

ARISTOTLE UNIVERSITY OF THESSALONIKI

Teaching German within the Framework of Intercultural Exchanges

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Structure of the Presentation

01

Background & Aims

Why intercultural exchanges matter for German language education

02

Theoretical Framework

Non-formal education, intercultural learning, youth exchanges

03

Institutional Context

IJAB and the Hellenic-German Youth Foundation

04

The Study

Aims, research questions, methodology and tools

05

Preliminary Findings

Discussion and emerging conclusions

Language Learning Beyond the Classroom

A central aim of foreign language education is to develop multilingual awareness and intercultural communicative competence (*Huneke & Steinig, 2000*).

Intercultural exchange programmes

let adolescent learners use German in authentic communicative contexts with native speakers - a cornerstone of contemporary pedagogy (*Savignon, 2017*).

The Greek context

Exchanges were long tied to Erasmus, with English as lingua franca.

The Hellenic-German Youth Foundation (since 2021) created new direct Greek-German exchange opportunities - recognised across formal and non-formal education.

Educational Value of Intercultural Exchanges

This study investigates the impact and effectiveness of intercultural exchanges across the cognitive, social, and intercultural dimensions of German language education.

Cognitive

Listening comprehension, oral production and fluency in authentic interaction

Social

Self-confidence, autonomy, teamwork and active participation

Intercultural

Empathy, critical cultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence

Non-formal Education

Learning that takes place outside compulsory, curriculum-based instruction - intentional from the learner's perspective (*Cedefop, 2008*).



Learner-centred

Less teacher-directed; learners take responsibility for their own development



Organised & guided

Facilitated by trained staff, with clear objectives and methodologies



Experiential

Grounded in voluntary participation and active engagement



Competence-focused

Initiative, collaboration, communication and participation

Intercultural Learning

Classroom exposure alone rarely develops spontaneity, intonation or cultural familiarity. Exchanges complement instruction through authentic interaction with native speakers (*Edelenbos & Kubanek, 2004*).

Gains

- Improved listening comprehension and fluency
- Greater autonomy and self-confidence
- Emotional engagement leaves a lasting impact

Productive tensions

- Encounters may create misunderstanding (Heringer, 2004)
- Differences in proficiency, expectations & experience
- Negotiation of meaning builds ICC (Byram, 2008)

Intercultural Youth Exchanges

University of Regensburg - *Long-term Effects of Participation in International Youth Meetings*

Even short intercultural experiences can have a lasting influence on personal development — beyond language skills alone.

Self-confidence

Teamwork

Openness to new perspectives

Adaptability & empathy

**Future professional
opportunities**

Active citizenship

Supporting Institutions

IJAB

International Youth Work, Germany e.V.

- Active since 1967, under the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs.
- Promotes mutual understanding, youth participation and exchange.
- Counselling, training and resources for youth organisations.

HGYF

Hellenic-German Youth Foundation

- Bilateral agreement 2019; operations in Leipzig & Thessaloniki from April 2021.
- Funds Greek-German youth and professional exchanges.
- Internships, job-shadowing and collaborative projects.

Aims & Research Questions

The study explores the benefits of intercultural exchange across social and cognitive development - focusing on oral comprehension, oral production, and attitudes towards languages and cultures.

RQ1 Do participants feel more confident understanding spoken German by native speakers after the exchange?

RQ2 Do participants feel more confident and effective in oral communication with native speakers?

RQ3 What are participants' attitudes towards German and the corresponding culture?

RQ4 What are participants' attitudes towards multilingualism?

Hypothesis: *the strongest gains are expected at A2–B1 level, where learners already command enough structures to manage varied communicative situations.*

Methodology & Research Tools

Mixed-methods design · 8 Greek participants · Greek-German youth exchange

- 1 Pre-exchange questionnaire** 13 closed-ended items on comprehension, use & intercultural contact
- 2 Daily observation protocol** ~10 items per participant: interaction, communication, engagement
- 3 Post-exchange questionnaire** 41 closed + 2 open items on experience & development
- 4 Semi-structured interviews** ~12 open questions, days after the exchange
- 5 Parent interviews** 11 questions on cognitive, emotional & personal change

Preliminary Findings

Analysis and triangulation are ongoing; early findings point to an overall positive evaluation of participation.

**More positive
attitudes**

towards other cultures

Personal growth

autonomy & self-confidence

Greater initiative

in intercultural settings

**Stronger
motivation**

& intercultural awareness

Language Education as European Youth Work

Teaching German through intercultural exchanges enhances **linguistic proficiency** while fostering **intercultural sensitivity** and **active citizenship**.

Intercultural exchanges are an integral element of youth work, not an add-on to formal instruction.

They develop intercultural communicative competence through authentic, emotionally meaningful interaction.

Their potential calls for systematic support, expansion and integration into formal and non-formal education.

Thank you

Questions & discussion welcome

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