

# **Art Education and Art-Based Methods in Polish Schools in the Context of Integrating Children with Migration Experience. Presentation of the Expected Outcomes and Preliminary Results of Research conducted within the ALPHABETICA project**

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**Abstract:** The article presents findings from a project and research-based study that investigates the role of art-based educational methods in shaping and developing language and intercultural competences among students, particularly children with migration experience. Grounded in qualitative inquiry and interdisciplinary frameworks combining applied linguistics, pedagogy, and art education, the research explores how theatre, music, dance, visual arts, film, and digital storytelling can function as innovative pedagogical tools in multilingual and multicultural school environments. The results demonstrate that artistic practices stimulate cognitive, emotional, and sensory engagement, leading to enhanced vocabulary retention, communicative fluency, and language confidence while reducing language anxiety but are not practised sufficiently in the educational realm. The study concludes that integrating art into language education not only enriches linguistic development but also contributes to the broader goals of intercultural education and social inclusion. It calls for further empirical research on innovative, art-driven educational models that strengthen both language and intercultural competences in contemporary classrooms.

**Keywords:** art-based learning, language acquisition, intercultural education, multilingualism, creative pedagogy, children with migration experience

## **Introduction**

*ALPHABETICA*<sup>1</sup> is a project implemented by the Association INTERKULTURALNI PL together with twelve European universities and organisations. Its main goal is to provide effective solutions that enable children and young people who are at risk of

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<sup>1</sup> The *ALPHABETICA* project began in January 2025 and will run until June 2028, implemented under the European Commission's Horizon Europe program (European Research Executive Agency REA – Horizon Europe – HORIZON-CL2-2024-TRANSFORMATIONS-01, grant no: 101177819). Project website: <https://alphabetica-project.eu>.

poverty or social exclusion to access art and art education through co-created and participatory research activities. Within the framework of the *ALPHABETICA* project, twelve pilot actions will be carried out in seven European countries, aiming to strengthen the transformative impact of active participation in community-based artistic activities focused on co-creation. The project started in January 2025, and in the Polish context, its first stage involved systematic mapping and analysis of existing good practices that ensure broad access to art and artistic education for children and youth. The aim of these activities is to develop a comprehensive training program for teachers and educators, focused on integrating art education into formal curricula, as well as identifying indicators of educational poverty and creating a plan for its reduction. The research initiative also aims to identify and disseminate best practices and to equip teachers with tools and strategies that promote social inclusion in art education. By lifting these practices from the level of local activities to a coherent EU-wide educational policy, the project seeks to contribute to the wider development of art education in Europe.

Art education, which includes both the development of individual creative competences and the implementation of art-based methods, plays an increasingly important role in building an inclusive, balanced, and empathetic school environment. It can also serve as an effective means of integrating children with migration experience, especially by creating channels of non-linguistic and non-verbal communication. Art, co-creation, and the development of creativity provide excellent ways to build relationships between children coming from different cultures and speaking different languages, while also supporting the natural process of language acquisition in a way similar to learning one's native language (Maiese 2016).

The idea of supporting students' creativity and developing their artistic interests is an integral part of the assumptions of the Polish educational system. According to current law, schools are obliged to create conditions that allow each student to develop their potential – also in the field of creativity. The development of creativity is not treated as an additional element of education but as an expression of recognising the autonomy of the student, their ability to think, act, and create independently (Gralewski/ Wiśniewska 2025).

## 1. Structure of the Article

In the first part of the article, we present the conclusions from the analysis of the current state of research on art education and the implementation of art-based methods in Poland, as well as findings from the analysis of good practices. In the second part, we discuss the conclusions from interviews conducted in July 2025 with intercultural assistants, psychologists, speech therapists, and other specialists supporting the learning process who work in Kraków schools or psychological and pedagogical counselling centres. All participants had personal migration experience.

