

INTEGRATING AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE IN GERMAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (DAF) ACQUISITION: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY FOR DEVELOPING A WORKSHOP CONCEPT – ARTS EDUCATE IN ROMANIAN SCHOOLS

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Abstract: Language use and communication evolve significantly due to everyday necessities, influencing both native and foreign language interactions. The need for effective communication and cooperation drives us to engage in various communicative exchanges. However, traditional structured learning often diverges from naturally motivated, experience-based language learning, leading to difficulties in foreign language acquisition such as hesitant verbal communication and fear of making mistakes. This paper explores a complementary approach to create realistic, experience-rich learning processes that align with natural language acquisition. Focusing on learning through aesthetic experiences, which unite the inner duality of humans (Schiller, 1792), this study investigates the impact of an arts-based workshop concept called ‘Arts educate – a German as a Foreign Language-Workshop’ on students’ individual, social, and communicative competencies. Key research questions included the extent of the workshop’s impact, its structural requirements, and the necessary teacher training. Over two and a half years, this empirical survey involved 29 Romanian teachers of German as a Foreign Language (DaF), 29 schools, and 368 students. The research utilized a mixed-methods approach with pre- and post-intervention surveys, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative tools. The intervention phases included initial training, intervention 1, a second meeting, intervention 2, and final evaluation. Results indicate that artistic activities significantly enhance students’ communication skills in German, improving active vocabulary, the more conscious integration of verbal, non-verbal, and paraverbal communication, pronunciation, willingness to speak, and confidence in speaking. Furthermore, participants demonstrated improvements in self-awareness, self-expression, and social skills, fostering greater confidence and presence in their interactions. This study provides detailed insights into the research methods and tools used, along with a thorough discussion of the outcomes, supporting the hypothesis that aesthetic experiences significantly contribute to the communicative competencies of students learning German as a foreign language.

Keywords: German as a Foreign Language (DaF), aesthetic experience, arts education, language acquisition, communication skills, empirical study, Romania

1. Introduction

Based on the results of a comprehensive preliminary study assessing the state of German as a Foreign Language (DaF) instruction in Romania, significant reforms are necessary in the educational system, particularly in current DaF teaching practices. This study involved structured interviews with 63 DaF teachers from various counties in Romania, along with an analysis of Romanian DaF curricula and observations of students’ personal and social challenges.

The interviewed DaF teachers reported significant time constraints as a prominent issue across multiple survey questions. Nearly all respondents (97%) cited the "battle against time" as their primary challenge. The current allocation of two to three hours per week for DaF instruction is insufficient to meet educational objectives. As a result, teachers are compelled to prioritize vocabulary expansion, theoretical grammar instruction, and reading and writing skills, often at the expense of developing

communicative abilities, oral expression, and intercultural education. Playful and interactive classroom elements are frequently sacrificed in favor of content-focused teaching, with games used merely as “time fillers” for relaxation at the beginning or end of lessons.

Consequently, most students experience a traditional teaching approach that offers limited opportunities to develop communicative competencies, particularly in spoken German. This is evident as 94% of teachers reported difficulties with students’ oral communication skills, and 91% indicated that their students fear engaging in spontaneous German conversations. Despite the modernization of DaF curricula over the past 15 to 20 years, the communicative and intercultural approach has only been partially realized in practice.

Conversely, rapid societal changes and evolving values in postmodern contexts pose significant challenges for youth, leading to identity crises, feelings of overwhelm, and social isolation (Weintz, 2008). As Bidlo (2006) notes, everything appears to be correct and important, unnecessary and wrong, ambiguous, intentional, and accidental all at once. Furthermore, technological advancements create virtual realities that often replace real experiences, demanding minimal cognitive and interactive engagement. At the same time, the labor market emphasizes the need for skills such as “initiative, a sense of responsibility, problem-solving skills, creativity, flexibility, willingness to take risks, teamwork ability and other key qualifications” (Klippert, 2002, p. 20). Employers increasingly seek individuals who can ensure quality, optimize workflows, address disruptions and problems independently, and remain task-oriented.

However, Romanian curricula for core subjects place little emphasis on self-expression and self-actualization, viewing the management of learning material as time-consuming. Personal and social development is relegated to weekly class meetings and art lessons, which are insufficient to address students’ developmental needs. Art education, referred to as “plastic education” and “musical education,” has been described as the “stepchildren of the Romanian system” (Stănescu, 2012), receiving minimal attention and leading to neglected creative skills. Despite these challenges, the Romanian Ministry of Education aims to promote communicative, intercultural, and action-oriented teaching (Ministerul Educației Naționale, 2017), though practical implementation remains limited.

In summary, adolescents require more support in both foreign language skills and personal development, as these areas are closely interconnected. This study investigates, through qualitative and quantitative methods, the extent to which the integration of art as an educational tool (Libeau, 2008) can positively impact foreign language learning by fostering creative and personal development. Theater pedagogy plays a central role in this approach, supplemented by musical education, engagement with literary texts, creative writing, and visual arts. Various artistic expressions aim to enrich students’ experience of using the foreign language as a means of self-expression.

The study integrates modern teaching principles such as action orientation (Dewey, 1934), multisensory learning, competency orientation, and transculturality. Tomasello’s (2009) theories provide a foundational basis for this approach, proposing a guided language learning model that mirrors the natural progression from basic communicative interactions to more complex language use. This concept is further enriched by other language acquisition theories, including Chomsky’s (1980) notion of innate, creative language ability and Krashen’s (1982) emphasis on communicative, comprehensible input over correction-focused methods.

Building on this theoretical framework, Bartalis (2017) highlights the importance of empathy and cooperation in learning contexts, particularly when students interact with peers in role-based or character-driven tasks: “Interacting with other players, their roles, and characters requires the ability to empathize and, moreover, to cooperate” (Bartalis, 2017, p. 57). Theater in Education (TiE) and participatory theater thus create a relevant space for exploring how these principles can guide students toward more immersive and collaborative language learning experiences.

The subsequent sections detail the steps of the empirical study *Künste bilden – eine DaF-Werkstatt* (Arts Educate: A German as a Foreign Language Workshop), conducted with 29 German teachers from 29 schools in Romania and involving a total of 368 students. Following this, the study’s results are analyzed.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Language Acquisition Theories and Hypotheses

Over time, second language acquisition research has developed various theories to explain the process of learning an additional language. Early perspectives, such as the Contrastive Hypothesis, emphasized structural differences between the native language (L1) and the target language (L2), suggesting that errors in L2 are influenced by the structure of L1 (Lado, 1957). In contrast, the Identity Hypothesis proposed in the 1980s posits that L1 and L2 acquisition processes are fundamentally similar and governed by universal mechanisms (Dulay & Burt, 1974).

The Monitor Hypothesis distinguishes between the conscious learning of language structures and the subconscious acquisition of language skills. According to this hypothesis, learners primarily use learned knowledge as a "monitor" to self-correct language use when sufficient time and focus are available. Complementing this is the Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1982), which argues that language acquisition occurs most effectively when learners are exposed to input that slightly exceeds their current language proficiency—creating manageable challenges for progression.

Further theories emphasize the interactive nature of language acquisition. The Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1981) underscores the importance of social interactions and negotiations between learners and native speakers of the target language. Conversely, the Pidginization Hypothesis (Schumann, 1978) warns that mutual imitation of linguistic errors in interactions can result in the development of incorrect language structures.

