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DEVELOPMENT OF COMPETENCIES THROUGH NON-
FORMAL ACTIVITIES

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Abstract

Nonformal activities are based on student-centered educational strategy objectives. The used content, methods and instruments are student-centered, differentiated according to the children's capacities and interest. Activities are flexible, optional and complementary to formal education and help to develop personality, creativity and competencies. The residence area, drop-out, assessments' results, nonformal activities are factors influencing the students' progress, personality and key competencies development. Extracurricular student-centered activities within the Children's Palace focus on developmental aspect of learning by identification of the efficient organizational ways of the students' activities. Choosing the appropriate extracurricular activities in order to acquire knowledge, to form skills, abilities and attitudes that should help with the integration in a modern society has a close relationship with the children's gender and residence area. Present questionnaire researches the role, importance and complementarity of extracurricular activities seen from the children's perspective. Through the answers we can realize a correlation between the results, drop-out and extracurricular activities. These activities assist the children to develop personality, research the learners' opinion on the interactive student-centered extra school activities. The study has been realized with an online questionnaire on a national level among primary, secondary, upper secondary children (N=3945). The results show us the importance of non-formal activities that besides formal education help to improve the results and to develop competencies. The study helps in analysing the strengths and weaknesses of non-formal education, the results enlighten us about the requirements of children and about the use of the student-centered educational strategy in obtaining better results.

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Keywords: Non-formal education, creativity, educational strategy, complementary education, key competencies.



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1. Introduction

Present research studies the role of activities within the Children's Palaces and Clubs, the complementarity with formal education and factors influencing participation of children in non-formal education. Extracurricular and extra school activities are the main non-formal activity providers from Romania. These activities are financed by the Ministry of Education and are free of charge for the students.

The specificity of non-formal education within the Children's Palaces and Clubs is carried out through the interference of educational forms with the requirements of the local communities, the specificity of the region. Increase of the educational act's complexity, interaction of sciences, flexibility and open character of education, researches in the area of educational sciences, globalization, compared pedagogy are some elements that require the introduction of the interdisciplinary character (Albulescu, 2008). Realization of children's requirements' needs, harmonious and complex development of the learner could be realized through interaction of the three educational forms, the formal, non-formal provided by the Children's Palaces and Clubs and the informal ones (Bocoş, 2017). Researches in extracurricular and extra school activities highlight the role of these educational forms which could improve drop-out and can be complementary to quality education by development of personality and of key competencies. Extracurricular activities can have a number of positive effects. Some of them are designed to fill the gaps in correctional, catching-up, compensatory programs, lessons and socio-social disadvantages, and the other is to develop sports activities, a culture of movement, third type activities related to musical literacy, participation in school life in the fourth type, one fifth and religious or charitable activities. The positive impact of sport, art, science and professional extracurricular activities can be directly demonstrated in improving learning outcomes (Pusztai, 2009).

2. Problem Statement

Characteristics of extra school activities organized within the Children's Palaces and Clubs have to be explored from the perspective of different educational forms and require their investigation, because non-formal activities have to be considered complementary with formal education and should help to develop personality and achieve the educational outcomes proposed for the integration of the learners in a modern society. Popularity of non-formal education is associated with Coombs, president of the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning, forum in which has „developed” the interrelation of the three educational form and the bases of non-formal education, as an alternative to formal education, have been laid. The characteristics in favour of which non-formal education militate and which are governed also by regulations in the case of extra school activities in Romania, take place in the Children's Palaces and Clubs, are student-centered, and on the real learning needs facilitating in this way a better adaptation of the non-formal educational process. Another positive aspect through its autonomy, the activities are adapted to the community, to the group and it is centered on a proper learning rhythm. The content of non-formal activities, development programs are structured and organized on areas of interest and not on years or academic disciplines, have clear learning objectives, allow moment of abstraction by extraction of knowledge from real life, are complementary activities to formal education

(Bocoş, 2017). The flexible contents, the period of achieving the results are shorter than in formal education and satisfaction is larger among the children. Diversification, extension of the learning frame, rendering space and time more flexible, introduction of educative games, as a skills training method is the duty of the leader of the club (Albulescu & Catalano, 2019). The respective activities complete formal education, respectively accumulation of knowledge, abilities, attitudes that help personal development of children. The requirements of the children and of the community, motivation of the students to participate in non-formal activities besides other activities probably more interesting or more relaxing, require an efficient management and a modern pedagogy centered on competence through education designed to focus on consolidating the theoretical information and their practical application.

