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INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION IN ROMANIA: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL EDUCATION TEXTBOOKS FOR 6TH GRADE STUDENTS

Educația interculturală în România: o analiză de conținut a manualelor de educație
socială pentru elevii de clasa a VI-a

Magda Cristina TUNEGARU

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INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION IN ROMANIA: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL EDUCATION TEXTBOOKS FOR 6TH GRADE STUDENTS

Magda Cristina Tunegaru*

University of Bucharest,
Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences,
Bucharest, Romania
cristina.tunegaru@gmail.com

Abstract

In this paper, we aim to examine intercultural education textbooks, a subject that has been introduced in Romania, in the new school curriculum for middle school in 2017, for the 6th grade. The research uses content analysis to identify and analyze the cultural topics, the types of interactions that are suggested, and the extent to which these textbooks address social justice issues. We will approach both the textual and the visual elements of the textbooks.

The data is analyzed on four levels, using a social justice perspective, mainly Iris Young's conceptualization of oppression. First, we explore the micro level which refers to the characters' attitudes and values; then the macro level which comprises historical and political factors. Further, we examine the international dimension comprised in the analyzed textbooks. Finally, we are interested in the authors' position. For this purpose, we employ Hilliard's (2014) conceptual frameworks, developed from Gray (2010) – to which we added 12 topics – and Risager (1991). Moreover, the research proposes further analysis and inquiries on the subject of intercultural education in Romania.

Keywords: content analysis, intercultural education, social justice, textbook.

Rezumat

În această lucrare ne propunem să examinăm manualele de educație interculturală, disciplină care a fost introdusă în România, în noua programa școlară pentru

* PhD Candidate, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Bucharest, Bucharest, Romania.

gimnaziu în anul 2017, la clasa a VI-a. Cercetarea folosește analiza de conținut pentru a identifica și analiza tematicile culturale, tipurile de interacțiuni propuse, măsura în care aceste manuale abordează subiectele justiției sociale. Vom avea în vedere atât elementele textuale, cât și pe cele vizuale ale eșantionului.

Datele sunt analizate pe patru niveluri, folosind perspectiva justiției sociale, în principal conceptualizarea opresiunii realizată de către Iris Young. În primul rând, explorăm nivelul micro care se referă la atitudinile și valorile personale; apoi nivelul macro care cuprinde factori istorici și politici. În continuare, examinăm dimensiunea internațională cuprinsă în eșantion. În cele din urmă, ne interesează atitudinea autorilor. În acest scop, folosim cadrul conceptual al lui Hilliard (2014) creat pornind de la Gray (2010) – la care am adăugat 12 subiecte – și Risager (1991). De asemenea, cercetarea propune analize și investigații suplimentare pe tema educației interculturale în România.

Cuvinte-cheie: *analiză de conținut, educație interculturală, justiție socială, manual.*

1. Introduction

In Romania, intercultural education has the potential to foster a more positive attitude towards ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, or other disadvantaged groups. The richness of the cultural diversity of the country (Chircu & Negreanu, 2010), and the social context of ethnic minorities in Romania require increased attention towards intercultural education and its practice in schools (Barth et al., 2017).

Using a social justice lens, in this article, we propose to explore intercultural education in Romania by analyzing the 6th grade Intercultural education textbooks using content analysis strategies. As a theoretical framework, we use Iris Young's (1990) conceptualization of oppression which is always structural, embedded in everyday norms, behaviors, gestures, and reactions. The five faces of oppression – exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence – identified by Young comprise distributive and relational justice perspectives (Gewirtz, 1998). By discussing textbook contents, we focus on **marginalization** - when people are “expelled from useful participation in social life” (p. 50) **powerlessness** – which “describes the lives of people who have little or no work autonomy, exercise little creativity

or judgment in their work” (p. 53) and **cultural imperialism** - which “consists in the universalization of one group’s experience and culture, and its establishment as the norm” (p. 54).