The Acculturation Hypothesis (Schumann, 1978) views language acquisition as a process influenced by social integration within the target language community. Learners' willingness to engage with the target culture affects their proficiency levels. On the other hand, the Output Hypothesis (Swain, 1985) emphasizes the active role of producing the language, proposing that language production aids learners in analyzing and refining linguistic structures.

Later perspectives, such as the Interlanguage Hypothesis (Selinker, 1972), describe learners' evolving linguistic systems as dynamic and transitional. Pienemann's (1985) theory of learnability proposes that learners progress through fixed developmental stages and cannot bypass these stages during the acquisition process.

Despite differences in theoretical frameworks, contemporary research largely views foreign language acquisition as an interplay of linguistic, contextual, and cognitive factors (Pienemann, 1985). These theories collectively highlight the complex nature of language acquisition and underscore the need for adaptive, evidence-based teaching practices.

The acquisition of a first language (L1) differs significantly from that of a second or foreign language (L2). While L1 acquisition occurs naturally and rapidly during early childhood, L2 learning is often constrained by pre-existing neural and cognitive structures, requiring integration into established frameworks (Slobin, 1985). Initially, both L1 and L2 acquisition rely on the right hemisphere of the brain; however, as competence develops, language processing shifts predominantly to the left hemisphere (Roth, 2001). Non-verbal cues, such as gestures and intonation, play a critical role in early stages, particularly in L2 acquisition.

Moreover, successful L2 learning demands metacognitive and metalinguistic awareness, as learners consciously analyze and reflect on linguistic forms (Krashen, 1982). The limbic system also plays a vital role, as emotional engagement enhances learners' motivation and attention span (Roth, 2001). First language knowledge serves as a foundation for L2 learning. Similarities between L1 and L2—particularly in phonology, syntax, and semantics—facilitate learning. However, greater linguistic distance necessitates more effort from learners to acquire the new language system.

Educators must leverage learners' existing linguistic knowledge to optimize the L2 acquisition process (Butzkamm, 2003). By integrating cognitive, emotional, and linguistic considerations into teaching practices, educators can create more effective and engaging learning environments.

This study builds on these latest theoretical insights to develop an innovative, arts-integrated approach

to teaching German as a foreign language. By linking language acquisition with creative and affective dimensions, the framework aims to address the complex interplay of cognitive, emotional, and social factors in language learning, providing learners with opportunities to interpret language inputs uniquely and express themselves individually.

2.2. Historical Background of Foreign Language Acquisition

The development of theories and methodologies in language acquisition is inseparably linked to the historical, cultural, and societal contexts that shaped them. Understanding the historical trajectory of foreign language instruction illuminates the evolution of pedagogical priorities, reflecting shifting societal demands, technological advancements, and intellectual currents. From ancient methodologies emphasizing textual mastery to contemporary approaches prioritizing intercultural competence and communicative skills, the progression of methods illustrates the dynamic interplay between theory and practice.

The Grammar-Translation Method (GÜM), rooted in the classical education model of the 19th century, served as the foundation of foreign language instruction. It aimed to cultivate a deep understanding of original texts from Greek and Latin authors, such as Homer and Cicero, emphasizing translation as the core objective. Instruction was deductive, prioritizing the systematic analysis of grammatical structures (Huneke & Steinig, 2010). This method was later adapted for modern languages, such as French and English, with teaching conducted in the learner's mother tongue. The approach heavily relied on formal grammar rules, with limited focus on communicative use. Exercises typically included translation tasks between the mother tongue and the target language, sentence transformation following formal grammatical rules, linguistic drills, such as dictation, writing essays, or retelling passages. The method's reliance on literary texts and written language reflected a belief in their cultural and intellectual value. Although widely criticized for its neglect of speaking skills, GÜM laid the groundwork for structured approaches to grammar and syntax, emphasizing linguistic precision and textual analysis (Neuner & Hunfeld, 1993).

By the late 19th century, growing dissatisfaction with GÜM's rigidity and its inadequacy for fostering practical communication led to the emergence of reform movements. These approaches, such as the Direct Method (DM), sought to prioritize oral proficiency, contextual learning, and immersive techniques. The Direct Method emerged as a response to the perceived inadequacies of GÜM, marking a pivotal moment in the history of foreign language teaching. Wilhelm Viëtor's manifesto *Der Sprachunterricht muß umkehren* (1882) provided the theoretical foundation for this method, advocating for a departure from grammar-heavy, translation-focused instruction toward a more natural and immersive language learning approach. The Direct Method emphasized oral proficiency, seeking to emulate the natural process of first language acquisition. Learners were encouraged to think and communicate directly in the target language, bypassing the intermediary of their native language. Its central principles included the exclusive use of the target language during instruction to foster immersion, inductive grammar learning through contextual exposure rather than explicit memorization of rules, a strong focus on oral communication with an emphasis on pronunciation and dialogue practice, and the integration of vocabulary into meaningful sentence contexts, rejecting rote memorization of isolated words.

The Direct Method sought holistic education, engaging both cognitive and emotional faculties to develop linguistic intuition (*Sprachgefühl*). This approach was revolutionary in its emphasis on active, experiential learning.

While the Direct Method laid the groundwork for modern communicative approaches, it faced criticism for its limitations: insufficient focus on written language and grammar, dependence on highly skilled teachers fluent in the target language, and limited applicability in large or heterogeneous classrooms. Nonetheless, its emphasis on oral fluency and contextual learning inspired subsequent methodologies, notably the Audiolingual Method (ALM).

Rooted in behaviorist psychology and structural linguistics, the Audiolingual Method, also known as the "Army Method," was developed in the mid-20th century to address practical language learning needs during and after World War II (Helbig, 2001). This method prioritized mechanical habit

formation through repetition and drills, oral and aural skills as primary competencies, relegating reading and writing to secondary importance, dialogues as central texts often reflecting everyday scenarios. ALM sought to instill linguistic competence through stimulus-response-reinforcement cycles, akin to behaviorist theories of learning. The reliance on native-like pronunciation and controlled input mirrored its goal of functional fluency.

However, the method's rigidity—emphasizing rote learning and neglecting creative language use—drew criticism as linguistic theory and pedagogy evolved.

Developed contemporaneously in France, the Audiovisual Method (AVM) augmented ALM by integrating visual stimuli to contextualize language learning. Visual aids, such as slides, filmstrips, and images, provided learners with situational frameworks before introducing corresponding dialogues. This multisensory approach enhanced comprehension and retention, bridging the gap between abstract linguistic structures and real-world application. AVM remains influential, with modern multimedia-based instruction reflecting its principles.

The Mediating Method (VM) emerged in the 1950s as a hybrid approach, blending the systematic grammar instruction of GÜM with the oral focus of ALM. This method sought to address diverse learner needs, particularly in postwar Germany, where linguistic integration of Gastarbeiter (guest workers) became a priority.

The 1970s marked a significant shift in foreign language didactics, influenced by sociopolitical, cultural, and technological developments in Europe. The expansion of the European Union, increased mobility, and rapid advancements in communication created a widespread demand for multilingual competence. Consequently, foreign language education, previously considered an exclusive domain of higher education, became an integral part of curricula for diverse learner groups, including vocational students and adults. This shift necessitated the development of innovative teaching approaches to address these new demographics effectively (Neuner & Hunfeld, 1993).