Focusing in the first phase of the project on professionals working with children with migration experience was not accidental. We assumed that the use of art-based methods by people working with foreign children may support the process of integrating these children into a new environment (Kościółek et al. 2024). This is a new topic,

not yet widely explored in Polish academic publications. Therefore, our findings presented in this article are preliminary, yet they indicate the direction of further scientific exploration in this area. General research (Hulsbosch 2010) shows that art-based learning gives students an opportunity to explore a deeper sense of perception of cultural heritage, gain multicultural understanding, and develop intercultural skills – all of which make art-based pedagogy a key component of effective education in multicultural environments.

## 2. Art-Based Methods and Language Learning

Ifenatoura and others (Ifenatoura et al. 2021) point out that traditional language instruction is often built around grammar drills, rote memorisation, and standardised assessment, which fail to support the communicative competence of multilingual learners. Such approaches hinder natural language acquisition and demotivate students, especially when linguistic diversity is seen as a deficit rather than an asset. As they reveal, in contrast, dynamic, inclusive, and culturally responsive approaches to learning have shown greater promise in fostering linguistic growth among learners. Within these, artistic methods that integrate music, drama, visual arts, and movement have emerged as powerful pedagogical tools in addressing language acquisition.

According to Zhang and Jia (2022), art is a field that enables multicultural sensory stimulation, allowing students to experience abstract theories through their senses. Research (Zhang/ Jia 2022; Assadi/ Abu Obed 2025) indicates that art-based methods are very useful tools not only in language learning but also in overcoming anxiety related to using a foreign language (Hashiwaki 2024). Studies (Zheng/ Wang 2022; Hashiwaki 2024) also show that the use of visual arts in second language learning brings good results in language acquisition. Research from the field of cognitive psychology confirms that engaging students in creative activities supports the memorisation process and increases their motivation to learn. Artistic thinking, therefore, can have a positive impact on the teaching process (Eisner 2002).

For example, including painting in the learning process can support language development while also teaching critical thinking and self-expression, which are very valuable in multicultural communities. Painting, due to its inclusive character, can become a potential bridge across linguistic and cultural differences (Assadi/ Abu Obed 2025). It also helps accelerate vocabulary acquisition, as it connects linguistic, kinesthetic, and visual elements, thus strengthening the memory process. Moreover, it helps to reduce stress among students (Martinez/ Lopez 2020). Music, in turn, can be used to teach rhythm, intonation, and pronunciation, which are crucial elements of verbal communication. Together with other art-based methods, it can improve language proficiency by encouraging a more fluid and authentic use of language – something that is essential for achieving verbal fluency (Ifenatoura et al. 2021).

## 3. Children with Migration Experience in Polish Schools

Children with migration experience in Poland are dispersed across different schools, and their proportion in most schools is below 5%. While such dispersion can facilitate individualised support, it may also lead to isolation and a lack of visibility. Education

is compulsory for all migrant children aged 7 to 18, who must complete at least the primary education stage. However, the integration of these students largely depends on the commitment of individual teachers and staff, rather than on systemic solutions at the national level (Gębal 2018). At the beginning of the previous decade and earlier, foreign students were a marginal presence in Polish schools. Since 2014, however, their number has been systematically increasing. In the 2020/2021 school year, there were 49,000 foreign students in Polish schools, while in 2022/2023 this number rose to 223,000 (NIK 2023), out of a total of 4.9 million school-aged children. The outbreak of the full-scale war between Russia and Ukraine did not cause major structural changes in the education system, but it introduced new challenges. Despite recognising the problem, authorities were slow to implement effective measures. Refugee children either joined Polish schools under general rules, participated in remote learning within the Ukrainian education system (the majority), or remained outside the education system entirely. There were no monitoring mechanisms to track the extent of this educational poverty or to enforce compulsory schooling. Changes were introduced only in July 2024, linking the payment of child social benefits to school attendance in Poland.

Polish integration measures for migrant children include several systemic tools, the most important of which are Polish language lessons. These classes take place from two to five hours per week, with the possibility of extension decided by local governments. However, the role of Polish language teachers as intercultural educators remains underdeveloped, often limited due to insufficient training and a lack of structural support. Additional forms of support include compensatory classes designed to align students with the curriculum, conducted by teachers and assistants, but usually limited to one year. Children who lack sufficient language competence may attend preparatory classes, which often group students from different grades, making effective teaching difficult (due to multiple curricula). Psychological support is provided under the same conditions as for Polish students, but language barriers significantly reduce its effectiveness. Exams may be adapted to students' language competence, but this practice is inconsistent (Bulandra/ Kościółek 2021).