These activities according to the organisation way and location in which they are carried out, can be realized both in school and away from it, as extracurricular and extra school programs. Changing the place of the activities decreases the monotony, routine, laboratories, workshops, clubs of non-formal activities have to offer an alternative. The flexibility to see also other educational forms, to compare positively or negatively to what is happening in school, requires a change of the place of activities. Children's Palaces and Clubs assist the formation of the child's personality, play "area takes place within an institutionalized frame, but outside of the educational system, in institutions not having an explicit educational purpose" (Bocoş & Jucan, 2017, p. 25).

2.1. Extracurricular activities

Extracurricular activities in Romania are those spent in school, but are organized within the frame of the Curriculum according to the school's decision or outside of the scholar Curriculum. According to Order No. 4.828/2018 for modification and completion of the Order of the Minister of National Education and Scientific Research No.3590/2016 regarding the approval of educational framework plans for secondary education, have well-established role and place, they aim to identify and cultivate skills, civilized lifestyle and to enhance creativity in various areas from the earliest age within the framework of which children accumulate and deepen knowledge, develop an interest in cultural, sport activities, improve skills and they can facilitate their integration in certain social groups. They are educative activities organized and planned with educational purpose, they have a non-formal character and through their activities completes children's personality formation. The extracurricular activities offer opportunities for developing of some competencies in respect of educational objectives that motivate and have a formative value for social and personal development of the child. They are structured, organized, assured by the correlation of the projection, implementation and evaluating activities. The success of the activities depends on the teacher's personality and on the used didactical strategy to which adds student motivation to attend the respective activities. These activities have to be particularized considering the nature of activity category which it covers. General reference that has to be gone through at the planning of activities are identical with the formal activities, selection of objectives, choice of the needed experience for achieving the educational objectives, choice of the contents through which learning and student-centered experience, organization and integration of experiences and contents in specific extracurricular activities and evaluation will be carried out. Following international pedagogy and didactics regarding spending free time of the child, it would be ideal that these extracurricular activities

have an identical rank with the disciplines from the common core included in the National Curriculum, because it is the ideal terrain in terms of psychopedagogy of the child, it is the area, where it can exist motivation to learn, to realize a differentiated pedagogy, a more objective and larger vision of the things that happen around us. Extracurricular activities have a self-selective aspect due to the fact that they are chosen voluntarily by the children, fact that imposes an additional motivation to the curricular ones. Extracurricular activities require giving up leisure time, these activities require huge amounts of energy, giving up on other activities, friends, family, but if the activities are well organized it is worth the effort of both sides. In educational institutions where the parent is unable to help the child prepare for the afternoon, the school has a prominent role in improving student performance. The positive effects of a well-functioning professional relationship and collaboration of teachers can be demonstrated in the study of student efficiency (Bacsikai, 2015).

The first negative aspect of the educational policy from Romania has been the substantial reduction of extracurricular activities for compliance with the allocated funds. Another negative aspect has been the obligation to participate at some activities even if the student has not chosen the respective subject. Extracurricular subjects often do not reflect the choices of the children or of the parents, they cannot be personalized and they do not offer the horizons desired by the learners. Some of them are included in the National Curriculum and are tendered on national level, are uniformly planned, and the evaluations are realized in the same way as in formal activities, presence of children, who have not opted for the respective subject affects the educative process (Chiş, 2005). These activities often complete chair and thus they loose from the charm of the facultative process.

2.2. Extra school activities

Extra school activities performed outside school in Romania by the Children's Palaces and Clubs, Sportive Clubs, as well as ONG through diversified and student-centered programs. Children's Palaces and Clubs are state educational establishments specialized in extra school activities and within the frame of which specific instructive-educative activities are performed which develops and exercises the key competencies by valuing spare time of the children. The activities have to be realized in a manner that they are complementary to formal education and that they avoid parallelism or overlaps with the content of specific formal educational programs.