A pivotal moment in this evolution was the integration of pragmalinguistics into foreign language didactics. Unlike structuralist paradigms, which viewed language as a static system of forms, pragmalinguistics emphasized language as dynamic, functional human behavior. This perspective reframed communication as a process of “doing something with language” (Neuner & Hunfeld, 1993, p. 28). The communicative approach thus diverged from earlier behaviorist models by rejecting the mechanistic notion of language learning as habit formation. Instead, it embraced cognitive and creative processes, recognizing language acquisition as a deliberate, meaning-driven activity (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

The central objective of the communicative approach is to enable learners to use the target language effectively in everyday scenarios. This pragmatic focus resulted in a curricular realignment: grammar and vocabulary were no longer ends in themselves but means to facilitate interaction. For example, functional knowledge of language, such as ordering food or asking for directions, took precedence over rote memorization of grammatical rules. Moreover, the approach fostered a learner-centered paradigm, wherein teaching methodologies prioritized the learner's ability to achieve “successful linguistic action” (Neuner & Hunfeld, 1993).

In schools, this orientation broadened the scope of language education. It integrated sociocultural and thematic elements beyond mundane practicalities, encouraging learners to explore *landeskundliche* (regional and cultural studies) topics through texts and discussions. These thematic inclusions underscored the relevance of linguistic skills in diverse communicative contexts (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

The 1980s and 1990s saw further refinement of the communicative approach through a deeper acknowledgment of learners' cultural backgrounds. This cultural sensitivity evolved into the intercultural approach, emphasizing the interconnectedness of language learning and intercultural competence.

The intercultural approach represents a natural progression of the communicative paradigm, building on its principles while addressing the challenges of globalized language learning. The approach aims

to deepen learners' understanding of the target culture and promote reflective comparisons between their native culture and the culture of the target language (Neuner & Hunfeld, 1993).

Key to the intercultural approach is the recognition of universal human experiences, which transcend cultural boundaries. Anthropological research has categorized these into domains such as personal identity, social relationships, housing, work, education, and mobility, among others (Neuner & Hunfeld, 1993). These shared experiences form a foundation for meaningful intercultural dialogue and learning. For instance, themes like family dynamics or work ethics resonate universally but reveal distinct cultural nuances when explored comparatively.

Instructional materials play a crucial role in the success of the intercultural approach. Authentic texts, such as informational articles or literary works, serve as bridges between the learner's world and the target culture. They stimulate engagement, contextualize language use, and encourage learners to draw connections between their lived experiences and the realities of the target language community (Byram, 1997).

Furthermore, the approach emphasizes the active involvement of learners in constructing meaning. This process requires moving beyond passive consumption of texts to critical reflection and discussion, enabling learners to internalize and articulate their understanding of cultural differences and similarities. The "Brücke" (bridge) metaphor captures this dynamic exchange, symbolizing the learner's journey toward reconciling the familiar with the foreign (Neuner & Hunfeld, 1993).

By synthesizing the strengths of these diverse methods, a new language teaching approach based on aesthetic experiences emerges. This approach, explored in this study, connects language learning with personal and social development, creativity, cultural exploration, and sensory engagement. It integrates personal expression, repetitive practice through creative rituals (from the Audiovisual and Audiolingual Methods), the selection and processing of themes from universal human experiences for the workshop concept, as well as creativity with, through, and in language (from Communicative Didactics), and transcultural awareness (from the Intercultural Approach, with transcultural here meaning the individual creating a picture of a culture and engaging with each culture on equal terms). This creates a holistic framework for foreign language education that engages both the intellect and the emotions of students. Its approach is similar to natural language learning but within a structured framework.

2.3. Methodical Principles for Aesthetic and Action-Oriented Language Teaching

Central to this approach is student-active learning, where learners are not passive recipients of information but are encouraged to actively explore, test, discover, plan, and create. The concept of "action" is rooted in student activity, and this action-oriented teaching method has its origins in the 17th century. Johann Amos Comenius (1592–1670) advocated for learning processes conveyed through sensory perception, while Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746–1827) emphasized learning with the head, heart, and hands. Similarly, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) and Friedrich Fröbel (1782–1852) valued the combination of learning and play. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1831) stated, "Ultimately, no one learns anything just by listening; anyone who does not actively engage in certain matters will only understand them superficially and partially."

Active, experiential learning methods, such as researching, repeating, playing, discussing, and documenting, are shown to result in the lowest forgetting rates (Metzig, 1997). Active learning materials are retained in memory the longest because they engage students in meaningful tasks (Gudjon, 2001). This approach places students at the heart of the learning process, where they shape their own experiences, driving their engagement through experimentation and self-directed discovery. The method is student-oriented, beginning with the interests and needs of learners. It emphasizes process-oriented learning, focusing on individual learning journeys rather than set outcomes, allowing for deeper engagement with the material and more effective knowledge retention.

Creativity plays a central role in this approach, as students are encouraged to express themselves freely in the target language. Social learning is equally important, promoting the development of social competencies like empathy, collaboration, and communication.

Additionally, the concept incorporates multisensory learning, grounded in the understanding that language acquisition is most effective when all senses are engaged. Drawing from Popper's theory, participants engage in sensory experiences, act creatively, develop ideas independently or collaboratively, and solve problems (1995). Brain research reveals that the two hemispheres of the brain perform different tasks: the left hemisphere is more involved in conceptual thinking, while the right hemisphere is responsible for visual and holistic thinking. The left hemisphere processes information logically, linking words according to grammatical rules, while the right hemisphere processes information holistically, registering emotional aspects and responding to the visual content of words (Jerre & Levy, 1986). Studies show that successful learning occurs when both hemispheres collaborate. This interconnection underpins multisensory teaching, allowing students to "perceive, act, learn, and remember with all senses" (Zitzlsperger, 1995). Physical and psychological stimuli are essential in the learning process, especially in foreign language acquisition, where engaging all the senses aids in rediscovering oneself and the surrounding world in the new language.

The transcultural aspect of this approach emphasizes dynamic cultural exchange, enabling students to construct and continually reshape their individual cultural identities. This method goes beyond learning about a foreign culture; it fosters a deep, personal engagement through hands-on experiences.

Finally, the concept emphasizes real communication, where the foreign language is used authentically. Butzkamm (1993) draws on Konrad Lorenz's theory of "functional improvement of a system through the function itself," which suggests that a foreign language is learned effectively when it is used as a communication medium. In this view, the foreign language becomes a path to self-expression. To learn a language, it must be practiced in real communication contexts, where expressing oneself in the language is necessary (Butzkamm, 1993). This does not make individual tasks irrelevant but highlights the importance of meaningful communication in the learning process. Thus, the proposed methods foster creative language use by placing students in real-life situations where they can exchange experiences and feelings (Huneke & Steinig, 2010). These activities train both specific linguistic competencies and spontaneous language use, with speech acts in "as-if" situations gradually moving toward real-life language use.

Artistic and creative expression is central to this approach, with theater, music, visual arts, and creative writing playing key roles in the learning process.

3. Research Objectives and Methods

3.1. Research Objectives, Members and Design

The research project aimed to investigate the impact of aesthetic experiences and arts-based learning on students' self-perceptions, social skills, and language competencies in Romania. The central hypothesis posited that engaging students in various forms of artistic expression would significantly enhance their self-esteem, interpersonal abilities, and proficiency in the German language, while fostering a deeper engagement with personal and social aspects of their lives. The study involved a diverse group of participants encompassing German language teachers and students. 29 teachers were recruited from schools across Romania, selected based on their interest in innovative teaching methodologies and their willingness to integrate arts-based activities into their teaching plan. This diverse group included teachers at different career stages, ensuring a broad spectrum of perspectives on the implementation and outcomes of the intervention. A total of 368 students participated in the study, drawn from classes taught by the participating teachers. Students were selected based on their willingness to engage in arts-based activities and their availability for pre- and post-intervention assessments. They represented a diverse cross-section of Romania's student population, encompassing various socio-economic backgrounds and educational contexts. The research was conducted in multiple schools across urban and rural areas of Romania to capture insights from diverse educational environments. This approach aimed to enhance the applicability and generalizability of the findings across different school settings.