#### 4. Art Education in Schools

In 1999, the Polish education system introduced an integrated subject called "art", which was intended to combine the content of the previous music and visual arts classes. As a result, these subjects could also be taught by teachers of other disciplines who had completed a one-year qualification course, not only by specialists in music or visual arts. This solution met with criticism from educational circles, as it was pointed out that it led to a decline in the quality of art education and to the marginalisation of visual arts in schools. Although in 2002 the separation of music and visual arts curricula was restored, they did not gain full autonomy until 2008. The national curriculum introduced in 2009, and later updated in 2017, explicitly assumed that students at all educational stages should engage in independent creative activities, using diverse forms of artistic expression – both traditional and digital (Cieślikowska 2019:

51). The 2017 curriculum for grades IV–VIII emphasizes that students should be provided with experiences that stimulate their sensitivity to beauty and should be encouraged toward both individual and collective artistic expression (Lowkajtis 2018).

In the curriculum base for general and technical secondary schools (Dz.U. 2018, poz. 467), among the eight key educational goals, there are those directly related to developing creative competences. They include creative thinking, the ability to formulate questions and problems, to solve tasks independently in non-standard ways, and to express one's opinions through writing and artistic creation. These goals highlight the need to shape an education that not only transmits knowledge but also strengthens the agency and subjectivity of the student as the creator of their own learning process. Such assumptions are consistent with research-based conclusions indicating that "art-based learning can be a fundamental element in the development of students' intercultural competences" (Hulsbosch 2010: 90). Despite these noble intentions, school practice shows that art education is often perceived by students as boring and discouraging. Young people clearly distinguish between their school encounters with art and those that occur spontaneously in their free time (Ferenz 2016: 27). According to Bober (2005), modern schools are strongly oriented not toward creative learning but toward suppressing the learning process.

In traditional schools, students are taught that learning means absorbing a predetermined, rigid system of knowledge that leaves no room for imagination, creativity, intuition, or the ability to take risks – all of which are essential for any kind of intellectual or artistic work. The school does not provide conditions for developing these skills (Bober 2005: 286).

It should be emphasised that the aim of art education is not only to transmit knowledge about artworks, artistic movements, or artists' biographies, but above all to enable students to personally experience art and to actively participate in its environment. As Sullivan adds, engagement in art-based education contributes to new knowledge and understanding of the self, and by structuring it in relation to others, provides a better understanding of otherness (Sullivan 2005). The experience of learning about a wide variety of human expressions, beliefs, and values across different cultural and historical contexts – which is inherent to artistic practice – becomes a catalyst for change in personal beliefs and behaviour (Hulsbosch 2010). Such a model of teaching, based on the autonomy of the student, is gaining increasing recognition in contemporary art pedagogy. However, it still faces barriers resulting from entrenched educational hierarchies – the teacher as the "omniscient authority" and the student as a passive recipient. This approach limits opportunities for creative action, experimentation, and personal expression. In art education, students should be treated as active participants and co-creators rather than as mere performers of imposed tasks (Janota-Bzowska 2025).

In practice, however, as researchers analysing music lessons report, these classes have become similar to other school subjects where knowledge transmission is the main goal. Students mainly "learn about" music rather than "make" music; musical

activities have become only occasional additions (Grusiewicz 2021). Similarly, contemporary visual arts education should prepare students “to consciously examine, evaluate, and compare visual images in the real world – such as graphics and words in newspapers, illustrations in magazines, books, posters, leaflets, shop windows, as well as digital images introduced into virtual spaces” (Łowkajtis 2018: 210). Visual art should thus become a language of social communication. This idea applies equally to other forms of art education. The visual culture perspective, perceived as an educational space, should include an analysis of the human visual environment – including cyberspace, new technologies, and digital art – in order to initiate visual literacy and shape new interpretative competences.