In order to explore curricular contents, we used Hilliard’s (2014) framework for intercultural education and focused on the micro, as well as macro level, international dimension. We also used the authors’ subjectivity comprised in the selected textbooks.

We do take into consideration the distinction between textbooks and educational practice, the idea that proposing an intercultural education subject in schools “does not automatically equip teachers with the intercultural knowledge or skills to effectively build students’ intercultural capabilities” (Cloonan et al., 2017). Teachers are key elements in the formation of intercultural competence, the impact of textbooks “depends on how the teachers interpret and enact the textbook” and “the extent to which the teachers assume the role of curriculum makers” (Bakken & Andersson-Bakken, 2021, p.745).

Nevertheless, we do consider it relevant to examine textbooks’ content because textbooks are defined as resources “developed to provide officially sanctioned and authorized human pedagogic knowledge that is dynamically used in the classroom” (Ulusoy & İncikabı, 2020, p. 1).

2. Literature review

Intercultural education is a matter of concern for policymakers in Romania since elements of interculturality have been integrated into numerous subject curricula. However, Stan and Manea (2018) show that the initial training of teachers must be complementary to curricular measures, and in Romania, initial training from this perspective must be further developed. Intercultural education is a recent curriculum development in Romania. In 2017, Intercultural education has been introduced as a specific subject for 6th grade students under the umbrella of Social Education with the purpose of “learning to live together in harmony” (Textbook A).

Intercultural education represents an important component of contemporary education that aims to train intercultural competence, by bringing together different cultures on a common ground and by destabilizing ethnocentric curricular contents. For the purpose of developing intercultural competences, Gundara and Portera (2008) stress the need to develop a common culture, a result of a teacher-student negotiation of “core values to which all can subscribe, and which result from a broader understanding of all commonalities in a socially diverse society” (2008, p. 71). For Lanas, intercultural education “offers particularly many opportunities to learn from “the other who is located outside of one’s expectations”, who “is outside of one’s world” and “disturbs one by calling one into question” (2014, p. 9). Analyzing the complex social interactions between students and teachers – each withholding different sets of values and experiences, Wang (2005) shows that intercultural education implies a “pedagogy-through-discomfort” as students and teachers “move beyond the familiar toward new landscapes of subjectivity” (p. 54).

Intercultural education tries to develop an educational strategy for everybody, by acknowledging the differences within society. Such practice goes beyond the concept of a fixed national curriculum, as every community, and the group has its own particularities and dynamics.

Barrette et al. describe intercultural competence as “a combination of attitudes, knowledge, understanding, and skills which enables people to “understand and respect people who have different cultural affiliations”, to effectively and respectfully communicate interact and establish “constructive relationships”, to “understand oneself through encounters with a cultural difference” (Barrette et al., 2013, p. 16). In other words, “intercultural education is intended for all, not just those belonging to a minority group” (Chircu & Negreanu, 2010, p. 333).

This paper is focused on how textbooks construct and shape intercultural competence in Romania. For the purpose of this objective, we have chosen Heejin Song’s framework which enables us to identify types of intercultural interactions and their implications. Song identifies three intercultural interactions: **superficial interactions** which “involve explanation or discussion of physical cultural products such as food, travel, and festivals”; **hybridization** described as “a mixture of more than two different cultural

values, traditions, and customs”; and, finally, **critical reflections** which are starting points “in further discussion or reflection of beliefs, history, values, or conflicts related to the cultures that interact” (Song, 2013, p. 386). Moreover, we have employed Hilliard’s (2014) intercultural framework in order to examine cultural elements.

In assessing the benefits of intercultural education, we must consider its theoretical weaknesses. Coulby (2006) has emphasized the “unrealistic normative inclusiveness” of intercultural education, especially when the group is complex in its diversity. Are schools capable of including every minority living in Romania in the curriculum of a common culture? Another weakness refers to the space which delineates intercultural education. Are political borders the limits? Or should intercultural education cross borders?