Extra school activities from within Children's Palaces and Clubs are carried out depending on the areas of interest. According to Order MECS no. 4624/2015 - modification of annexe no. 1 to the Regulation of establishments offering extra school activities are structured on domains of the type: cultural, artistic, civic, technical, applicative, scientific, sportive and touristic. Recommendation 2006/962/CE of the European Parliament and of European Council regarding key competencies for lifelong learning includes also within the framework of extra school activities learning focused on competencies, objectives of which are the development of key competencies. The recommendation identifies eight key competencies being fundamental for each person in a society based on knowledge.

Quality and efficiency of the activities within the Children's Palaces and Clubs depend on the compliance with some rules and principles and have to follow and to form the competencies, that are formed by the formal education. Educational valences of the non-formal activities emphasizes a more relaxed, closer relation between teacher and student. Even if the teacher facilitates the entire teaching

approach, students can manifest spontaneously and freely. The teacher or the club leader do not impose his/her point of view, at the very most he/she suggests, cooperates and he/she supports them to become good organizers of their own activities. The range of various didactical strategies offers the student the chance to accumulate life experience by direct contact with people, with phenomena of material and spiritual culture. The educated one becomes resource, producer, opinion leader, in other words, active participant in the own learning (Stan, 2001).

Like formal education, the non-formal one follows the formation of some positive continuous learning behaviours, even through proper methods, acquisition of an information volume and its transfer in diverse domains of knowledge, development of critical thinking, multiplying positive experiences (Kerekes, 2018).

We have recently found a tendency of approaching between formal and non-formal education: the first tends to become more flexible, more adapted to the needs and motivations specific to learners, while the second one is organized more and more rigorously, follows a public recognition as explained as possible, uses the already probed methods recognized by specialists, follows to ensure a certain quality.

Though the extra school education has its role, supporting the efforts of those who wish to increase the coherence of the instructive-educative process through educative practical activities and with a prospective orientation of the extra school education.

In Romania, education represents a right guaranteed by Constitution regardless of social or ethical origin, of sex or of religious affiliation. Gratuity of the extracurricular and extra school activities in Children's Palaces and Clubs financed in Romania by the Ministry of Education are wards of the state to leisure of the child and the strength of the formal and non-formal education in the Romanian education system, as well.

Following the activities of the Children's Palaces and Clubs it can be affirmed that there exist clubs, where the number of boys prevails, such as applied electronics, model airplanes, go-kart and there are clubs, that girls like more such as modern dance, fantasy workshop, experimental chemistry, etc. One of the main research themes regarding gender in education is the difference between the scholar results of girls comparatively to those of the boys, that is what in the specialized literature was called gender discrepancy (or disparity) in education (gender gap) (Barash & Lipton, 2002; Francis, 2000; Martino & Meyenn, 2001). Initially this problem was formulated as an advantage that boys have in some subjects (such as mathematics or sciences), that is at the so-called masculine sciences (Goldstein, 1993), above girls. International studies and researches show a balance in case of the non-formal activities, a slight feminization of all activities. Researches carried out in other EU states in this domain have concentrated principally on determining some factors that influence the students in choosing different types of extracurricular and extra school activities and determining if they facilitate or prevent healthy development of the children (Fredricks & Eccles, 2008). Findings in these studies demonstrate that participation in such activities contributes to the development of physical, social and intellectual abilities of the children and helps them both to create mutual networks rich in resources and to construct a positive identity and a higher self-esteem (Mahoney, Larson, & Eccles, 2005). The mentioned studies show us the interest, preference of the students depending on gender for a certain sport or for a certain extra school activity without drawing attention to discrimination. The fact that boys consider that technical clubs are

more attractive for them, does not mean that girls cannot participate in it as well. They both need the same competencies in order to achieve professionally in everyday life.

Teachers play a highly important role in the development of the understanding capacity of the gender roles at the age of childhood. There exists a large variety of studies, coming from more countries, where it has been shown that primarily parents together with teachers have the tendency to encourage girls to participate in activities that do not need practical or technical abilities. Uniform development of the key competencies is crucial in the knowledge society (Ionescu & Popescu, 2012). In order to be able to avoid gender barriers from adults in the education of the children, we have to be conscientious of these differences, to know them, to accept them and to take action in order to avoid stereotypes and cataloging the children depending on gender. The perception that children have about themselves is considered to be a crucial element for the choice of non-formal activity. All implied in the education of children, from parents to teachers have to know the problematic of gender differences and the need of valuing or compensation of these differences (Balica & Fărdușnic, 2004).