Therefore, visual education is necessary. Its goal should be both the development of critical analysis of visual messages and the ability to create them. Students should be taught to understand visual qualities, because the greater the visual experience, the better the ability to read media messages (Didkowska 2017: 172–173).

Contact with visual art also plays an important role in shaping language competences and in teaching languages, including contemporary *lingua franca* languages such as English or Spanish. Teaching English in and through the arts allows both teachers and students to find common visual ground to build trust, respect, and start conveying general content knowledge (Smilan 2017). Hashiwaki (2024) also notes that language acquisition can be a source of stress, and even well-adjusted learners experience emotional difficulties related to the language learning process rather than their personal characteristics. He concludes that the act of making art may help reduce the anxiety common among language learners, helping them feel more relaxed and comfortable in the classroom. When expressive art is used in the classroom, it provides students with a sense of release, joy, self-reflection, and revitalisation that counterbalances the rigid structure of academic schooling – far beyond linguistic barriers. Purposefully designed art lessons can support vocabulary development through visual cues and oral practice linked with collaborative projects (Smilan 2017).

In this context, there is a growing need for serious and regular discussions and actions promoting educational equity for culturally and linguistically diverse students (Ball 2009). Even more importantly, the arts facilitate contextualised language use. Different forms of artistic expression – particularly storytelling and improvisation – present language in authentic, meaningful contexts that mirror real-life communication. As Maiese (2016) argues, this supports deeper language processing and promotes the transfer of language skills from the classroom to social environments, where the arts become central to a more embodied, emotional, and experiential model of language learning – one that aligns with how people naturally learn and use language.

Unfortunately, in Polish schools, art education currently exists only as separate compulsory subjects in primary education (music and visual arts). In secondary schools, it becomes optional (as an elective extension) or is integrated into other general education subjects, serving mainly as a cultural context rather than as a distinct practice. At the preschool and early primary levels (ages 3–9), there are no separate

art subjects – artistic education (visual, musical, and theatrical) is integrated into general teaching content. The curriculum at this stage emphasises creativity, aesthetic sensitivity, and expression through various forms of activity, selected by teachers according to students' individual and group needs. At the next stage (grades 4–8), two separate art subjects – music and visual arts – are taught as compulsory subjects, one hour per week each. These curricula are autonomous and not linked to other subjects.

The core curriculum for these grades aims to prepare students to become active participants in culture and also introduces issues related to intellectual property and cultural heritage protection, teaching “respect for national and universal cultural heritage” (Lowkajtis 2018: 211). However, these ambitions rarely translate into school reality. Czarnecka (2020) notes that analysis of the 2017 curriculum leads to the conclusion that visual arts and music occupy the lowest position in the school hierarchy. “According to the report *Artistic and Cultural Education in Schools in Europe*, during nine years of primary school, Polish children spend no more than 255 hours on art-related lessons” (Czarnecka 2020: 609). In Polish primary schools, students attend about 30 hours of music and 30 hours of visual arts per year. While Poland meets the European minimum of 50–100 annual hours devoted to art subjects, practice shows that this is not enough to develop conscious engagement with art.

The 2024 education reform did not change the number of hours devoted to these subjects. In previous years, for example, in junior high school (gymnasium), students had only 30 hours of visual arts classes over three years, often concentrated in a single grade. Further contact with art depended on optional courses (music or art), meaning that visual education could end as early as age 13. In high schools, if a student does not choose art history as an extended subject, their contact with art education is reduced to one hour per week in a one-year course called *Knowledge about Culture*, often taught by Polish language teachers. This course focuses on cultural history rather than creative practice. In vocational schools, even this minimal contact with art is often absent (Minchberg 2025). As a result, the older the student becomes, the more limited their contact with art becomes (Minchberg 2025). Surveys on the quality of art education confirm these tendencies. According to the 2019 survey – *The Level of Art Education in Polish Schools – A Survey for Art and Music Teachers* – 79% of respondents believe that their subjects are not considered as important as others, and many students treat them as a break from “real” lessons. 75% report that class sizes are too large to achieve planned goals or give individual attention. 68% say that Polish schools still lack properly equipped art studios and music rooms. 44% report that school trips to cultural institutions are rare – once per semester at best – and some principals consider such activities “free” or “wasted” lessons (Czarnecka 2020: 614–619).

