

RETURN TO THE NORMAL EDUCATIONAL PROCESS AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION THROUGH ERASMUS+ PROJECTS

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Abstract

The purpose of the Cooperation was the realization of an international five-day project Erasmus+ at a ski resort between three universities of different countries Bulgaria, Romania, and Macedonia. Project Subject: Skiing and sport animations/game activities for children. The aim of the training program was for students to organize and implement sports animation programs for children and to teach them skiing, games and other physical indoor and outdoor activities. Method of work: The number of students who participated in this project was 20. In the project with multiethnic composition participated students of seven ethnicities. While the staff and expertise numbered 8 professors from the three universities. Practical lessons in outdoor/indoor contained sport animation activities for children: games, skiing and exercising, animations and traditional dances off different Balkan Ethnicities. The program allows for presentation and integration as well as exchange of good practices and experience from different participating countries. Results and conclusion: Professional development of the students for sports animation for children, social and communication competences, recognition of intercultural values through traditional games and dances, learning through observation using workshop and video recording on methods of training etc.

Keywords: International cooperation, Skiing and game activities for children

1. Introduction

As it is known Erasmus+ is the EU's programme to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe (Erasmus+...). Groups of higher education institutions will have the opportunity to organise short blended intensive programmes of learning, teaching and training for students and staff. During these blended intensive programmes, groups of students or staff as learners will undertake a short-term physical mobility abroad combined with a compulsory virtual component facilitating collaborative online learning exchange and teamwork (Erasmus+...).

According to European Commission, Directorate-General for Education and Culture, the case studies examined in greater detail the findings that emerged from the survey results. They showed that the motivations for getting involved in the ERASMUS programme vary. One group of universities sees ERASMUS as an opportunity to improve the quality of the institution and to support its modernisation efforts. Others see ERASMUS as an important tool to offer students international study opportunities that may be required in their course programmes. Yet, some universities see ERASMUS as a way to contribute to their profiling at international level, and in some countries universities face pressure from national policy-makers to get involved. Others indicate their ERASMUS involvement is related to national expectations to get involved in the programme. In spite of the varied motivations to take part in the programme, the case study visits found evidence that higher education institutions have clearly benefited from their participation in the ERASMUS programme in terms of teaching, learning and students services Key impacts were reported in respect of improvements in teaching and learning. Interesting developments were found primarily in terms of curriculum

development. Specifically, new modules and study programmes were set up in collaboration with other international partners and modernisation and internationalisation of the curriculum have occurred (The impact of Erasmus...).

In the framework of Erasmus+, there is an opportunity for cooperation between universities which enables the exchange of experience between them. At the level of teachers, this exchange carries with it the experience gained over the years, both in terms of theoretical and practical knowledge. While for students, the use of Erasmus+ presents a new challenge with the change of living environment, the language of the foreign country where they attend education, culture, etc. This practical confrontation, in addition to the students, enables the exchange of experience, as well as enables socialization and knowledge of different cultures up close.

Through these programs students have opportunity to participate in international team work during the programme, to learn specific activities and skills related to organizing activities for children in a ski resort, to practice their English language skills, to receive certificates for participation in an international project - Blended Erasmus intensive programme. Also, the university is enabled to be registered as receiving university in the Mobility platform for the new Erasmus period. In this case the University of Tetova was in the role of the host university, while the other two project partners were the University of Veliko Tarnovo Bulgaria and the University of Alba Iulia Romania.

2. The purpose of the paper

The purpose of the Cooperation was the realization of an international 5 days project Erasmus+ at a ski resort Popova Shapka between three universities of different countries "St. Cyril and St. Methodius" University of Veliko Tarnovo Bulgaria, "1 Decembrie 1918" University of Alba Iulia Romania and University of Tetova. The project subject was "Skiing and sport animations/game activities for children" within Joint Blended Intensive Programs. The aim of the training program was for students to organize and implement sports animation programs for children and to teach them skiing, games and other physical indoors and outdoors activities, including for children with special educational needs.

What are partnerships for cooperation? This action enables participating organisations to gain experience in international cooperation and to strengthen their capacities, but also to produce high-quality innovative deliverables. Depending on the objectives of the project, the participating organisations involved, or the expected impact, among other elements, Partnerships for Cooperation can be of different sizes and scope, and adapt their activities accordingly. The qualitative assessment of these projects will be proportional to the objectives of the cooperation and the nature of the organisations involved (Erasmus-Plus).

Why are International Collaborations so Important For Universities? For domestic students, it offers the opportunity to travel internationally via any exchange programs which may have been set up, and vice versa for students at partnered universities. It also enables universities to better understand the culture of other nations, thereby facilitating their marketing success there (International collaborations...).

