

**STUDY ON THE MOTIVATION AND INVOLVEMENT OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
IN THE ACTIVITIES OF THE “DIFFERENT SCHOOL” PROGRAM**

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the motivation and involvement of high school students in the activities carried out within the "Different School" program—an educational initiative aimed at promoting non-formal learning and students' personal development. The main objective of the research was to identify the factors that influence students' active participation, as well as their perceptions regarding the relevance and attractiveness of the proposed activities. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used, including a questionnaire addressed to students from two high schools. The results indicate a variety of motivations, ranging from the desire to learn in a different way than the traditional approach, to interest in recreational or social activities. Students' involvement is significantly influenced by the degree of freedom in choosing activities, the quality of organization, and the relevance of the topics to their needs and interests. Additionally, it was found that the involvement of teachers and collaboration with various community actors contribute to the program's success. The general conclusion emphasizes the importance of tailoring activities to students' profiles and actively involving them in the planning process, in order to enhance the effectiveness and appeal of the "Different School" program.

KEYWORDS: *students, high school, the “Different School” program, involvement, motivation*

JEL CLASSIFICATION: I2, I21, I26, I28

1. INTRODUCTION

In the current educational context, there is an increasing emphasis on developing competencies that go beyond the boundaries of traditional curricula, aiming at the personal, social, and professional development of students. The "Different School" program, initiated by the Romanian Ministry of Education, emerged as a response to the need to diversify students' educational experiences by promoting non-formal activities that complement the traditional teaching-learning process. This initiative seeks to create a flexible framework in which learning takes various forms, adapted to the interests and needs of students, while also fostering creativity, teamwork, and civic spirit.

This paper aims to investigate the extent to which high school students are motivated and involved in the activities carried out within the "Different School" program, as well as the factors that determine their level of active participation. Student motivation is essential to the success of this initiative, and understanding it can contribute to improving how the program is designed and implemented. By combining quantitative and qualitative methods, the research aims to provide a realistic view of how students perceive these activities and to identify key elements that can enhance the program's attractiveness and effectiveness.

Within the "Different School" program, schools have the freedom to organize a wide range of non-formal educational activities aimed at supporting the personal, social, and professional development of students. The activities can be adapted to the students' age, interests, and community context. Below, we will present a few examples of activities suitable for high school that we have implemented as part of the "Different School" program:

Educational and cultural activities:

- Visits to museums, exhibitions, theaters, and philharmonics – Students can take part in guided tours at history, science, or art museums, where they discover exhibits relevant to general culture. Attending theater performances or live concerts can stimulate interest in art, music, and dramatic literature.

- Creative workshops (literature, painting, photography, theater) – These activities develop creativity and personal expression. Students can learn techniques in creative writing, drawing, digital photography, or acting, working individually or in teams to create projects that can be presented in school or within the community.

- Screenings of educational films followed by debates – Thematic screenings (historical, social, psychological) can be followed by guided discussions, during which students analyze messages, values, or moral dilemmas. This helps them develop critical thinking and argumentation skills.
- Meetings with writers, artists, journalists, or specialists from various fields – Inviting personalities from different domains offers students a realistic perspective on careers and an opportunity for dialogue on current or cultural topics.

Career guidance activities:

- Visits to companies, public institutions, or universities – Students can directly explore various work environments, observe processes and organizational structures, and interact with professionals. These visits can help clarify their career aspirations.

- Presentations by professionals from different fields – Specialists in IT, medicine, architecture, engineering, entrepreneurship, and more can be invited to school to speak about their career paths, the challenges of their profession, and the skills required.

- Mock job interviews – Students can participate in simulated interviews where they learn how to present themselves, what to avoid, how to express their strengths, and how to confidently defend their point of view in front of a potential employer, while also learning to manage their emotions.

- Workshops on writing a CV and cover letter – In interactive sessions, students can learn how to create essential documents for applying to jobs or scholarships, tailored to their individual profiles.

- Civic and Volunteer Activities - Students can actively participate in cleaning green spaces, sorting waste, or planting trees in urban or rural areas, contributing to environmental protection and care.

- Environmental cleanup or tree-planting campaigns – Students take an active role in cleaning green areas, selective waste collection, or tree planting in urban or rural zones, helping protect the environment while working as a team and socializing.

- Participation in NGO-led projects – Students can collaborate with organizations working in fields such as education, health, animal protection, and human rights, learning about civic responsibility and active engagement.

- Awareness campaigns on social issues (health, human rights, etc.) – Students can create posters, videos, or presentations on important topics such as violence prevention, drug use, mental health, bullying, and more.

Sports and recreational activities

- Sports competitions between classes or schools – Matches in football, basketball, handball, table tennis, badminton, or athletics can be organized. Such competitions encourage team spirit, discipline, and fair play.

- Hiking, themed excursions, or camps – Outdoor trips contribute to developing observation skills, physical endurance, and knowledge about geography, ecology, or local history. These can also include orienteering activities or outdoor games.

- Team games and team-building activities – Activities where students must collaborate, such as treasure hunts, logical team games, or trust exercises, help develop teamwork, communication, and leadership skills.