## 5. Art-Based Methods

A significant barrier to developing the qualifications necessary for effectively implementing art-based methods across general education subjects is the fact that not every teacher in mainstream schools has the motivation, time, or resources to complete post-graduate art-related training. Moreover, in rural areas, such training opportunities are

often unavailable or limited to promoting local folklore and traditional culture. The level of readiness of schools to introduce artistic elements and art-based methods into non-artistic subjects depends on several factors: the school's statute and mission, the availability of specialised spaces, staff motivation, the support of local authorities, and partnerships with cultural institutions.

In a broad review of good practices identified during the first stage of the *ALPHABETICA* project – a mapping and analysis of research and good practices in the field of art education and the implementation of art-based methods – we found that some schools carry out locally embedded cultural projects, artistic workshops, and interdisciplinary programs combining, for instance, history with art or natural science with drawing. It is also worth noting that such integration is standard practice in art schools, which typically have permanent studios, concert halls, and technical or artistic workshops – facilities that remain rare in regular public schools. Particularly in smaller towns, there is often no dedicated classroom space for visual arts or music, which limits the possibility of developing students' talents and encourages a more lecture-based, theoretical approach. Focus group studies conducted within our project also revealed a noticeable decline in school art facilities compared to the period of the Polish People's Republic and the early years of systemic transformation, when schools maintained well-equipped art rooms and considered them an important resource.

In teacher education – both general and art-focused – there is increasing emphasis on interdisciplinary approaches, including art-based pedagogy. In practice, however, in most teacher training programs, art-related methods constitute only a small part of elective courses or modules on aesthetic education. Nonetheless, there is a wide range of postgraduate studies and professional development courses for teachers interested in expanding their artistic competences, offered both in-person and online. Many cultural institutions and educational centres also run such programs, and teacher awareness of the importance of art education is further supported by governmental bodies such as the Regional Education Authorities (ORA) and the Centre for Art Education (*Centrum Edukacji Artystycznej*). The main barriers to participation in such training are structural and organisational factors within the education system — in particular, an overloaded curriculum that requires teachers to invest significant time in preparation, leaving little space for developing competences not considered a priority in everyday school practice. Financial factors are less significant, since many cultural and art-related postgraduate programs are co-funded by local authorities. However, such opportunities are typically available only in larger urban centres.

## 6. Art in Non-Formal Education

The low status and perceived importance of art education — including music — within the general education system makes it necessary to emphasise once again its crucial role in the holistic development of children and youth. Deficiencies in this area within schools are partly compensated by the growing offer of non-formal and informal art and music education, mostly implemented by cultural institutions. These pro-

grams, addressed to a broad age range – from infants to high school students and university youth – respond to the need for developing artistic competences that are insufficiently cultivated within school curricula. The dynamic expansion of these initiatives reflects the increasing social demand for contact with music and creative activity outside the school system (Sasin 2018).

Non-formal education also includes grassroots initiatives by cultural animators and educators aimed at developing artistic reception skills. These are usually one-time events, which, despite their value, cannot replace systematic school-based art education. The main challenge for such initiatives lies in obtaining stable financial support. In the context of the insufficient presence of culture and art in formal education, informal education is gaining importance. Cultural institutions – especially museums – seek to fill curricular gaps by organising educational activities such as museum lessons, long-term projects, participation in performances as both audience and creators, or involving young people in cultural volunteering. Although the offer is wide, it still mainly reaches those who already have an existing interest in culture (Minchberg 2025).