The provision of higher education is associated with various benefits and costs (McMahon, 2009).

Fostering cooperation between Higher Education Institutions is one of the strategic options available to countries that aim to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of their Higher Education System (van der Wende, 2007; van der Wende, 2001).

UNICEF says play is the basic right for every child and, that is no different for a child with special needs. It's through play that your child understands the world around him, learns problem-solving, builds self-esteem and improves his motor and social skills. Not to mention the sheer fun of playing. For a child with special needs, the rigorous standards and the competitive nature of traditional games can be overwhelming (parentcircle...). The games and exercises are fun, exciting and at the same time challenging. They demonstrate how versatile skiing activities can be, and how to effectively utilize ski equipment. Basic skills are built through fun and exciting play. The games and exercises do not require much equipment, and they can be mixed and matched. You can pick some here and some there to make your own variations. The possibilities are only limited by

your imagination. Encourage the children to come up with their own variations too! (czech-ski...).

Ski resorts are built with hardcore skiers in mind but, fortunately, they also offer many other ways to have fun on and off the mountain. Each year, ski resorts and ski towns are adding more and more indoor activities, including luxury spas, arcades, trampoline activity centers, and award-winning restaurants, the number of outdoor options also continues to grow (tripsavvy...).

Indoor activities are carried out inside a space. They are limited to the conditions of the place where they are held, to the number of people participating in the activities, among other factors. Outdoor activities are carried out in an outdoor space. It can be a green space on a property or in contact with nature (smartest...).

But why should children play outside and what are the benefits? Today's kids average seven hours daily in front of electronics, such as television, tablets, laptops and phones. There's no denying what the statistics show today's kids are swapping active, outdoor play for a more sedentary lifestyle, causing severe consequences for their health and overall well-being. There are different benefits of outdoor play or physical activities, but the most important are: Physical Development, Social Development, Emotional Development, Intellectual Development (miracle...).

3. Method of work

The number of universities who participated in the project is 3 from three different countries: "St. Cyril and St. Methodius" University of Veliko Tarnovo Bulgaria, "1 Decembrie 1918" University of Alba Iulia Romania and Faculty of Physical Education, University of Tetova.

The number of students who participated in this project is 20. In the project with multiethnic composition participated students from seven different ethnicities.

While the staff and expertise numbered eight professors from the three aforementioned universities.

The method of teaching/learning was used, as well as the opportunity for innovation and creativity is provided. Practical lessons in outdoor/indoor contained sport animation activities for children: games, skiing and exercising, animations and traditional dances of different Balkan Ethnicities were implemented.

The program allows for presentation and integration as well as exchange of good practices and experience from different participating countries.

In the ski areas the activities were divided into two main groups, the first group was characterized by learning and mastering the basic skiing techniques as well as the second group with games and recreational activities with a fun character.

It should be noted that in the ski areas during the teaching of basic skiing techniques in the foreground was health and care for possible injuries, while games and activities in the snow were mainly with a recreational and fun character.

In both cases, various tools and props were needed for successful realization of games and various animation activities. Basic skiing techniques were led by teachers in the role of skiing instructors using various methodological and pedagogical methods.

Also, for games and activities in the snow that mainly have a recreational and fun character, various props and tools were used, but in these activities students played the main role with their creativity by proposing different games and activities.

While, in a closed space in the hotel lounges, various recreational animations were realized. The groups of students representing the university had the task to prepare various recreational and entertaining games and animations every day. Mainly presented games that were popular in the country where they live as well as various animations with traditional character.

It is worth mentioning the socialization side which was very positively emphasized within the project days. The students had the task to make presentations through various workshops where each university provided information about the university and other characteristics of the country from which they come. This enables the acquaintance of young people with different cultures, national costumes, tourism, sports, culture,

geographical positioning, language, music and the most popular songs, actors, movies, food, drinks, etc. Traditional folk dances, which included dances from all ethnicities living in the Balkans, express great interest of students for their learning. Through these dances that are a novelty for students, in addition to teaching dances and different movements of ethnicities living in the Balkans and beyond, dances can enable and serve as a mediating tool for intercultural recognition and respect. Also, dancing serves to lift the mood and have fun. This issue should be practiced in school curricula from the youngest school ages. As Fadil M. stated (2021), ... the existing curricula at all levels of education need changes and modifications according to contemporary needs, as well as that dances in the curriculum of all educational levels to be transferred from the national or monocultural framework to the international or multicultural ones.