Thus, it reinforces the idea that only certain activities and behaviours are suitable to one gender, therefore, rather limits are put than to improve the curriculum in the meaning of offering equal chances (Skelton, Francis, & Valkanova, 2007). Differences between boys and girls regarding the type of activity they prefer, determines the differences in average, with large implications in personal development. A series of researches have been focalized on the type of activity in which girls and boys imply during playing periods and they have noted the fact that girls prefer in much higher structured activities than boys (Hutson-Comeaux, 2002). Structured activities are the activities in which the club leaders provide the rules, offer orientation and suggestions regarding the way in which actions should be carried out. An action is more or less structured depending on the measure in which the adult interacts with the boys and girls implied in the activity. Researches explain this difference between girls and boys in choosing the activity type by the boy's biologically sustained competitive pervasive character (Albulescu & Catalano, 2018). Preferring more or less structured activities has a direct implication in the adult-child relationship and in the interaction between them in order to establish some criteria of education and self-control. If girls choose well-structured activities they will have more experience in maintaining structures and offering answers in these structures. Not choosing structured activities, boys will have more experience in creation of own structures. They will adapt and will join with difficulty in some already created structures (Santrock, 2001).

Based on a study carried out in Covasna county, database COV-IP-EN-2017, it is apparent that at the extracurricular and extra school activities among the students from the primary cycle, the participation percent in these activities is low. Based on the research at extracurricular recreational activities organized by school participate only 29,7%, at the talent development programs only 20,2%, and at tutoring/development programs for children with learning difficulties participate only 14,2%. Based on the results we can affirm that the way these activities are carried out, requires a new approach, because the results show the positive impacts on scholar results. It can be observed a close correlation between scholar results and participation in musical, sportive activities or programs for learning a foreign language (Barabas, 2019).

Non-formal activities can give an alternative to reinvigorate education in rural area, for example contents like “Impuls perpetuum”, a chemistry and physics contest organized for children from rural area or the organized projects „Let’s Be ECO” organized by the team “Let’s Do It, Romania” together with the National Environmental Guard. They are good practices that help children from the - if we can affirm - more disadvantaged residence area, and everything depends on the school management, on dedication and professionalism of the teachers.

Important activities in the life of students are tutoring activities in school and outside school, as well. It can be considered extracurricular and extra school activities those which develop competencies, activities either individual or in restrained groups. These activities called frequently the second school are activities, that help to develop some competencies in order to pass the exams or to get a higher grade, in some cases for the preparing of the students, who take part in subject Olympics, of the students for the scholar competitions. Some students with possibilities or talents participate in activities on the level of some formal or non-formal educational structures in order to participate at national and international competitions (Cucuş, 2017).

Perfectionism, anxieties and the need to be a good parent for his child are the barriers in understanding the real, emotional needs of the child. There exist parents who pay private lessons for the children to have the desired performances, where there is no shame at all, if the student feels that he/she does not effectively understand the subject and appeals to private lessons. The problem occurs when almost all children from a class take private lessons in certain subjects, and the question/s the school management should ask is/are: Who has to adapt, the children or the teachers?

For years private lessons have become effective part in the life of a student, and this issue as naturally it looks for them, it is so abnormal in a modern educational system (Daniel, 2015). Pressure on the students does not often come from the educational system, but rather from parents and teachers. Supplementary preparation is not imposed by concurrence which awaits the students, but by the decision of parents. On their turn, more than once, the teachers themselves suggest or say directly that students should have private lessons.

3. Research Questions

In our research, we were curious to know that the participation of the secondary education students in extracurricular and extra school activities is larger at the secondary education cycle than in other cycles? Are there differences in choosing non-formal activities depending on gender? Does the participation in extracurricular and extra school activities have a connection with the residence area?

It is supposed that the secondary education students participate in extracurricular and extra school activities in a larger percent than those in the primary and upper secondary education. We also suppose that girls follow extracurricular and extra school activities that develops more the competencies in the cultural-artistic and sportive-touristic domain and the students from the urban area have more possibilities to participate in extracurricular and extra school activities.

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the research is to analyze the focus and complementarity of nonformal activities within Children's Palaces and Clubs by comparing the development of key competences among pupils attending extracurricular activities at the Children's Palaces and Clubs in comparison with students who do not attend these activities.