In this article, we use the concept of oppression which is defined by Iris Young as a structural injustice a group is suffering while being dominated by another group. According to Iris Young (1990), marginals are “expelled from useful participation in social life and thus potentially subjected to severe material deprivation and even extermination” (p. 18). But marginalization is not limited to economic deprivation, as “it also involves the deprivation of cultural, practical, and institutionalized conditions for exercising capacities in a context of recognition and interaction” (p. 20).

While, in Romania, the number of immigrants is relatively low compared to other European countries, intercultural education brings together ethnicities that have lived on the same land for centuries, in order to combat oppression against vulnerable groups and potentially raise awareness about the cultural richness of the Other who was previously oppressed.

A considerable number of studies discuss the struggles of implementing an intercultural course in schools. Leeman and Lenoux (2003) explore the manner in which preservice teachers in The Netherlands are being prepared to teach intercultural education. Achaeva et al. (2018) formulate a series of recommendations for future teachers who ought to be trained for a diverse society and “against ethnocentrism”. In Romania, Fetti (2021) explores teacher’s beliefs and practices on intercultural education in the classroom showing that while teachers in the sample mastered the terms associated

with intercultural education, few of them (only 7%) consider it is important to employ specific methods in teaching intercultural education and only 2% of the teachers in the sample “work interculturally in any circumstance of teaching activity” (p. 224).

Using a pedagogical approach and a social justice lens we intend to explore the Intercultural curriculum in Romania and formulate a series of further guidelines and recommendations for education professionals, teachers, and textbook authors.

The goal of this paper is to analyze intercultural education textbooks by depicting the cultural topics they propose and the types of interactions. The main research question of this study is the following:

- What are the cultural topics included in intercultural education textbooks for 6th grade students in Romania?

Other questions which guided the research were:

- What is the approach to intercultural education in intercultural education textbooks?
- What types of interactions are proposed to the students?
- Are topics related to social justice addressed in these manuals?

3. Methodology

3.1. Textbooks analyzed

Using content analysis, this paper explores the intercultural education curriculum in Romania as it is mirrored in Intercultural Education textbooks for grade 6. The Ministry of Education approved two textbooks for intercultural education further named textbook A and textbook B, both published by Editura Didactică și Pedagogică¹. The schoolbooks were approved in 2018 and are still in use. They are used in all schools in the country, being the only intercultural education textbooks for the 6th grade approved by the Ministry of Education. Textbook A has seven chapters and Textbook B has four chapters. The intercultural education class takes place once a week, in a single lesson, every week of the school year.

3.2. Content Analysis

For the purpose of this study, we examined the data using content analysis which is “a research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text” (Weber, 1990, p. 9), encompassing both quantitative and qualitative strategies. This research method can be applied to big quantities of text which is reduced to categories and themes, thus being a descriptive method.

We have analyzed both the text and the visual elements, illustrating the degree to which Romanian ethnicity is present compared to other ethnicities, the micro, and the macro level, the international dimensions, as well as the attitude of the authors. The visual and the textual content of textbooks were coded into themes through “systematic reduction [...] of text to a standard set of statistically manipulable symbols representing the presence, the intensity or the frequency of some characteristics” (Shapiro & Markoff, 1997, p. 14). To explore the cultural and pedagogical approach of the selected textbooks, we used Hilliard’s (2014) to which we added 12 other categories that are related to social justice terminology. For example, the category “Education” is present in textbook A, through one activity that illustrates visually a classroom in three time periods; although there are three illustrations, we considered that this is a single occurrence of the subject. The new categories were added after carefully reading the text and observing the increased frequency of certain topics; these new categories are grouped around social justice themes. The results allow a qualitative and quantitative analysis, as texts’ signifiers, images, and the number of occurrences are taken into consideration.