The study employed a pre-post research design to assess the development of competencies by comparing data collected before and after the intervention. The teacher training component consisted

of an initial two-day event and a follow-up seminar during the intervention period. Measurements were taken on two points: pre-intervention and post-intervention. Three data collection instruments were used: student questionnaires, guided interviews with teachers, and video-supported individual case analyses. The data was analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Planning commenced in October 2015, focusing on defining project goals, selecting research methods, forming participant groups, and outlining the project timeline. The workshop was integrated into the schools' schedules as an additional hour per week, following approval from school administrations. This structure allowed for sustained engagement and observation of participant progress over time. An introductory two-day seminar in November 2015 equipped teachers with essential tools and methods for facilitating aesthetic experiences in the classroom. Activities included theater pedagogy, musical-aesthetic education, creative writing, and visual arts, aiming to foster a supportive learning environment and familiarize participants with workshop protocols. Measurement Point 1 involved baseline assessments through student questionnaires and video recordings, capturing initial perceptions and interactions among participants. Teachers submitted these documents for review before commencing the intervention phase. Intervention Phase I spanned 2.5 months, during which teachers implemented the workshop curriculum based on their training and instructional materials. Regular consultations with project leaders facilitated ongoing feedback and adjustment of workshop activities to optimize student engagement and learning outcomes. An interim meeting provided an opportunity for teachers to share experiences, discuss challenges, and refine workshop strategies for the remaining intervention phases. Intervention Phase II – 3 months- focused on completing the workshop curriculum and consolidating student learning through practical exercises and collaborative projects. This phase emphasized continuous dialogue between teachers and project leaders to ensure alignment with workshop objectives and celebrate student achievements through public presentations and exhibitions. Measurement Point 2 involved re-administering student questionnaires and recording additional videos to assess changes in participant behavior and skills following workshop participation. Qualitative teacher interviews supplemented these findings, offering insights into observed changes and workshop impact.

3.2. Research Instruments and Methods

Structured questionnaires were administered to students before and after the intervention to assess changes in self-perception, social interactions, and language proficiency. The surveys were meticulously designed to capture quantitative data on the perceived impact of arts integration on students' cognitive and emotional development.

Some sections of the questions focus on the students' foreign language developments. For example, question number 3 asks "I can..." with three items focusing on foreign language development: "I can introduce myself in German," "describe spaces in the German language," and "share my thoughts with others in German". Some parts of the intervention focused on self-discovery and perception of surroundings and different spaces. Through these questions, the aim was to determine if participants felt more capable by the end of the project compared to the beginning in communicating in these areas in German. Behind the question of whether they can share their thoughts with others in German lies the potential improvement in the communication of one's own thoughts and feelings practiced during regular reflection sessions. The same question includes the items "singing," "painting/drawing," and "improvising" (with or without language), which focus not only on foreign language but also on general competencies. The questionnaire aimed to determine if students felt more capable in these areas than before. Especially regarding improvisation, there was great interest in how confident participants felt at the beginning and compared to the end of the research project in this area. The next item in the questionnaire, question number 4, closely examines self-confidence and self-assurance. To what extent did individuals dare to express themselves through body language, assume a different role, converse orally in German, perform something in front of their class, present themselves, or express their personal opinion before and after the intervention? There are also questions where students should reflect on their characteristics in general, based on how they behave in everyday situations, i.e., how they react in certain situations. This focused on their self-assessment from an external perspective, from the perspective of their colleagues or partners. This closer examination aims to

scrutinize the social skills of workshop participants. In the questionnaire, students were confronted with two types of response formats: on the one hand, an open response format where they had to indicate their age and grade level. These questions were important for the research project to understand which classes and age groups the concept was being tested with. The other response format, which plays an important role in this questionnaire, is called the rating scale, where respondents have the opportunity to use more than two graded response categories for answering, which is associated with an information gain:

Table 1. Example from the questionnaire for the bipolar rating scale

I can	very good	good	moderate	less good	not at all
Improvise (with and without language)	O	o	o	o	o

Statistical analyses, facilitated by SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), were used to identify significant changes and correlations within the quantitative data.

Complementing the quantitative approach, qualitative insights were gathered through semi-structured interviews with participating teachers. These interviews were conducted with teachers to gather in-depth insights into their observations and reflections on the impact of arts-based learning on students' development. The guide for the teacher interview was constructed around four thematic areas: 1. Information about the teacher and the research project in general, 2. About the accompanying seminars (training sessions), 3. Regarding the results, changes, and 4. Conclusion. The interview alternated between open-ended and hypothesis-driven questions ("To what extent do you think this approach could improve Romanian foreign language teaching?").

The first part of the interview focused on the teacher and the introduction of their own research group. It was important to document the different teachers with varying levels of experience who signed up for and conducted the research project. Whether they were colleagues at the beginning of their practice or those with more experience. This part also involved them introducing their own research groups. The second part aimed to understand how important it was for teachers to participate in the introductory and accompanying seminars and to personally try out the individual phases of the concept first as participants before implementing them with their own students. The third phase of the interview contained most questions regarding the changes or improvements the students achieved in their social, personal, aesthetic, and foreign language development. Through the interviews, the aim was to find out if the intervention triggered anything in these areas for the participants or if specific progress was noticed among the students. Finally, teachers were confronted with questions about the impact of the project on the teacher themselves, their teaching methods, procedures, or personal style, and perhaps the entire Romanian foreign language teaching.

As a third research instrument video recordings of students engaging in aesthetic experiences through arts activities were qualitatively analyzed to capture nuanced changes in verbal and non-verbal communication skills, providing a rich understanding of behavioral changes over time. Since videos report on nuances that do not come to light in questionnaires or interviews or can only be reflected upon exemplarily, it was relevant to include them in the research project. These details included pronunciation, the interplay of verbal, non-verbal, and paraverbal communication, as well as the use of elements of intonation or expressiveness, among others.

4. Results

4.1. Results on the Students Questionnaires

The fundamental research question of this study is whether the intervention 'Arts Educate' – a German as a Foreign Language (DaF) workshop – has led to a more positive self-assessment of students in the areas of communication in both mother tongue and foreign language, as well as personal, social and aesthetic skills. Accordingly, the alternative hypothesis (also known as the H1 hypothesis) posits a difference between the pre- and post-intervention data, which can only be accepted if the null hypothesis, stating that the intervention had no effect on students in the aforementioned areas, can be

rejected. The first question provides an overview of the ages of students participating in the research project. It shows the frequencies of respective age groups as well as their corresponding percentage. The most represented age group, comprising 31%, was 11-year-olds, totaling 112 students out of 268. Slightly fewer, 12-year-olds represented 27%, and 10-year-olds represented 26%. Not more than 15% of the students were 13 years old, and 10% were 14 years old. Thus, the majority of students were between 10 and 12 years old. Regarding the frequency of grade levels, most students, totaling 145 out of 368, were in the fifth grade. 102 students, or 28% of the workshop participants, were in the sixth grade, followed by 61 eighth graders and 60 seventh graders. Based on the initial study mentioned in the introduction, which highlighted difficulties in oral proficiency among learners with varying language competencies, it was deemed unnecessary to further assess their proficiency levels. This is because the intervention methods are designed to accommodate students' diverse language abilities, allowing them to engage with the language at a level of complexity that suits their individual proficiency.