5. Research Methods

During the research we used on-line questionnaires. The online questionnaire has been realized in the time period from February-March 2019 in 38 counties from Romania on a sample of 3945 children who attend formal education and different forms of non-formal education. Statistical analyses have been realized with the help of the program SPSS24. The online questionnaire has been structured on the two form of non-formal education carried out within the framework of national educational system, respectively extracurricular and extra school education. Within the 19 questions it was focused on the children's gender influence when choosing some non-formal activities, the residence area and their influence upon scholar progress, socio-economical status of participant children, the role of extracurricular and extra school activities in developing key competencies which are the main factors having influenced the participation or non-participation in these activities, the role of scholar tutoring and private lessons, which are the factors that influence the sharp decrease of the activities in the technical and scientific domain and personal opinions about these non-formal activities.

6. Findings

Complexity of the activities, selection of the children according to their age and the intellectual capacity or the ability with which the child is gifted is realized by the club leader based on a selection procedure approved by the methodical Commissions and by the management board of the institution. The interest of the students for non-formal activities increases along with the ageing of the children, a fact confirmed by the questionnaire as well.

Depending on the covering of the minimal number or where applicable maximal number of classes per week determined in the Framework plan, in the offer of the school are included progressively depending on the children's age, classes representing Curriculum according to the school's decision, in present case extracurricular activities.

Table 01. Percent of the students taking part in non-formal activities by scholar cycles (N=3945)

Education levels		Extra school activities			Extracurricular activities		
		Yes	No		Yes	No	
Primary (ISCED1)	27%	85,6%	14,4%	31.0%	80.1%	19.9%	
Secondary lower (ISCED2)	42.5%	67,8%	32,2%	41.7%	71.3%	28,8%	
Secondary superior (ISCED3)	30.5%	59,9%	40,1%	27.3%	64.3%	35,7%	

Extracurricular activities are set by consulting the students and the parents. Based on the research the increase of the importance of non-formal activities can be observed along with the ageing of the students and the increase of autonomy towards parents. The results of the Table no.1 show that the students of the primary participate almost in the same percent, 31% in extracurricular activities and 27,0% in extra school activities, repeatedly in activities parents choose on the school's proposal. The extra school activities preferred by the students of primary are instructive educative processes that develop mainly physical skills.

The biggest contribution of the non-formal activities have students from secondary lower (ISCED2) level. They take part in a larger percent, in these interdisciplinary activities, that are complementary to formal education and that develop their personality, abilities, creativity. By the mid-teens children try all types of extra school activities, until they find those activities they are attracted to. Non-formal activities within the Children's Palaces and Clubs attract a percent of 41,7% of children in extracurricular activities and 42,5% in extra school activities. From among the children, who responded positively to the questionnaire 71,3% participate actively in the educative activities organized in schools and 67,8% attend weekly an educative activity within the Children's Palaces and Clubs. Viewed from the gender perspective in the respective activities a number of 42,1% are girls and 41,8% are boys from the total of children participating in the questionnaire and who are spending their free time actively. Motivation of the students for these types of recreational activities depends very much on the personality of the teacher and the didactical strategy they use for attracting these children, rebels in the most of the time, sometimes aggressive, who do not like to respect the rules, but are interested in creative, interactive activities. The role of the extracurricular and extra school activities drops significantly with the accession in a secondary superior (ISCED3) level, only 30,5% respective 27,3% from the questioned ones take part in non-formal activities.

Table 02. Proportion of the students who choose an extra school activities (N=3945)

Education level	Chosen by the teacher or by the parents	Chosen by the child
Primary (ISCED1)	92,9%	7,1%
Secondary lower (ISCED2)	45,1%	54,9%
Secondary superior (ISCED3)	9,3%	92,7%

The choice of the extra school activities organized by the Children's Palaces and Clubs, increase of the autonomy of choosing the activities for spare time is proportional to the children's age (Table no.2). In the primary cycle children choose non-formal activities encouraged to by the teachers in partnership with parents (92,9%). In secondary cycle things start to change, students choose those activities through which they desire to develop their strengths and which help to develop competencies in the respective domain. Parents must help, inform and find the weaknesses of the children in order to develop those abilities, that lack of knowledge, attitude which are necessary in the children's future. Secondary lower (ISCED2) education children choose their activities voluntarily in proportion of 54,9% from among the interviewed ones. The upper secondary cycle has a larger vision on activities they desire, they choose in proportion of 92,7% non-formal activities, they want to follow and which will help to develop competencies. We cannot draw general conclusions, but it can be generalized from the statistics of the Children's Palace

from Covasna county that the number of students from the Secondary superior (ISCED3) level, who participate in these activities in proportion of 70% are children from the 9. and 10. classes. They follow activities that have become for now their hobby as well, such as music, modern dance, folk dances and rarely there are students who are into electronics or natural sciences.