Personal development activities

- Workshops on communication, leadership, and emotional management – These interactive sessions help students better understand their emotions, clearly express their ideas, and take on leadership roles within groups.

- First aid courses – Organized in collaboration with medical personnel or Red Cross volunteers, students learn how to respond in emergencies (resuscitation, immobilization, bleeding control, etc.).

- Sessions on mental health and healthy lifestyle – Psychologists or counselors can conduct meetings about stress, anxiety, balancing school and personal life, balanced nutrition, and the importance of sleep.

Regardless of the type of activity, involving students in the selection and organization of activities is essential to ensure the program is relevant and appealing. The school can collaborate with parents, public institutions, local businesses, non-governmental organizations, and volunteers to diversify and improve the range of activities offered.

Many children want to engage in outdoor sports activities, and among the most commonly practiced sports are basketball, football (soccer), table tennis, and badminton. All of these sports contribute to the physical and mental well-being of children.

Badminton is an accessible sport that can be played both indoors and outdoors, making it suitable for all students regardless of their physical fitness level. Additionally, it promotes fair play,

concentration, and the development of specific motor skills that are useful for children's overall development.

Basketball is popular among high school students because it is a dynamic and fun sport that gives them the opportunity to move, collaborate as a team, and test their skills competitively.

From another perspective, table tennis is advantageous in schools because it develops students' coordination, reflexes, and concentration. It requires limited space and is accessible to all skill levels.

Football (soccer) is loved by students because it is dynamic, involves a lot of movement and adrenaline. It offers them the chance to work in teams, develop a competitive spirit, and cooperate with classmates. Moreover, it is easy to play and provides a lot of fun, regardless of skill level.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study involved 158 eleventh-grade students: 104 from the "George Coșbuc" National College and 54 from the Greek-Catholic "Inochentie Micu" High School in Cluj-Napoca, of whom 82 were girls and 76 boys.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze and understand how students perceive, relate to, and participate in the non-formal educational activities conducted within this program, as well as to identify the factors that influence their motivation and level of involvement.

The working hypothesis for this study is that "high school students demonstrate a higher level of motivation and involvement in the activities within the 'Școala Altfel' program when they have the opportunity to contribute to the selection of activities, and when these activities are perceived as relevant to their interests and needs for personal and professional development."

The research methods used were: a review of specialized literature, questionnaire-based method, and statistical-mathematical method.

Description of the Questionnaire

Questionnaire – Motivation and Involvement of Students in the "Different school" Program

Date generale (optional):

- Class: _____
- Sex: M / F
- Highschool: _____

I. Participation and Involvement

1. Did you participate in the activities organized within the “Different school” program during the last school year?

☐ Yes
☐ Partially
☐ No
2. How involved did you feel in the activities you participated in?
☐ Very involved
☐ Fairly involved
☐ Slightly involved
☐ Not at all involvedă
3. Which types of activities within the program did you find most interesting? (You can select more than one)
☐ Cultural (visits to museums, theater, etc.)
☐ Sports
☐ Creative workshops (art, theater, photography, etc.)
☐ Professional workshops (career guidance, company visits)
☐ Volunteer activities
☐ Others: _____
4. Did you have the opportunity to express your opinion regarding the choice of activities?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ I don't know

II. Participation motivation

5. What motivates you the most to participate in the “Different school” activities? (check up to 2 options)

☐ The fact that they are different from regular classes
☐ Interest in certain topics
☐ The activities are fun
☐ Participation of friends

- ☐ The opportunity to learn useful things for the future
- ☐ I am not motivated to participate

6. Do you think the activities in “Different school” are useful for your personal development?
- ☐ Yes, very useful
 - ☐ Partially useful
 - ☐ Not very useful
 - ☐ Not useful at all
7. Did you participate in activities outside the school during “Different school”?
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ I don't remember
8. Which of the following forms of learning appeal to you more?
- ☐ Traditional classroom learning
 - ☐ Experiential learning (visits, hands-on practice, projects)
 - ☐ Both equally

III. Program evaluation

9. How do you rate the overall organization of the program at your high school?
- ☐ Very well organized
 - ☐ Well organized
 - ☐ Poorly organized
 - ☐ I don't know / I haven't noticed
10. Would you like the “Different school” program to be extended or changed?
- ☐ Yes, I would like it to last longer
 - ☐ Yes, but with different types of activities
 - ☐ No, it is fine as it is
 - ☐ I am not interested

IV. Personal reflection

11. Did you feel that the activities in “Different school” had an impact on how you see school or learning?
- ☐ Yes, in a positive way
 - ☐ There was no difference
 - ☐ No, I found them useless
12. Would you like to be more actively involved in organizing future activities?
- ☐ Yes

- ☐ No
☐ Maybe

Results and discussion

The table below presents the students' responses to the questionnaire shown above.