Highly significant differences appear in the foreign language-related item of the question "I can share my thoughts with others in German", which considers language use as a means of self-expression: Observing the response results in percentages, the diagram shows that both at the first and second measurement points, most respondents felt moderately confident in exchanging their own ideas and thoughts with classmates in German. However, a significant change occurred at the second measurement point with fewer respondents selecting 'not at all' and 'less well' response categories by 5.5% and 7.4%, respectively. Conversely, the 'good' and 'very good' response options strengthened notably. The difference in means accordingly demonstrates clear significant results: $p \leq 0.001$ indicates an error probability of less than 0.1%, allowing us to reject the null hypothesis that the intervention had no impact on self-expression in the foreign language.

Table 2. F-Test for Question 3.5: "I can share my thoughts with others in German"

I can	Mean (Before)	Mean (After)	Difference in Means	F-Value	Significance (One-tailed Pearson)
share my thoughts with others in German	3.49	3.17	-0.32	26.483	0.000

Therefore, we support the alternative hypothesis, which posits that regular reflections after aesthetic activities helped participants progressively become more comfortable expressing their thoughts and feelings in the foreign language. This reflective process fostered aesthetic experiences and contributed to personal development. Significant improvements are evident in improvisational competencies, as reflected in the mean values and percentage frequency distribution post-project. Initially, students reported minimal proficiency in improvisation, with only 4.3% and 17.1% rating themselves as good or moderate, respectively. However, post-intervention data reveal a notable increase in positive responses. The mean value difference for improvisation, both with and without language, is -0.47, indicating a significance level of 0.000. Improvisation, encompassing communicative skills, active imagination, and spontaneous reactions, is often inadequately addressed in traditional instruction, leading to initial uncertainty among students.

The fourth question, "I dare to..." pertained to competencies that require courage, presence, self-confidence, linguistic proficiency, empathy, a secure social environment, and, above all, positive self-assessment.

Table 3. F-Test for Questions 4.1, 4.3, 4.5

I dare to...	Pre-Mean	Post-Mean	Difference	F-Value	Person 1-Sided Significance
express myself through body language (gestures/facial expressions)	3.34	2.9	-0.44	28.524	0.000

converse with my fellow students in German	4.16	3.81	-0.35	28.473	0.000
voice my disagreement in class	3.23	3.08	-0.15	3.883	0.049

Post-project ratings for "express myself through body language (gestures/facial expressions)" and "converse with my fellow students in German" showed significant improvements, with mean values increasing by .44 and .35, respectively, indicating a highly significant change. The percentage of students feeling very confident in adopting different roles rose to 8.75%, with those rating themselves as "good" increasing to 16.8%, compared to pre-test levels. Conversely, ratings of "less good" and "not at all" declined notably. The mean value for understanding characters and self through role development improved by 0.43, and similarly positive results were observed for the question "I dare to perform something in front of my class," as demonstrated by the error probability test. The significance value of .000 confirms that this is a highly significant change, and the null hypothesis can be rejected. Accordingly, it can be stated that the aesthetic experiences gained through the intervention led to increased confidence, better imagination, and improved expressive ability.

Question 5 addresses identity formation, self-recognition, and communicative and aesthetic competencies through items such as "I like myself as I am," "I know myself well," and "I can show my feelings to others." These items reflect self-recognition, self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-expression. The table below presents the mean values for these aspects.

Table 4. F-Test for Questions 5.1, 5.3, 5.7

My opinion about myself in general and in school	Mean value before	Mean value after	Difference in values	F-value	Significance according to Pearson one-tailed
I like myself as I am	2.53	2.34	-0.19	8.444	0.004
I can show my feelings to others	3.41	2.89	-0.52	43.411	0.000

The preceding table demonstrates a significant improvement in students' self-acceptance following the project, with a significance value of 0.004, indicating a meaningful effect and allowing us to reject the null hypothesis. This confirms that the intervention positively influenced students' self-recognition. Additionally, there were highly significant results in students' ability to consciously express their feelings. The mean value decreased by 0.52 post-intervention, with a significance value of 0.000, reflecting a substantial enhancement in emotional expression and personal agency.

Social competencies were assessed through items such as "I can trust my classmates," "I enjoy working in groups at school," and "I feel comfortable in my class." Positive responses for "I can trust my classmates" significantly increased, while negative and neutral responses declined. For "I enjoy working in groups at school," the improvement was also significant, with an error probability of 0.000%, highlighting the effectiveness of collaborative activities in enhancing students' engagement in group work.

Table 5. F-Test for Questions 5.9, 5.10

Question	Mean Before	Mean After	Difference	F-Value	Significance (1-sided Pearson)
I enjoy working in groups at school	2.83	2.44	-0.39	31.013	0.000
I feel comfortable in my class	2.74	2.31	-0.43	42.778	0.000

The intervention enhanced students' sense of integrity effectively, likely due to working within individual classes rather than mixed groups, which fostered stronger connections and shared experiences.

The impact of creative writing on communicative and aesthetic competencies was assessed through the frequency analysis of question 5.4. Notable improvements were found in responses indicating increased confidence in writing personal texts in German, with positive responses rising by 5.5% and negative responses decreasing from 20.7% to 6.8%. The mean value showed a positive change of 0.55, with a significance value of 0.000, supporting the conclusion that creative writing significantly boosted students' confidence in writing German texts and their engagement with the language.

4.2. Results of the Qualitative Content Analysis of Teacher Interviews

The investigation results were generalized argumentatively based on qualitative content analysis. The study addressed specific, practical problems, forming the following areas for presenting and analyzing the interview content according to Mayring's techniques (Mayring, 2002) for qualitative content-analytic research: the pragmatic dimension, the teacher dimension (own experiences as teachers), and the student dimension (observational reflection regarding students). The first two dimensions relate to the practical, organizational areas and the teachers' reflections on their own experiences. These provide a new perspective on the course of individual projects. The third dimension, observational reflection concerning the students, aims to find commonalities between the questionnaire results and the teachers' opinions. By comparing the quantitative data with qualitative insights from the teacher interviews, a more comprehensive picture of the intervention's impact is formed.

A focus group of teachers with diverse backgrounds was selected, ensuring that each grade level was represented in the analysis. The following teacher interviews were analyzed (all sources were anonymized; thus, only the author of this text has access to personal details such as names, institutions, addresses, etc.):

1. Female teacher, 56 years old, 28 years of teaching experience, led a workshop with seventh graders.
2. Male teacher, 32 years old, 10 years of teaching experience, led a workshop with a sixth-grade class.
3. Female teacher, 57 years old, 34 years of teaching experience, led a workshop with fifth graders.
4. Female teacher, 22 years old, 1 year of teaching experience, led a workshop with a sixth-grade class.
5. Female teacher, 46 years old, 9 years of teaching experience, led a workshop with eighth graders.

These interviews will be presented and analyzed according to the three dimensions introduced earlier: the pragmatic dimension, the teacher's dimension (own experiences as a teacher), and the student's dimension (observational reflections regarding the students).