Table 03. Residence area as main factor in choosing of an extra school activities (N=3945)

Residence area	Primary (ISCED1)	Secondary lower (ISCED2)	Secondary superior (ISCED3)
Urban	28,2%	40,9%	30,9%
Rural	16,1%	45%	38,9%

Note: Nprimary=945, $p < .001$, $\text{adj.resid} > 3$, Nsecondary lower = 1671, $p < .001$, $\text{adj.resid} > 2$, Nsecondary superior = 1329, $p < .001$, $\text{adj.resid} > 3$

Analysis of the data has been carried out with the program SPSS24, coefficients have high values, fact that indicates the existence of a positive, significant and powerful connection between the residence area and education levels.

In order to observe the significant differences adjusted standardized residuals are followed for every cell in part. The Table no. 3 presents the correlations of residence area and the choosing of an extra school activities. At the primary from among the children who answered the questions 28,2% participate in a non-formal activity form. In urban area 16,1% participate in such activities, but their number compared to the urban residence area is lower, 222 students compared to 723 students from urban area. On the secondary lower education level there exists a significant increase 40,9% to urban residence area and 45% rural residence area. At the Secondary superior (ISCED3) there exists a slight drop compared to Secondary lower (ISCED2) up to 30,9% by students domiciled in towns compared to 38,9% for students in rural area.

By analyzing the relation between residence area and educational levels, we observe at primary (urban, rural) we have adjusted residual interval between (-8.5 – 8.5), the positive value we accredit to the primary from urban area. We can affirm that there exists a significant difference between the number of children who attend non-formal activities from urban residence area compared to the number of valid children. Therefore, unlike children with rural residence area, development of competencies by students from urban area is more eloquent due to participation in extracurricular and extra school activities.

On the ISCED3 level that presents us the value of standardized adjusted residuals is of (5.1 - -5.1), the positive tendency is, this time, in favour of the students coming from rural area. According to the research students coming from rural schools take part in proportion of 38,9% in these activities. Probably the lack of educational alternatives in secondary lower education level, curiosity about these activities attracts a larger number from children coming from rural schools. High school students have a more eloquent possibility to follow through creative and recreational activities hobbies in the Children's Palaces and Clubs. The results of the research are sustained also by other researches realized in the extracurricular and extra school activities on national and international level (Eschelman, Madsen, Alarcon, & Barelka, 2014; Ionescu & Popescu, 2012).

Table 04. Proportion of students who participate in non-formal activities by education levels and gender (N=3945)

		Education level		
		Primary (ISCED1)	Secondary lower (ISCED2)	Secondary superior (ISCED3)
Sex	Girl	591	955	725
		26,0%	42,1%	31,9%
	Boys	354	716	604
		21,1%	42,8%	36,1%

The proportion in which girls or boys participate in these non-formal activities depends on the activity domain. Optional subjects are part of the curriculum according to the school's decision, it has to be the result of initiative and creativity of the teachers, to reflect the interests of the students based on investigation and to develop competences, abilities and personality of the students. Ratio of girls and boys in extracurricular activities is proportional with the collective of students in the class and it performs all its activities in common. Instead, in extra school activities the component between sexes depends on the activity domain, girls like more the cultural-artistic activity domain and the sportive-touristic ones, while boys like the sportive-touristic and technical-applicative ones. Based on the results a slight shift of participation of the girls in non-formal activities offered by Children's Palaces and Clubs can be affirmed.

The results of the study (Table no.4) corresponds to researches carried out in the respective domains in Europe, girls from the primary cycle participates in proportion of 26% compared to 21% which is the proportion of the boys in non-formal activities. At secondary lower education level there exists a balance between the participation of girls and boys in these activities, they participate in proportion of 42,1% respectively boys 42,8%. Secondary superior level brings a slight shift towards more active participation of boys 36,1% compared to girls with 31,9%. Per total participation of girls in these activities is larger, which corresponds also with the results of other researches.