Another important specific that the project enabled was the teaching of English as a common language of communication as well as the official language of the project. English is the universal form of communication in science. Although many countries still publish journals in their native tongue, English is currently the best way to share one's research findings with scientists in other parts of the world. There are of course many benefits to having a universal language. The most obvious advantage is that results can be more widely accessed, and scientific exchange between countries is significantly enhanced. However, we must also consider the drawbacks. The use of a universal language to communicate in science is unavoidable. Although English has gained its status without going through a true democratic process, having a universal form of communication does allow for a wider scope and better understanding which ultimately leads to scientific progress (languageconnections...).

In today's world, multilingualism is becoming more and more important. In addition to opening up employment opportunities, being able to speak a foreign language helps to make a real connection with people and to know more about diverse cultures, places and lifestyles. The more proficient you are, the better you can express yourself. Therefore, it is highly likely that if you meet someone from another country, you will both be able to speak English. It gives you an open door to the world and helps you communicate with global citizens (etsglobal...).

As a special and more specific part was the organization of activities with children with special needs. Characteristic of these exercises was the way of organization, the special care that should be paid at all times, the different educational methods that differ from the normal ones, the tools and props dedicated exactly to these specific and very sensitive activities.

The Objectives of the programme are including innovation, transdisciplinary contents, added value, etc. The most important are the following:

- I. *Professional development of the students for sports animation for children at a ski resort.* The programme is designed to develop:
 - skills on how to compose a sport animation programme for children at a ski resort;
 - skills to organize programme activities;
 - knowledge and skills how to train children: games, skiing, and exercises indoors and outdoors at a ski resort hotel;
 - knowledge and skills how to integrate children with special needs in the activities.
- II. *Development of the social and communication competences.* The programme is based on team work and the communication improves English language skills. New contacts are established which expand the current own professional network with other participants, sport animators and therapists of the hotel.
- III. *Development of intercultural skills.* The programme is designed to include social activities: evenings of the nations where each team will represent their own country. Participants communicate with representatives of other countries and lifestyles.
- IV. *Exchange of good practices and experience in different countries.* The programme allows for presentation and integration of good practices in sport animation from the participants from different participating countries

4. Results and recommendations

From the material presented in this paper, the following results or benefits can be seen:

I. *Practical lessons in outdoor sport animation activities for children at a ski resort: games, skiing and exercising.*

Outcomes: Knowledge and skills for practicing various outdoor sport animation activities for children at a ski resort, including social integration approach: skiing, outdoor games and other exercises in the open.

II. *Practical lessons in indoor sport animation activities for children at a ski resort: games and exercising.*

Outcomes: Knowledge and skills for practicing various indoor sport animation activities for children at a ski resort, including social integration approach: indoor games and exercises for specific settings in the hotel: swimming pool, corner for children etc.

III. *Workshop on methods of training.*

Outcomes: Knowledge and skills of methods: how to teach the sport animation outdoor and indoor activities for children, for a ski resort, and how to include children with special educational needs.

IV. *Simulation workshops.*

Outcomes: Raising capacity of organizing, promoting and conducting a sport animation programme for children at a ski resort. Development of student's entrepreneurship skills by being exposed to new business opportunities – activities at a ski resort.

V. *Presentation of sports animation experience in different countries.*

Outcomes: Exchange of good practices implemented in each country on sport animation. Increase student's knowledge database.

VI. *Evening animation for the family at a ski resort hotel. Cultural awareness.*

Outcomes: Students develop intercultural competences by participating in the evening of the nations – event which is organized in the form of evening animation, folk dances of different ethnicities and cultures. In addition, the social programme includes visit the city of the ski center Tetovo and the capital Skopje which enriches student's life and raises cultural awareness of the host country.

VII. *Video recording of the Erasmus intensive programme activities.*

Outcomes: Learning through observation.

From what we saw above, we can conclude that professional development of the students for sports animation for children, social and communication competences, recognition of intercultural values through traditional games and dances, learning through observation using workshop and video recording on methods of training etcetera, all this accompanied by innovation and creativity was the main goal of the aforementioned project.

Therefore, we recommend that during these multiethnic meetings to use animations, games and dances of different ethnicities which in addition to entertainment and recreation will also serve for intercultural and multicultural recognition and respect. These types of collaborations enable the close acquaintance of different cultures, music, folk dances as well as knowledge of new geographical territories. The socialization of young people and the exchange of experience between students from different countries is one of the main points of such collaborations.

The realization of this project and similar international projects justifies the impact of the ERASMUS programme on quality improvement in European higher education in particular in the areas of teaching, research, student services and the openness to society with a focus at the institutional and system level, for which it is best written in the paper "The Impact of ERASMUS on European Higher Education: Quality, Openness and Internationalisation" (2008).

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