At the level of the pragmatic dimension, the focus is initially on the challenges related to organizing the workshop meetings "Although pushing the tables aside created some space in the middle of the classroom, it was not sufficient. Some activities had to be organized in two groups, while others could not be conducted at all." (first interview, 28). Some teachers mentioned initial student resistance to the unconventional exercises and games under the "difficulties" section, while others only addressed it in question III.10. In most workshops, the methods based on aesthetic experience were met with some skepticism. Students initially reacted with shyness or did not take the activities seriously enough: "In the first session, the students were a bit surprised as they were not used to such exercises," said one teacher. (fifth interview, 29) Another teacher noted, "At the beginning, almost all of them were a bit shy (except for 2 or 3 girls); they did not dare to join in." (second interview, 30)

This initial anxious or even unmotivated attitude towards the workshop activities can be correlated with the results from the questionnaire analysis regarding "enjoyment of playing in German." Most students initially responded negatively or neutrally to this question at the first measurement point.

However, their opinions changed significantly by the end of the project, with an increase in positive responses. This trend is also supported by teachers' observations: "At the beginning, they made fun of it, but now they really enjoy these games." (first interview, 31)

Analyzing the teachers' responses from the dimension of their self-reflection, it stands out that the initial and mid-project in-person meetings had a substantial importance for their work with the students. According to their reflections, these occasions helped them not only by experiencing and reflecting on the methods themselves but also by exchanging experiences with their colleagues, discussing each other's difficulties and results. Many emphasized the necessity of personally experiencing these methods, as implementation based solely on descriptions would have been inadequate. Some teachers even expressed a desire for more seminars. The mid-project meeting provided encouragement and practical advice from the project leader. Teachers recounted significant moments from the seminars that facilitated their progress: "As (probably?) the oldest participant, I had initial reservations, but our project leader was persistent, and everyone participated in the games and exercises. The reflection rounds raised questions like: Who am I? What do I feel? How do others see me? What is the other person trying to convey? This gave me the courage to discover myself and consult with my own person (something I had never found time for before!). The trust games were also important for me. Eventually, I trusted myself and my team members more, and we even formed friendships." (third interview, 32). This confirmed that in theater education methods, the workshop leader's self-experiences are vital for later work with students. Initially, teachers were cautious about these methods, similar to the students. However, without personally experiencing the potential outcomes and knowing the kinds of experiences they could lead their students to, many would have given up at the beginning of the project.

Changes were also noted regarding the impact of the project on teachers' attitudes, character, and activities. Most of the colleagues who completed the project reported feeling more creative and spontaneous in their teaching afterward: "I feel more creative now. I try to incorporate various games with multiple classes" (First interview, 33). All the teachers confirmed their intention to continue using the concept in the future. One teacher stated, "Next year, I plan to use these methods with a fifth-grade class. I want to follow the same steps: arrival activities like clap circle and room walking, facilitating getting to know each other, basic exercises, status exercises, improvisation games, tableaux, and varying the same text. Additionally, I aim to continue with the group I've been working with, exploring new topics such as clothing, media, holidays, festivals, or transportation" (Second interview, 34). Others mentioned that they would also use the concept in their classrooms as a form of classroom management: "(...) Furthermore, these methods can be used as classroom management tools because they emphasize social skills, which class teachers particularly want to develop in their students. So, I will apply them with my next generation of students (5th grade) in the upcoming school year." (Fifth interview, 35). Some colleagues expressed interest in attending further theater pedagogy seminars or professional development related to aesthetic education after the project: "I'm glad I got to know theater pedagogy. I could imagine participating in a short-term training in the future to further develop myself in this field." (Fourth interview, 36)

Organizational challenges arise in securing a protected framework for the project, especially when dealing with colleagues and school administration that are not particularly open to new methods: "Improving teaching could certainly be possible, but we face issues with numerous classes, spaces, parental views, and school leadership. As long as other subjects stick to traditional methods, the modern, playful methods used by German teachers are often ridiculed and mocked. I've had to explain to the principal and colleagues why my classes involve noise, movement, chatter – group work, station training, songs in lessons, etc." (Third interview, 37). To legitimize the concept within the school, collaboration with the school administration is crucial, ensuring it achieves recognized status in the eyes of parents and other colleagues.

The teacher interviews revealed notable behavioral changes in students following the intervention. For instance, one teacher observed emerging talents, stating, "A girl who was usually withdrawn wanted to participate first in the improvisation exercises, showcasing organizational talent" (Third interview, 38). Another teacher highlighted improvements in expressiveness and courageous speaking: "A

student who struggled with reading and writing errors now reads her homework aloud and speaks more confidently” (Fourth interview, 39).

In terms of social skills, teachers reported enhanced group cohesion: “As a group, they now work much better together than at the beginning. Initially, they were reluctant to work with certain students, but now they trust their classmates and can listen and help each other” (Fourth interview, 40). These observations align with the questionnaire data, which indicated significant improvements in students' self-assessments, particularly regarding group cooperation and classroom comfort.

Teachers also noted increased trust and integration among students: “A disabled student who previously faced challenges became deeply engaged during the project, participating actively and expressing emotions” (Fifth interview, 41). This improvement in tolerance and changed relationships with teachers was also highlighted: “Their behavior towards me is friendlier and warmer” (First interview, 42).

Foreign language communication skills showed versatile development. Teachers reported that students became more accustomed to everyday language use: “They prefer to communicate in German much more than before, expressing their thoughts confidently” (Third interview, 43). Theater pedagogical methods facilitated practical vocabulary acquisition: “Their vocabulary has expanded, especially in topics covered by the intervention, and they use these words in communication” (Fourth interview, 44).

Almost all teachers observed an increased use of the whole body in communication among their students: “They pay attention to intonation and their body language while speaking” (Second interview, 45). Another observation goes as follows: “My students have become noticeably more communicative. Additionally, they are more mindful of their behavior and speech during activities. For instance, I've noticed some students paying more attention to their body language, or when reading a text, they try to be attentive to their intonation or facial expressions” (Third interview, 46).

4. 3. Results of the Individual Case Analyses of Video Recordings

The video analysis was carried out in four phases, each with a selected focus group. Firstly, a speaking situation involving a group of pupils was compared at two measurement times (Time 1 and Time 2) based on their communicative competencies (Transcripts of V.1- 2, 47). The basis for comparison was that in both cases, the students' task was to improvise a specific situation, focusing on the communication between the participants. All students were from the same class and had roughly the same language level. The two conversations involving the three girls were recorded at a school during workshop sessions. Both times, they were aware that the videos were being made for the research project. The second video analysis centered on personality development by examining an 8th-grade student's reactions at two different measurement points. In both instances, the task required the student to show herself in front of the group. In the third video analysis, the focus shifted to the inclusion of a child with a physical disability in a trust game. This segment highlighted the development of social competencies and how the child was integrated into group activities, demonstrating increased trust and interaction with peers. The fourth video analysis showcased a performance show, which revealed the aesthetic experiences that students went through.

As the first video analysis aimed to document changes in the communicative area, the following observation categories were established: presence, naturalness of the speaking situation, posture and body language, distancing behavior, speaking behavior, interplay of verbal, non-verbal, and paraverbal communication, interactivity, expressivity, spontaneity and flexibility, as well as word count and vocabulary.