An important factor in non-formal activities within Children's Palaces and Clubs has the lack of alternatives for boys. Technical-scientific activities are attended by 26,9% boys from primary, 22,8% from secondary and 12% from upper secondary cycle. These data are in concordance with the statistics carried out by the Council of the European Union in 2019.

Table 05. Proportion of students participating in non-formal activities by curricular areas and gender (N=3945)

	Extracurricular activities		Extracurricular activities		Extra school activities		Extra school activities	
	Does not take part	Participates	Does not take part	Participates	Does not take part	Participates	Does not take part	Participates
	Technical-applicative		Cultural-artistic		Technical-applicative		Cultural-artistic	
Girl	50,1%	49,9%	31,2%	68,8%	46,5%	43,5%	34,5%	65,5%
Boy	52,7%	47,3%	56,1%	43,9%	44,6%	55,4%	55,6%	44,4%

Research has focused on preferences of the students and factors influencing in choosing of some non-formal activities. The results of the Table no. 5 show there is a significant correlation between the child's gender and the participating in non-formal activities. In the case of technical-applicative extracurricular activities it can be observed that there does not exist a significant difference between participation of girls or boys in these education forms. Boys participate in proportion of 47,3% while girls in proportion of 49,9%. A significant increase can be observed in the participation of girls in cultural artistic activities, 68,8% and a drop among boys to 43,9%, numbers that highlight the sympathy of cultural-artistic activities among girls. Technical-applicative activities organized by Children's Palaces and Clubs are preferred among boys - 55,4% and cultural-artistic activities are attended especially by girls - 65,5%. Data of the realized research are in concordance with the results of the researches carried out in Luxemburg, Cyprus, Hungary and Romania, boys prefer activities that develop more competences in the domain of science and technology, and girls attend especially cultural artistic clubs (Olaru, 2015).

In virtue of the unitary character of the educational system from our country, of the equal chances to instruction and education, the same preparation must be assured for all children of our country, inclusive of those from localities in which, due to low number of students, the scholar activity is performed under simultaneous teaching - learning conditions.

Simultaneous classes, large number of students in a class, social factors, education centered on scholar performances and not on competence indicate pressure that parents feel in order to help their children to have best possible results both in school and at the national assessments and baccalaureate.

Table 06. Proportion of students by scholar cycles participating in tutoring in school (N=3945)

Educational level	Tutoring in school	
	Yes	No
Primary (ISCED1)	40%	60%
Secondary lower (ISCED2)	45,5%	54,5%
Secondary superior (ISCED3)	40%	60%

Note: N_{primary}=945, p<.001, adj.resid>2, N_{secondary}= 1671, p<.001, adj.resid>3, N_{secondary superior}=1329, p<.001, adj.resid>3,

Tutoring classes organized in schools are agreed by 40% from the students of primary (Table no.6). These tutoring classes are realized after termination of the courses and most probably they refer to preparation of homework for the next day. These tutoring classes are performed within the framework of some programs called after school or School after school.

In order to observe the significant differences standardized adjusted residuals are followed for each cell in part. By analyzing the relation between tutoring classes organized in schools and education levels we observe that at the secondary lower level we have the adjusted residual interval between (-4 – 5,4), we accredit the positive value to the secondary lower level students not attending tutoring classes in schools. We can affirm that there exists a difference between the number of children attending a form of tutoring in the school (45,5%) and students who do not benefit from these activities (54,5%).

On the secondary superior level the interval presenting us the value of standardized adjusted residuals is of (3.4- -7.1), it can be observed among the upper secondary education students an important relevance between the students attending and students not attending a tutoring form in the school. Results

show that 60% from the students that answered the questionnaire do not participate in a tutoring or other form offered by the high-school. Only 40% uses activities free of charge offered by schools through different programs dedicated to high-school students.

Table 07. Proportion of students by educational level participating in private lessons outside school

Education level	Private lessons outside school	
	Yes	No
Primary (ISCED1)	47,7%	52,3%
Secondary lower (ISCED2)	49,4%	50,6%
Secondary superior (ISCED3)	39,3%	60,7%

Note: Nprimary=945, $p < .001$, $adj.resid > 2$, Nsecondary lower= 1671, $p < .001$, $adj.resid > 3$, Nsecondary superior =1329, $p < .001$, $adj.resid > 3$

The analysis of tutoring classes organized outside school and which require an additional financial effort from the parents (Table 7), the numbers on primary and secondary cycle level show a balance between the students participating in these activities and those who cannot afford them for various reasons, or students who do not need, preparation on school level being enough for them.

