), Awareness of Health-Related Behaviors (P3.1), Use of Health Services (P3.2), and Sustainable Lifestyle, Natural Resources, and Social Support (P3.3).

These findings are consistent with theories in positive psychology, adolescent development, and socio-emotional learning (SEL), which highlight the role of personal efficacy, adaptability, and well-being in adolescent functioning (Masten et al., 1995; Buckley, Storino, & Saarni, 2003; Masten, 2007). Moreover, the results demonstrate the effectiveness of the intervention program in developing high school students' personal competencies, particularly in optimism, resilience, adaptability to change, transition management, and well-being.

The significant gains in P1.3 confirm previous research on the role of structured school programs in strengthening coping strategies and future-oriented thinking, which are essential for the psychological adjustment of vulnerable adolescents. Improvements in P2.2 emphasize the importance of flexible thinking as a key skill for 21st-century learners, aligning with current educational and socio-professional requirements. Gains in P2.3 indicate an enhanced sense of direction and personal efficacy, supporting academic and personal planning and promoting proactive future orientation.

In the well-being domain, improvements in P3.1, P3.2, and P3.3 reflect the intervention's effectiveness in increasing awareness of the relationship between lifestyle, health, and academic performance, as well as in promoting the use of protective health services. These results confirm the value of school-based health education and support the need for a holistic educational approach integrating physical and emotional well-being into the learning process.

In summary, the measurement conducted using the validated psychoeducational instrument presented in Chapter VI.5, namely the LifeComp scale, enabled the observation of the changes produced and demonstrated that the program had a considerable influence on the personal skills that underpin students' well-being and success across diverse social and educational contexts, clearly confirming the effectiveness of the intervention. In conclusion, the post-test results

confirm that the intervention is effective in supporting the development of these competencies in adolescents.

The absence of statistically significant changes in the social and learning domains may be explained by the relatively short duration of the program, the gradual adaptation to project-based learning, and the alternation between formal and non-formal learning environments, which may not have been sufficient for students to acquire and consolidate more complex socio-cognitive and metacognitive competencies. Although the intervention addressed all subscales, the emphasis proved to be on personal development within the context of a multicultural school, thereby limiting its impact on domains that require direct peer interaction, dialogic feedback, or task-anchored learning—conditions that have been shown to be effective in other LifeComp-based applications as well (Lotti & Orlandini, 2022; Cacciamani & Fujita, 2023).

In this context, it is important to emphasize that the development of socio-cognitive and metacognitive competencies requires not only repeated exposure to relevant learning situations but also a stable educational framework that allows for critical reflection, authentic cooperation, and the gradual internalization of self-regulation strategies. Therefore, in order to achieve a significant impact on the LifeComp dimensions involving interpersonal relatedness and deep learning, it is recommended that future interventions be extended over a longer period, include systematic collaborative activities, and be more closely integrated into the formal curriculum, thus ensuring coherence between educational objectives and the proposed learning approaches.

With regard to the extent of academic achievement following the implementation of the intervention program, in addition to the significant gains already reported in this chapter, pre- and post-intervention academic outcomes were compared, specifically the students' overall grade point averages at the end of the 2022–2023 and 2023–2024 school years. The pre–post difference indicates the direct impact of the intervention and helps to highlight the program's effects. A comparative analysis of academic results from the school year preceding the intervention and at its conclusion is presented in Appendix 10.

Despite these promising results, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the sample size ($N = 164$), while sufficient for paired comparisons, limits the generalizability of the findings beyond the local Romanian context. Second, the absence of longitudinal follow-up precludes conclusions regarding the sustainability of the observed gains. Third, the quasi-experimental design and the exclusive use of self-report measures may introduce some degree of subjectivity; however, the consistency of patterns across subscales strengthens the credibility of the findings.

Future research could benefit from extending the intervention to diverse educational settings, including rural schools and large urban contexts, and from employing longitudinal designs to assess long-term competency development. Moreover, examining mediating factors such as student motivation, teacher–student relationships, and peer interaction could provide deeper insight into the mechanisms of change. Extending the model to younger students or integrating expanded service-learning approaches (Lotti & Orlandini, 2022; Boffoa et al., 2023) may further enhance its impact across developmental stages. The rural community intervention implemented through Design Thinking Project No. V, developed in connection with Danube Day, would benefit from scaling up, regular implementation, and long-term monitoring in order to maximize its impact across all competency domains.

In conclusion, this study provides empirical support for the growing body of literature on competency-based education and highlights the usefulness of the LifeComp framework as a tool for designing and evaluating interventions that foster resilience, adaptability, health literacy, and sustainable behaviors, with the aim of supporting academic success and competency development. The adoption of such frameworks in upper-secondary and vocational education equips students with the skills needed to understand and manage social complexity, while promoting learner autonomy and civic responsibility.

CHAPTER VIII: TARGETED INTERVENTIONS FOR ENSURING ACADEMIC SUCCESS AND FOR DEVELOPING LIFE SKILLS AMONG STUDENTS OF DIFFERENT ETHNIC BACKGROUNDS IN UPPER SECONDARY AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

The final chapter demonstrated that the doctoral research was designed to analyze and determine the extent to which a project-based learning intervention program contributes to school success and the development of life skills among students of different ethnic backgrounds in high school and vocational education in Caraș-Severin County. From a theoretical perspective, the thesis also examined the evolution of the concept of school success at the high school level, conducted a diachronic analysis of minority-language education in Caraș-Severin, and investigated the form and degree to which life skills—specifically personal, social, and learning competencies—are integrated into the national curriculum structure in Romania.

The literature review aimed both to provide a theoretical foundation for the research and to highlight potential relationships between the studied variables, which had not previously

been investigated in the Romanian context. Examination of the relevant literature and existing theoretical models supports the view that formative interventions through programs and projects—specifically project-based learning aligned with the LifeComp framework—can foster the development of essential personal, social, and learning competencies in high school and vocational students, both as a holistic approach and as a personalized strategy within multicultural educational settings (Buckley, Storino, & Saarni, 2003; Levin, 2015; Masten, 2007).

In summary, the results of the studies included in this doctoral thesis make an original contribution to understanding and optimizing educational strategies by identifying relevant approaches that can significantly influence the development of behaviors and skills essential for successful integration into the labor market. These findings not only offer viable solutions to current educational challenges but also have the potential to generate impact at the level of extended communities and society as a whole.

This final chapter also highlighted that the comparative analyses conducted following the program's implementation will generate relevant data for formulating recommendations for optimizing and adapting the conceptual framework, taking into account the observed and analyzed variables. The educational intervention was shown to be effective in developing essential competencies among high school and vocational students. These results confirm the value of structured, life-skills-focused programs and support their integration into current educational practices.

We also emphasized the importance of incorporating competence-based approaches into daily educational practice as part of a curricular modernization process aimed at the comprehensive development of students. In this context, integrating the LifeComp framework into current teaching strategies is considered essential, given its potential to support the development of personal, social, and learning competencies—core components of 21st-century education. These competencies facilitate not only adaptation to the rapidly changing society and labor market but also the development of autonomous, reflective, and socially responsible individuals.

Thus, the systematic inclusion of the LifeComp framework in the instructional process contributes to cultivating a positive attitude toward lifelong learning, continuous updating of knowledge, and the reinforcement of active and engaged civic behavior. This approach aligns with European recommendations on the development of transversal competencies and competencies for democratic citizenship, highlighting the need for student-centered, flexible, and future-oriented education.

Finally, it is considered that all these contributions may serve as a benchmark for future applied research and for educational policy initiatives aimed at the holistic development of students in diverse educational contexts.

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