During the first measurement point, participants showed little presence and were unable to maintain their roles consistently. Information was enumerated without any signs of natural communication. The students' postures did not correspond to their speech; they mostly stood still with their arms folded and shoulders slumped, indicating fear and uncertainty. Distancing behavior was consistently distant, communication was monotonous and lacked intonation variation. Actions and speech were barely connected, there was little eye contact, and speech was limited to memorized sentences. There were no

spontaneous expressions or original sentence formulations, and only 15 words were used in total. At the second measurement point, the participants were more involved in the communication and consistently maintained their roles. The spontaneous reactions of the communication partners, the flexible alternation between speaker and listener, the use of the whole body, and the logical forms of a natural conversation indicated a natural speaking situation. The participants actively used their bodies, there was a lot of movement and pantomime performances, demonstrating courage and self-confidence. Distancing behavior varied depending on the situation: they walked, formed tight circles, argued physically close, and then stood in semi-circles again. There were constant changes between loud and quiet speech, fast and slow tempo, and different speech melodies. Acting and speaking were completely interlinked, making the conversation more fluid and easier to understand. Participants maintained constant eye contact, turned to each other, listened attentively, and reacted to what was being said or shown. The students expressed their thoughts through the interplay of acting and speaking, improvising flexibly and continuing the scene according to spontaneous impressions. The number of words used increased to 24, and the students employed a more varied vocabulary, indicating better language skills.

The second video analysis focused on examining personal competencies in detail using the following observation criteria: body posture/expression, eye contact, facial expressions, speech behavior, concentration, self-confidence, and self-presentation in front of the group (Transcripts of V. 3-4, 48). At the first measurement point, a young girl participated in a game where each group member had to come to the middle of the circle, say their name, and make eye contact with everyone while others clapped. The participant exhibited a reserved body posture and limited body expression. Movements were minimal, such as small steps forward with hands crossed and head lowered, indicating constraints in self-recognition, a lack of self-confidence, and reduced presence. Eye contact was sporadic, despite the requirement to engage with multiple individuals. Her facial expressions remained largely neutral, with a single instance of smiling in response to applause. Speech was characterized by a quiet and rapid delivery, lacking variations in paraverbal communication. Concentration on the task appeared limited, with a tendency to expedite the performance. Her presentation was marked by hesitation and insecurity, avoiding central attention and displaying minimal spontaneous readiness to act. In contrast, the second video measurement point showed notable improvements in several areas. The task was similar, but this time, participants had to show and say something in front of the group while playing a role with a designated status number. The participant demonstrated larger and more deliberate movements, including confident steps forward and broad arm swings. Gestures and body movements were used to underscore her role, reflecting enhanced self-confidence and assertiveness. Eye contact increased, engaging with multiple individuals before speaking, indicating an improved ability to capture and maintain attention. Facial expressions became more purposeful, aligning with the intended role. Speech was delivered more loudly and clearly, with a maintained fast pace but incorporating deliberate pauses to build tension and emphasize key points. The participant showed full engagement in the scene, maintaining her role consistently without signs of distraction or lapses in concentration. The intervention appeared to enhance her readiness and ability to act, alongside increased self-confidence, resulting in a more willing and effective participation in front of the group.

The third video analysis examined developments in the social sphere by filming a mirror exercise from a workshop. In this confidence game, the participants act in pairs, with one person taking on the role of the mirror and the other the role of the person whose movements are to be imitated. The aim of the mirror exercise is for the movements to be synchronized so that it is not possible to tell from the outside who is playing the leading role. The analysis focused on a sequence in which two girls (P1 and P2), who are relevant to our research focus, interact. The observations show an increasing opening and rapprochement between the two. This exercise plays a central role in the "you experience" and serves as an introduction to further trust exercises, which are carried out in pairs. The transcript shows (Transcript of Video 5, 49) successful cooperation between P1 and P2. There are moments that indicate a genuine encounter: they make eye contact, smile at each other, and there is even brief physical contact. During the exercise, P2 (a child with a physical disability) always tried to imitate P1's movements exactly, which did not make P1 uncomfortable. On the contrary, she seemed to enjoy it. According to the notes of the teacher of this group, the openness towards this girl changed positively in the group after the 'trust sequences'.

The fourth video analysis examined the impact of the project on aesthetic competencies through the theater production "Friendship. A Journey to Yourself," presented by a project group at their school (Transcript of Video 6, 50). The development process of the play revealed that many scenes emerged from the students' own initiatives, based on improvisations, games, exercises, and their own thoughts and ideas. This play evolved through the project phases of 'you' and 'we' experiences. Through active student participation, they chose their music and wrote their texts for the play. This also reflects a courageous teaching approach that encourages students to fully engage in the project, take real responsibility, and actively participate. Perception exercises helped the students develop a better awareness of their bodies and experiment with different forms of expression. This led to an expansion of their acting abilities, with gestures and facial expressions being increasingly used naturally. The theater rehearsals promoted verbal and paraverbal communication among the participants. During the show, students combined their verbal, nonverbal, and paraverbal communication with confidence. The collectively created play represented the group's collaborative effort and led to a shared presentation experience.

5. Discussion

5.1. Discussion on the Impact of the Project on Students' Competences

The effects of the intervention on the students are initially presented in structured dimensions:

Personal competence:

- Perception and Imagination
- Self-Awareness and Identity
- Expression and Reflection
- Empathy and Social Interaction
- Initiative and Confidence
- Integration and Social Responsibility

Aesthetic Competence:

- Improvisation and Performing
- Aesthetic Awareness and Creativity
- Experiencing the combination of literature, music, theatre and visual arts

Communicative Competence:

- Verbalizing and speaking in both native and foreign languages
- Spontaneous and uninhibited acting and reacting in native and foreign languages
- Complexity of vocabulary and sentence composition
- Free oral and written self-expression
- Synergy of verbal, nonverbal and paraverbal communication

The results from various research methods clearly demonstrated that workshop participants made significant progress in their personal competencies. Thanks to the second phase of the concept, which focused exclusively on the self and approached it from all angles, students developed a more conscious self-perception, and consequently, their expressive abilities also improved. They now possess a stronger awareness of their habitual behaviors and were encouraged through self-experiences to try new things. The frequent self-reflection during the intervention allowed students to observe themselves from multiple perspectives. This enriched them gradually with more self-confidence, contributing to their growth in personality and identity. By the end of the project, they had a more positive self-assessment and appreciation of their abilities, indicating stronger self-recognition and self-respect. This increased self-confidence helped them to take initiative, present themselves alone to the class, or stand in the spotlight. The phases of the "you" and "we" experiences also brought significant improvements in the social resources of the workshop participants. Empathy was strengthened through the understanding of other "inner worlds." Trust in oneself and others grew progressively stronger, providing a solid foundation for uninhibited communication. The numerous

cooperation exercises fostered a sense of social responsibility, teamwork, and problem-solving skills within the groups. Quantitative research already showed significant results indicating a stronger sense of group cohesion and well-being within their own class. Individuals who previously felt excluded from the community were integrated, meaning that the community became more open, inclusive, and empathetic.

The emphasis on the students' imagination was pivotal. It served as the cornerstone for further aesthetic activities and experiences, fostering symbolic thinking, enhancing creativity, and refining performance abilities. By the project's conclusion, participants demonstrated proficiency in independently abstracting and presenting their thoughts on specific topics, whether individually, in pairs, or within groups. In summary, their heightened aesthetic awareness facilitated their performance abilities. Post-intervention, they eagerly assumed various roles, enthusiastically performed before their peers, authored original texts, and relished conveying their thoughts and emotions through visual arts such as painting, drawing, photography, and collage. These aesthetic encounters evolved into tangible experiences, aiding their growth and application.

The study's findings indicate enhanced communicative abilities in both the participants' second language and their native tongue. Communication in German has transitioned from initial apprehension to more uninhibited and assertive interaction, facilitated by familiarization with everyday language through workshop activities. This has enabled them to effortlessly employ colloquial expressions such as "I need a break," "I'm tired," "I feel good, okay," "I liked it because," "I'm interested in that," "Can I go to the bathroom?" and "Wow... awesome!"