A significant difference though can be observed on lower secondary education level, where the interval showing us the value of the standardized adjusted residuals on secondary education level is of (3,0- -5,1) the positive tendency is in favour of the lower secondary education students attending a tutoring or other form outside school. The results show that there exists a significant difference between students attending tutoring activities outside school (49,4%) compared to students not benefiting from these activities financed by parents or non governmental associations (50,6%).

The value of the standardized adjusted residuals on superior secondary education level is of (4,2- -8,4) the positive tendency is in favour of the high-school students not attending a tutoring form outside school. The difference is significant between students not attending tutoring activities outside school (39,3%), tutoring classes that will help the development of competences in the deficient domains and for preparation of the baccalaureate compared to students not benefiting from these activities for various reasons (60,7%).

Results of the research have close values with the studies carried out in Hungary, the students from the primary education level participate in proportion of 29% in private lessons outside school, and students from the 6. class in proportion of 21%. 10% among the students who took part in the study attend more than 4 private lessons/week in various subjects.

Table 08. Proportion of students participating in tutoring classes depending on residence area (N=3945)

Residence area	Tutoring classes in school		Private lessons outside school	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Urban	42,5%	57,5%	46,8%	53,2%
Rural	41,9%	58,1%	43,2%	56,8%

The background in present research refers to the type of locality in which a student has grown up and where he lived during the time period while he was registered and followed the courses of an educational institution. Residence area, infrastructure, drop-out and development of competences are

closely related to tutoring classes in school or private lessons outside school (Table 8). Students in rural residence area hardly can afford a tutoring class in some situations, because of the social conditions, fact proven also in the research. A number of 43,2% representing 597 students can afford to follow a tutoring activity outside school. Inequalities that appear between rural and urban schools are primarily due to the drop of the rural population by migration of scholar population from the villages around the town to urban schools and the high tide of immigration of the rural population in the EU. Rural schools have remained without children or simultaneous classes. Students hardly attend extracurricular and extra school activities for various reasons, and Children's Palaces and Clubs do not have activities in rural areas. Existent extracurricular activities do not satisfy the requirements of the students or of the parents according to the realized study. From the total of 3945 children only 43,2% representing 597 students can afford a private lesson outside school. Based on the research it cannot be affirmed, but there is a discrepancy regarding personality and competency development between children studying in rural area and those schooled in urban area. The modality that confirms the research is the high drop-out rate and the results of the national assessments 2018 in which students of the lower secondary education cycles from rural area have had grades far more below national average in the country according to MEN 2018. The difference of chances to accede to a higher educational level also depends on the residence area, on the starting position regarding the students' route towards the place of destination (Rotariu, 2004).

7. Conclusion

The scientific research has been carried out on a sample of 3945 children from 38 counties of Romania who responded to the online questionnaire regarding participation in extracurricular and extra school activities. From the realized study it has resulted the importance of the extracurricular and extra school activities realized in the schools and in the Palaces, Children's Clubs, activities being complementary to formal activities.

Our questions focused on the influence of the residence area, of the education levels and the gender on the participation in different form of activities outside school hours. Residence area is a main factor influencing the participation in these educational forms. It follows that those from the rural area have reduced possibilities to participate in these activities. In the research we did not have possibilities to analyze the factors influencing this aspect, it still remains a research possibility for the future. In accordance with the international and national studies realized to analyze the measure in which boys and girls take part in different extracurricular and extra school activities, it follows that boys prefer technical-scientific activities and girls like the cultural artistic ones. Another approached question was concerning preference of the students to choose different forms of non-formal activities. According to our results the lower secondary education students participate in a high proportion in extracurricular and extra school activities compared to the primary and superior secondary education students. In choosing the activities dominates the choice of the parents for those from the primary education, fact due to the low age of the children. In case of the students from the lower secondary education level, we can observe that the choice of the activities is almost equally made by parents and students, and in the case of superior secondary education level in a very high percent the student chooses the preferred activity. Extra school activities

are a modality to spend spare time by learning. In a further research we will study more thoroughly the factors that influence the attending of these forms of activities.

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