We examine the content in four directions. First, we explore the micro level, which “refers to the social and cultural anthropology phenomena which cover the social characters, a situation of interaction, the subjectivity of the characters in feelings, attitudes, values and perceiving” (Fong et al., 2018, p. 68). Second, we look into the macro level which “relates to the social, political, and historical matters” (ibidem). Then, we explore the international and intercultural discourse. Finally, we are interested in the point of view of the authors. The topics and the visual elements of the two textbooks are analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively.

3.3. Examinations of the textbooks

A series of investigations of the textbooks were undertaken. The first examination determined the structure of the textbooks and resulted in a formal count of cultural topics included, the racial and gender representations within the visual material. The topics were extracted from lesson texts and activities and tasks. A second examination aimed to explore the intercultural elements, the micro, and the macro level, and the point of view of the authors. Then, a third examination analyzed the international level.

4. Results

4.1. Topics

To examine the topics of the two textbooks, we have used Hilliard's conceptual framework (2014). Only some of the categories presented by Hilliard can be found in the analyzed textbooks. The table below contains the topics found, combining Hilliard's framework elements and other topics identified.

Table no. 1. Occurrences of the topics identified in intercultural textbooks

Topics	Textbook A	Textbook B
Personal Life, Identity	6	3
Family, Family Life	1	
Community	6	5
Travel	2	1
Education	1	
Arts, Humanities	5	10
Politics, Charities, World Organizations	4	5
Media, Communication	8	6
Culture	7	11
History	4	
Diversity	14	12
Tolerance and equal chances	4	10
Stereotyping	3	3
Racism and segregation	4	9
Marginalization, isolation and exclusion	2	10
War and refugees	3	3
Human rights	1	2
Minorities	6	10
Traditions	8	8
Patriotism	3	4
Solidarity	2	6

Table no. 1 shows that a significant part of the topics is related to social justice content. Diversity, inclusiveness, raising awareness about stereotypes, racism, and marginalization of vulnerable groups, and forms of intolerance permeate the majority of chapters in Textbook A and Textbook B through discussion points and case studies. Moreover, textbook B uses the phrase “social justice” in a short informational bullet: “The UN has decided to celebrate World Social Justice Day on February 20” (p. 52). Nevertheless, intercultural contents which could enable students to be more aware of the cultural and social diversity around them are scarce, especially in textbook B where cultural information is limited to a few examples of traditions. The analyzed textbooks, often rely on the teacher’s ability to guide the discussions and the activities and on the curiosity of the students sent to research and document in the immediate school environment, in the local community, in newspapers, on television, or nationwide.

On the other hand, textbook A gives more applied information. For example, when talking about traditions, the textbook presents a series of crafts and traditions belonging to Hungarians, Lipovans, Saxons, and Romanians, all of them being illustrated with pictures (p. 25).

Because cultural information is limited and great emphasis is put on social justice concepts, most intercultural interactions involve hybridization and critical reflection. While the former is usually present in the structure of lessons, the latter is present both in the lesson paragraphs (textbook A) and in the tasks and activities proposed as discussion points (textbook A and textbook B).

4.2. Images

When examining images, we focused on gender and on the racial representations of individuals in the selected textbooks.

As can be seen in Table no. 2, there is a balance of genders within the visual elements of the textbooks, with women and girls being slightly overrepresented in relation to men and boys.

Table no. 2. *Gender representation of visual content (mentions)*

	Textbook A	Textbook B
Women	21	17
Men	12	8
Girls	19	7
Boys	17	7

Nevertheless, there can be discerned little information about the occupation of the individuals in the pictures. When the occupation is visible, gender stereotypes are contested: in textbook B, we can see a male teacher (p. 55) and another male holding a child by the hand (p. 40).

The racial representation is not very diverse, the majority of people included in the pictures are Caucasian in both textbooks (72% in textbook A and 40% in textbook B). African-American individuals are represented in 12% of illustrations in textbook A and 25% in textbook B. The percentage of Asian individuals is even lower in both textbooks (see Table no. 3).