Moreover, participants exhibit a preference for German communication among peers. Their interaction now integrates verbal, nonverbal, and paraverbal elements, supported by refined body language, facial expressions, and emotional expression. Quantitative analysis substantiates an expanded lexicon among participants, underscoring improved self-assurance in constructing independent sentences, fostering creativity in language use, and enhancing self-correction during verbal communication. These developments reflect a heightened awareness and positive transformation in language engagement.

Enhanced classroom engagement prompts a shift towards preferring German language use during activities, thereby aligning actions with verbal expressions. The integration of improvisational exercises has notably increased participants' spontaneity and flexibility in specific speaking contexts by project conclusion. This newfound spontaneity and creative language utilization extend beyond oral communication to include written expression, cultivated through structured creative writing exercises.

5.2. Discussion on the Impact of the Project on Teachers' Competencies

The results of the data analyses demonstrate significant impacts in the following three areas related to the teacher and their activities:

Personal experiences during further training sessions and self-directed workshops:

- Enhanced self-awareness and development of self-confidence
- Personal experiences as a foundation for subsequent work with students

Teaching competence during the classes and in workshops:

- Confident demeanor in the classroom and shifting levels of status
- Creativity and spontaneity
- Courageous application of modern methods
- Inventing new variations of learned methods

Teacher-student relationship:

- Better understanding of their own students – increased patience
- Getting to know students from a different perspective

- Open and more honest teacher-student relationship

During the seminars, teachers experienced similar insights as their students did in their workshops. In interviews, teachers reported heightened self-awareness, discovery of their own expressive forms, and exploration of previously unknown behaviors. They consistently felt positively enriched after these professional development sessions, and this heightened self-confidence had impacts not only on their personal lives but also on their professional activities. Consequently, all teachers believed that one should personally experience these methods before engaging with students in the project. Workshop leaders can fully empathize with their students' thoughts and feelings only after having undergone similar experiences themselves. Many teachers noted that they became more confident not only in workshops but also in regular classroom settings, creatively expressing their thoughts and daringly employing new methods. Accordingly, the project led them to perceive their students in new ways; they were impressed by some workshop participants and observed unexpected gains in self-confidence among certain students. This trend strengthened their relationships, making them more open and honest.

6. Conclusions

Based on the structured and detailed presentation of results, the project encountered some organizational challenges in implementing the workshop classes but also demonstrated significant positive outcomes within a half-semester timeframe. The future continuation of such methods depends largely on the school administration's willingness to create opportunities for teachers to incorporate these modern methods into additional optional classes. The study showed that the workshop complemented conventional teaching methods across all participating schools, presenting innovative educational avenues.

The conclusion suggests that the initial goals were not only met but exceeded, revealing numerous unexpected positive changes attributable to the intervention. These included enhancements in verbal, nonverbal, and paraverbal communication, developments in language awareness, improved bodily awareness, enhanced expressive capabilities, self-recognition, confidence building, integration, social responsibility, and overall aesthetic development. These advancements, achieved collaboratively by students and teachers, progressively influenced regular German as a Foreign Language (DaF) classes.

Teachers and students initially require time to acclimate to these unconventional methods. Nonetheless, the research results reveal a steady increase in interest, participation, and collective responsibility towards achieving the final outcomes. The "Arts Educate – German as Foreign Language-Workshop" concept not only enhances students' communicative competencies but also creates a supportive environment for personal growth, helping individuals discover their roles within society and promoting cooperative group dynamics. Implementing this approach could render school life more interactive, action-oriented, student-centered, and holistic. It is anticipated that students would develop a stronger affinity for learning German, accelerate their linguistic and communicative development, and uncover new avenues for self-expression through artistic methods.

Legislation could potentially incorporate this subject into the Romanian school system as an optional course, pending thorough methodological and didactic approval from educational authorities. Teachers involved have explored various ways to sustain the approach; some have integrated these methods into regular classroom activities. For example, one teacher incorporates games and exercises into the standard curriculum, while others plan to continue the project within their classes, culminating in a large-scale theatrical production by the end of the year.

While current teacher motivation is promising, questions remain about sustained interest once dedicated events promoting the concept cease. Additionally, there is curiosity about potential outcomes had the research project extended for a full year. Teachers involved in the project could potentially influence change within their respective schools. However, broader systemic change within the Romanian education system would necessitate multiple advocates. Exploring ways to reintroduce the project annually within existing, officially recognized programs could expand participation among teachers, students, and entire schools. Similar research projects are necessary to discover effective implementation strategies in other European countries.

Further inquiries from teachers about adapting the concept for DaM classes (German as a teaching language in Romania), Germanistics students, or DaF classes from ninth to twelfth grade underscore the potential for continued development. Future studies could build upon the core principles of the concept to develop new content and themes for other target groups. Replicating established phases designed for DaF speakers with first-generation refugees could address essential topics encountered in a foreign culture, emphasizing personal and social development and intercultural competence. This innovative approach poses significant questions that merit further investigation.

The extended duration of the research project and the regular exchange between research colleagues facilitated teacher engagement, enabling them to find solutions for their specific situations and maintain project momentum. For the future, the study recommends similar teacher trainings to ensure sustainable impact rather than one-time courses. A future study could identify the specific teacher competencies required for working with artistic activities based on aesthetic experience, thereby integrating theater pedagogy into teacher training programs.

7. Structural Overview of the Concept Arts Educate – A German as Foreign Language-Workshop for Romanian Gimnazial Classes

The conceptual foundations of the 'Arts Educate – a German as Foreign Language-Workshop' approach are grounded in language learning theory, foreign language didactics, and principles of aesthetic education. This concept is rooted in Michael Tomasello's principles of natural language acquisition, which emphasize that human cooperative communication evolved from gestures and pantomime, involves shared intentionality, and that linguistic conventions arise from meaningful communal activities. Building on this theoretical foundation, the concept incorporates action-oriented learning and holistic education principles, aiming to foster both foreign language acquisition and intercultural competencies.

The third pillar of the concept is aesthetic education, which includes creative self-expression through visual arts, self-reflection, and rediscovering the surrounding world through theater pedagogy, music and rhythm making, and creative writing. The methodological and didactic elaboration of the 'Arts Educate' concept involves a detailed structure of the workshop. The framework is designed around the workshop terminology, the role of the workshop leader rather than a traditional teacher, the conditions, and the number of participants. The structure comprises nine phases, each based on a model of universal human experiences.

The chosen methods aim to enhance both communicative competencies and personal development. These methods include reflection rounds, intensive body awareness exercises, biographical theater for expressive power, Stanislavski's 'as-if' acting technique (Stanislawski, 1986), writing personal texts, using music and movement theater, Augusto Boal's statue theater (Boal, 2013), various speech training methods, Keith Johnstone's improvisation techniques (Johnstone, 2002), trust-building activities, visual representations of literary texts, staging, playback theater, working with futuristic sounds or contact improvisation.

The "Toolbox" section details the development of each phase. The first phase focuses on arrival, getting acquainted, becoming familiar with the working atmosphere, and basic exercises. Subsequent phases address self-awareness (body perception, expression, discovering and expressing emotions, perceiving breath and voice), integration into the group or community, and interpersonal relationships. In the later phases, the focus expands to the environment, both within and outside the private sphere. Themes such as an "intercultural journey," "our environment," "nature," "seasons," "freedom and leisure," and "annual festivals" provide diverse contexts for foreign language learning. Additionally, topics like "provision" (clothing, food) and "temporal-historical experience" (past and future forms) complete the educational toolbox, ensuring a comprehensive and engaging learning experience.

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