Table no. 1 – Students' responses to the questionnaire questions

Nr. crt.	Intrebare	Raspunsuri	
1.	Did you participate in the activities organized within the “Different school” program during the last school year?	Yes Partially No	130 20 8
2.	How involved did you feel in the activities you participated in?	Very involved Fairly involved Slightly involved Not at all involved	52 47 22 37
3.	Which types of activities within the program did you find most interesting? (You can select more than one)	Cultural (visits to museums, theater, etc.) Sports Creative workshops (art, theater, photography, etc.) Professional workshops (career guidance, company visits) Volunteer activities Others:	73 124 40 95 53 0
4.	Did you have the opportunity to express your opinion regarding the choice of activities?	Yes No I don't know	94 32 5

5.	What motivates you the most to participate in the “Different school” activities? (check up to 2 options)	The fact that they are different from regular classes Interest in certain topics The activities are fun Participation of friends The opportunity to learn useful things for the future I am not motivated to participate	93 37 86 72 34 8
6.	Do you think the activities in “Different school” are useful for your personal development?	Yes, very useful Partially useful Not very useful Not useful at all	97 56 5 0
7.	Did you participate in activities outside the school during “Different school”?	Yes No I don't remember	147 11 0
8.	Which of the following forms of learning appeal to you more?	Traditional classroom learning Experiential learning (visits, hands-on practice, projects) Both equally	12 125 21
9.	How do you rate the overall organization of the program at your high school?	Very well organized Well organized Poorly organized I don't know / I haven't noticed	76 58 24 0
10.	Would you like the “Different school” program to be extended or changed?	Yes, I would like it to last longer Yes, but with different types of activities No, it is fine as it is I am not interested	103 49

			6 0
11.	Did you feel that the activities in “Different school” had an impact on how you see school or learning?	Yes, in a positive way There was no difference No, I found them useless	128 30 0
12.	Would you like to be more actively involved in organizing future activities?	Yes No Maybe	136 2 20

DISCUSSION

Students participating in the activities of the ‘Școala Altfel’ program can improve their communication and interpersonal skills by working in teams and will develop abilities to organize public events, cultivating appropriate and civilized behaviors. Several experts state that badminton has various benefits for the body: it improves skills and helps with weight loss, enhances cognitive brain functions, strengthens joints and muscles, reduces stress, and prevents certain diseases. “Different school” represents a special type of non-formal curriculum with an optional or voluntary character, aimed at fulfilling specific objectives of applied education (technological/professional, aesthetic, physical/sports/hygiene-sanitary), related to the objectives of intellectual (scientific) education, which predominate in formal instruction. It is continuously supported from the perspective of the positive resources of moral formation and development in the context of the values of the information society, based on knowledge." Among the sports activities loved by students, especially girls, we can mention badminton, which is an engaging sport that works both the physical and intellectual aspects by requiring quick decision-making."

3. CONCLUSIONS

Following the consolidation of the results, we can say that out of the total number of students, 130 participated fully, 20 participated partially, while only 8 did not participate. Under these circumstances, we can state that the participation rate is very high (over 90%), which demonstrates the general interest in the program.

Among the participating students, 52 felt very involved in the activities of the “Different school” program, 47 felt fairly involved, 22 felt somewhat involved, while only 37 students were not involved at all. Although participation is high, emotional/active involvement varies. Almost 60% feel involved, but 37 students declare a total lack of involvement, indicating a possible gap between attendance and genuine motivation."

The most appreciated activities that children participated in during the “Different school” program were sports activities (124) and professional activities (95). These were followed by cultural activities (73) and volunteering (53). Creative activities attracted only 40 students, and ‘Others’ was not selected by anyone."

Following the consolidation of the questionnaire responses, it emerged that students prefer dynamic, practical activities with relevance for the future (career guidance, sports). Artistic or creative activities are less popular.

The students’ motivation for participating in the “Different school” program is predominantly extrinsic and related to socializing and novelty, rather than the perceived educational value. Regarding the impact on students, 97 of them consider the activities very useful, 56 find them partially useful, and only 5 consider them less useful. The majority recognize the benefits of the program for personal development, which supports its continuation and diversification.

Outdoor activities are a strong point and are also very attractive to students. Among the high school students who responded to the questionnaire, 125 prefer experiential learning, 21 prefer both forms, while only 12 students said they prefer traditional learning. In other words, they prefer non-formal and practical methods—validating the direction of the “Different school” program.

Among all participants, 128 students stated that the program had a positive impact on how they now perceive school. “Different school” contributes to increasing the attractiveness of the educational process and fosters a clear desire for co-participation and responsibility, offering an opportunity to develop civic and leadership skills.

The consolidated data reflect a high level of participation, interest, and appreciation for the “Different school” program. At the same time, some challenges arise regarding effective involvement, diversity of activities, and student consultation in the planning process. Personalizing activities and increasing student involvement in decision-making are essential to strengthen internal motivation and the educational benefits of this program."

The “Different school” program succeeds in providing an attractive framework for high school students, who begin to appreciate learning through experience and practical interaction.

The majority preference for sports, professional, and extracurricular activities demonstrates students' need to break away from the routine of traditional classes and engage in more dynamic, relevant educational contexts connected to real life.

Students want a more active role in planning and carrying out activities, highlighting the importance of student participation as partners in the educational process.

The large number of respondents expressing a desire for direct involvement in organizing future activities suggests that the program's success largely depends on collaboration between teachers and students, as well as adapting content to their real interests.

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