In discussing racial inclusiveness of the content, we have paid close attention to the Roma minority, which is one of the largest minorities in the country and has historically suffered much damage and continues to be deeply affected by poverty and forms of injustice – marginalization, isolation, discrimination (Molnar, 2021; Rauh, 2018).

Table no. 3. *Racial representation of visual content (occurrences)*

	Textbook A	Percents	Textbook B	Percents
Caucasian	80	72%	17	40%
Asian	7	6.3%	1	2.3%
African	14	12.6%	11	25.5%
Roma	3	2.7%	1	2.3%
Indian	1	0.9%	0	0
Other	4	3.6%	2	4.6%
Not determined	2	1.8%	11	25.5%
Total mentions	111	100%	43	100%

Only 2% of the illustrations portray Roma people, the minority is underrepresented in the two textbooks, in relation to a large Roma population in the country (Moldoveanu, 2015). We have encountered a single reference to a Roma tradition which is represented in Figure no. 1.



Figure no. 1. Roma youth dancing in Textbook A, p. 28

4.3. Presence of minorities

The theme of diversity is a part of the compulsory curriculum for intercultural education; thus the textbooks develop this issue. However, the approach is predominantly theoretical, diversity, inclusiveness, and intercultural society values are presented in theoretical, general terms. Information about ethnic minorities in the country is rare: Textbook B mentions the minority's celebration date (p. 13); textbook A offers examples of minorities' traditions. However, the activities, tasks, and exercises focus on encouraging students to discover and explore the local culture present within the school and community:

- Identification of minority groups that live in the community and compare them with the majority groups (textbook B, p. 13).
- Selection of images in which the elements of the Romanian culture and of other cultures in the country can be visually identified (textbook B, p. 13).
- Imagining life in a community that represents a minority group (textbook B, p. 13).
- Exploring the cultural identity of students in the school (textbook B, p. 14).
- Expressing the attitude towards students belonging to other ethnic groups (ibidem).

Other tasks send students outside the local community and ask them to read newspaper articles or watch tv programs that refer to different cultures, their traditions, and customs and analyze the cultural identity they illustrate (textbook B, p 14, p. 18), or even to identify tolerance or intolerance manifestations (textbook B, p. 43). Some tasks refer to an informational level, asking students to collect information about minorities in the country and their contribution to the local and national heritage considering the preservation of language, traditions, and customs (textbook B, p. 18). The interactions promoted by textbooks go beyond the informational level and ask students to visit a school in a community whose language they don't speak.

Critical thinking exercises are also proposed. Within the chapter concerning intercultural values, one exercise in textbook B proposes a role play in which students can exercise empathy and are introduced indirectly to some vulnerable groups. However, the exercise does not imply an in-depth analysis of the issues that are presented, nor does it explore the sensitive topics, which are the following: (a) „you are an unmarried and unemployed mother”; (b) „you are the son of a Chinese emigrant who has a profitable fast food business”; (c) „you are a 14-year-old Roma girl who has not completed primary education”; (d) „you are an illegal immigrant from Syria”; (e) “you are a person who has nowhere to live” (p. 43).

Textbook B uses the phrase “positive discrimination” (p. 43) to illustrate the meaning of “affirmative action” in the same lesson where it defines discrimination as a form of intolerance. The association between these terms can generate confusion and lack of clarity in what discrimination implies and how it affects vulnerable groups. This confusion can have serious consequences, when discrimination is associated with the adjective “positive”. Moreover, the same lesson in textbook B contains references to the celebration of International Roma Day. Combining these elements, the author implies that Roma is indeed a vulnerable group within Romanian society who suffered different forms of injustice.

Critical thinking and problem-solving competences are targeted through case studies. Textbook B (p. 44) proposes the following context: “Maria is a Roma child and she is in the 6th grade. She likes to play the violin, but she

has difficulties with English. Alexandra, her colleague, invited Maria home to learn English together. Her mother scolded Alexandra and told her that she does not allow Roma people in her house”. However, the exercise is not followed by any guidance or criteria in evaluating the attitudes and behaviors embedded in the case presented, the teacher’s contribution and guidance is vital for the identification and response to the case.

4.4. The international level

The international dimension of intercultural education textbooks can be structured into three categories: (1) foreigners living in Romania; (2) Romanians living abroad; (3) International issues outside Romania.

In the first category, we include a short story in textbook A about a woman with a Japanese father whose culture is foreign to her, she does not identify with Japanese cultural elements. Interestingly, she attributes physical differences to “a strangeness of nature” (textbook A, p. 53). Also, another case study is that of foreign workers who live and work in Romania and they stand out because of the different language they use, as it is perceived by a Romanian individual (textbook A, p. 52). While the attitude in the story is one of acceptance and enthusiasm for multiculturalism, the reference belongs to the majority in relation to which the presence of the other is validated. Another international issue concerns war refugees searching for shelter in Romania (ibidem).

In the second category, we include another case study which presents a family living in Copenhagen, as they integrate into the Danish lifestyle, but also keep their Romanian traditions and meet with other Romanians (idem, p. 28), navigating through both cultures and integrating elements of identity from both cultures.

Finally, the last category comprises references to a European identity (idem, p. 40), as well as references to war refugees coming to European countries (idem, p. 38).

As can be seen in the presentation above the international dimension of intercultural education connects individuals from different cultures and backgrounds breaking the barriers of nationality and focusing on global social

and political problems and difficulties people encounter in the present. The European and global perspectives illustrated especially by textbook A suggest the need of unity and cooperation on a worldwide level.

4.5. Values

While the discussion about minorities – both within the lessons and tasks – is structured in general terms, the ethnic diversity of the country is not being analyzed and explored, and several topics and tasks are centered around the majority's (Romanian) traditions and cultural heritage. Textbook B (p. 22) discusses cultural Romanian traditions giving examples of folk creations and craft arts. Some tasks ask students to identify and recognize local Romanian folk creations (textbook B, p. 22) while others invite students to study a list of Romanian UNESCO heritage: *Călușul*, *doina*, pottery processing techniques from Horezu area, caroling in the men's fog, the boy's game (*jocul feciorelnic*), the Romanian tradition of weaving carpets and scraps, *măștișorul* (p. 23). Two lessons in textbook B (pp. 25-27), as well as textbook A (p. 37) deal with the subject of patriotism and its form of manifestation – „work, fulfillment of duties to the country, defense of the country, even at the cost of living, when needed” (p. 26). Textbook A offers a few quotes from Romanian cultural figures which discuss the meaning of patriotism, one of which connects patriotism with language (Delavrancea, p. 37).

The discussion about discrimination centers around forms of intolerance – racism, segregation, and xenophobia – positioning minorities and other groups in the Other category, in the victim's role, in relation to the majority, which is presented as the norm. However, on a larger scale, in a European context, when speaking about Romanian immigrants, students are asked to identify “Romanians who became famous in the countries where they emigrated (for example, the Romanian engineer and inventor academician Henri Coandă was the technical director of the British aviation factories in Bristol)” (textbook B, p. 46).

The discussion about heritage presents exclusively Romanian heritage sites and elements: The Romanian blouse (textbook A, p. 23), Sarmisegetusa-Regia (ibidem), Romanian, wood carving (ibidem), Corvinilor Castle (textbook A, p. 22). Ethnic minorities references to Romanian heritage are absent.

4.6. The attitude of the authors

While the analyzed textbooks emphasize the demand to protect and respect minorities, vulnerable groups, and people in need (by encouraging solidarity, tolerance, and equal opportunities), positive models of success are only attributed to the Romanian majority and the Romanians' skills. Few examples of other ethnicities are used. Textbook A offers a lesson on preserving cultural identity. Two fragments are provided as examples. In the first text, a German Romanian who moved to Germany specifies that his soul is still in Romania and he navigates between the two worlds, the author using the term "home" with reference to Transylvania, a region in Romania. In the second text, a Romanian who emigrated to Denmark presents the situation of his family. Other examples of preserving cultural identity are not provided.

Romanian literary texts are used as references – "D-I Goe..." (p. 66) in textbook B, "Amintiri din copilărie" (p. 21) in textbook A – and examples of Romanians who succeeded in promoting intercultural dialogue are used – Atanase Perifan, the son of a Romanian refugee from France proposed the celebration of the European Day of Neighbors celebrated on May 19 (p. 65). Textbook A presents only the list of Romanian cultural traditions that entered the UNESCO heritage. On a visual level, the same textbook offers four illustrations showing Romanian crafts and one illustration for the customs of other ethnicities: Lipovan Russians, Germans, Hungarians (pp. 24-25).

The lesson on heritage in textbook B discusses the importance of preserving and protecting the traditions and customs of a people or a community but exemplifies by only means of textual (Mărțișorul) and visual (children singing carols, Easter eggs) references to the Romanian ethnic group, the majority. Also, a half-page section of the lesson is dedicated to exemplifying elements related to traditional Romanian culture (literary folklore, traditional crafts (pp. 21-22).

5. Discussion

Intercultural textbooks lessons are structured as follows: a short presentation that defines the concepts and occasionally offers bullet information, followed by several exercises and tasks which guide students in applying and exploring

the new concepts in order to generate and take part in an intercultural dialogue at a classroom or school level, community or national level.

The concept of diversity is applied within the European and international space. We found that a Romanian-centered approach permeates the intercultural discourse, especially through the means of absence. Exploring the topic of cultural heritage, a series of Romanian historical sites and classical literary texts are given as examples in textbook A. Furthermore, the concept of cultural heritage, described as essential in the construction and cohesion of a nation is approached via Romanian cultural sites and their preservation. However, within the topic of customs and crafts, some images exhibit traditions of minorities – German, Hungarian, Russian, Lipovans, and Roma. A great deal of space is devoted to patriotism, through images, texts, and critical thinking activities.

While there are references to other ethnicities and nationalities (Indian, Swedish in textbook A and Syrian, Roma in textbook B), the presentation is predominantly Romanian-centered. A limited number of references concern national minorities in Romania; however, we have found three references to Roma ethnicity connected to issues of discrimination and racism. Conversely, two images present Roma people. The first picture illustrates Roma women dancing on a field while wearing traditional clothing and the second picture illustrates one Roma man dressed traditionally.

The discussion about tolerance gravitates around circumstantial manifestations of intolerance. The texts plead for equal respect for people regardless of their country, ethnicity, or other characteristics. It is our opinion that with no guidance or criteria from the teacher, certain exercises and tasks may be open to discriminatory attitudes or stereotypes. One such exercise asks students to compare the majority with one minority living in the country. The discussion on multiple identities is recurrent in the textbooks referring to different ethnicities (Romanian and German, textbook A) or nationalities (Romanian and Danish, textbook A). All the same, intersectionality which affects many vulnerable groups, including the Roma minority, is not discussed in the analyzed textbooks.

Minorities and vulnerable groups are often presented as *Others*, alterities, living outside but together with the majority. However, there is a significant

interest in recognition and relational justice issues such as discrimination, marginalization, tolerance, and solidarity. These social justice concepts are not only explained theoretically but are used to generate action responses from students. Thereby, we can see an increased interest to address forms of oppression as they are defined by Iris Young.

The evidence extracted from these textbooks shows responsibility and a keen interest to uncover the realities that vulnerable groups in Romania encounter in social, economic, and educational interactions. It is our belief that revealing oppression and creating empathy towards oppressed groups are precursor key elements of intercultural competence in a society that can guarantee equal opportunities. However, it is necessary that the activities proposed by these textbooks be carried out by teachers who are familiar with the themes of social justice and who have themselves acquired intercultural competences.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

In this paper, we have revealed some positive developments in creating an intercultural education component to education in Romania by analyzing Intercultural Education textbooks, in grade 6. We have revealed that there is a significant interest to develop a social justice perspective in education, textbooks not only provide theoretical explanations of social justice concepts but also come up with complex case studies and propose a variety of interactions between students, as well as outside the classroom.

Education for social justice is essential for an intercultural society, thus in schools diversity “should be recognized and valued in the sense of developing the character” (textbook A, p. 81) because “the political mechanisms that aim to ensure the minority communities the right to preserve their own identities, such as those that are promoted by international documents or those that have been put into practice in Romania, cannot alone guarantee positive relations between minorities and the majority” (ibidem).

Students are challenged to think critically and creatively, find solutions, show respect and recognition to others, and develop a sense of community and

inclusiveness. However, the teacher's contribution to decoding and exploring the sensitive themes and case studies is crucial. In order to be able to develop intercultural competence, students need teachers who have developed this competence. This finding suggests that interpretation of the text is essential, thus intercultural education needs to be taught by teachers who have developed a diversity awareness and have social justice knowledge. In order to implement an intercultural pedagogy in Romania, schools need to be equipped with prepared teaching staff, because critical thinking tasks offered through the textbooks need properly trained teachers who are able to create and encourage students to participate equally in dialogues and address evident or hidden forms of oppression.

It is our belief that intercultural education textbooks ought to devote equal representations of minorities and offer positive models and characters, especially for historically oppressed groups as is the case for the Roma minority.

Introducing an Intercultural education school subject for 6th grade students can be seen as a benchmark for implementing a new perspective, a relational one, of social justice measures which must be integrated into the curriculum to combat forms of oppression, as the distributive measures and affirmative action policies cannot alone address such profound social problems in Romania.

Further research ought to explore, on the one hand, teachers' preparedness for intercultural education in Romania. On the other hand, intercultural education inquiries ought to focus on the impact of textbook content on teachers and students and on their capacity to recognize, identify and act upon forms of oppression.

7. Limitations

This study examines Intercultural education textbooks for grade 6, but it does not take into consideration Social Education textbooks for 5th grade which can be seen as precursors of intercultural education pedagogy. Thus, one limitation of the study is the analysis of intercultural education textbooks

regardless of other educational material for middle school students, prior to grade 6. Moreover, this analysis does not focus on the type of activities and tasks included in the two textbooks, nor on their impact on developing intercultural competence.

Although we do recognize the teacher's undoubted role in implementing, enacting, and creating educational resources, we do not include in this analysis data concerning educational practice.

Further research ought to determine the attitudinal and developmental impact these textbooks have on students and young learners in Romania.

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Appendix¹

Table no. 4. Topics (from Hilliard, 2014, p. 251)

Personal Life, Identity	Family, Family Life	Community	Sports	Health, Welfare	Travel
Education	The Workplace, Occupations	Current Events	Religion	Arts, Humanities	Politics, Charities, World Organizations
Environment	Leisure, Hobbies	Geography	Transportation	Commerce, Economy	Media, Communication
Culture	Science, Animals	Food, Drink	Body, Fashion	History	Other

Table no. 5. Images (from Hilliard, 2014, p. 251)

	Caucasian	Asian	Hispanic	African American	Other	Not Determined	Total
Women							
Men							
Girls							
Boys							

Table no. 6. Cultural Dimensions (from Hilliard, 2014, p. 251)

Micro Level				
Cultures and Countries Addressed	Characters (age, gender, background)	Material Environment	Situations of Interaction	Interaction and Subjectivity of the Characters (feelings, attitudes, values, perceived problems)

Macro Level		
Broad Social Facts about Contemporary Society (geographical, economic, political, etc.)	Broad Socio-Political Problems	Historical Background

International and Intercultural Issues		
Comparisons between Cultures	Intercultural Situations	Images, Stereotypes

¹ These textbooks are available online at the following link: <https://www.manuale.edu.ro/>

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