Theatres are opening up to children and young people not only as spectators but also as participants in educational activities. Many institutions organise theatre lessons aligned with the national curriculum, conducted by actors or theatre educators, for age groups ranging from preschoolers to high school students. These sessions introduce elements of general and local theatre history, adapted to the participants' age. Their goal is not only education but also building a relationship with the theatre as a space of culture and creativity. Such activities often take the form of workshops preceded by backstage tours – of the stage, dressing rooms, makeup rooms, or scenography studios. Children learn about the theatre “from the inside,” meeting those who create it, which helps them understand the collective nature of artistic work (Prokosz 2016). International cooperation between theatres also contributes to making local theatre scenes multilingual and more universal.

The popularisation of contemporary music and the encouragement of children and youth to engage in creative activity are no longer seen as elite initiatives but are increasingly directed toward a wider audience. In Poland, there is a growing number of concerts and workshops for children and young people organised mainly by NGOs and cultural associations. Although these initiatives play an important role, their reach remains limited — they mainly attract parents and teachers who are already aware of the importance of music and actively seek such opportunities. To ensure that music, including contemporary music, can genuinely reach the entire young generation, systemic solutions within formal education are needed. This is a long-term process requiring persistence, but it is essential to ensure universal access to musical culture and the lasting, inclusive development of children's and young people's artistic competences (Sasin 2018).

Bringing artists into schools is not intended as a systemic reform but rather as a real alternative to routine, reproductive teaching methods. It introduces creative activities that bring new content into the school environment and develop students' competences in a more engaging and open way. When artists enter the school space, they

bring their creative potential and fresh perspectives on everyday educational realities. As a result, students gain opportunities to explore the world through artistic activity and creative experimentation. The presence of an artist revitalises the teaching process – both for students and teachers. The foundation of this approach is improvisation and openness to process. The artist does not impose ready-made solutions or rigid tasks. At first, they act as an initiator and companion – offering ideas, tools, and inspiration – but it is the students who take the initiative and develop the activity according to their own needs and ideas. This approach builds relationships based on cooperation, trust, and co-creation, while developing imagination, sensitivity, and a sense of agency (Minchberg 2018). In multicultural classrooms, such collaboration also helps to overcome social and linguistic barriers. It supports visual language immersion as a strategy for scaffolding learning in multiple languages and has powerful intersections with reading and oral literacy development for all children (Smilan 2017). However, studies on the creative activity of high school students still indicate that as much as 73% of their artistic engagement takes place outside of school (Gralewski/Wiśniewska 2025).

## **7. Art-Based Methods and the Integration of Children with Migration Experience**

Research on the experiences of professionals working with children with migration backgrounds in Polish schools and psychological-pedagogical counselling centres was carried out in July 2025. The study was made possible through collaboration with the “Słoneczne Przystanie” (Sunny Harbours) – support centres for children with special educational needs, including those with migration experience. These centres operate under the Psychological and Pedagogical Counselling Centre in Kraków and were established with financial support from UNICEF to provide comprehensive educational and psychological assistance to children and their families. The research took the form of semi-structured interviews with nine professionals, including intercultural assistants, psychologists, speech therapists, and other specialists supporting the learning process in Kraków schools. The sampling method was purposive: the management teams of the participating counselling centres identified and selected individuals who had direct and diverse experience in working with children from migration backgrounds. The interview scenario was standardised and jointly developed by all members of the research consortium to ensure methodological consistency. During the interviews, participants were asked about the role of art and art-based activities in education and cultural integration, as well as about their personal and professional experiences related to the use of such methods in supporting children's development and inclusion. For professionals with psychological or therapeutic training, the use of art-based methods was considered something natural – a bridge leading to art therapy, where the use of metaphors and symbols enables better communication not only with children who are neurodiverse or have special needs, but with all students.

Although regulations do not explicitly define art-based activities as a form of psychological-pedagogical support, in practice, art therapy is widely recognised as a valuable tool both for working with children with special educational needs and for developing the talents of gifted children (Stańdo-Kaczmarek 2013). Its growing importance in the education system can be seen, for example, in the increasing number of postgraduate programs in *pedagogical therapy with art therapy*, which equip graduates with tools for conducting therapy through different forms of art (Bugajska-Bigos 2018). This demonstrates that art therapy is no longer treated merely as an extracurricular activity but is becoming an integral part of the professional training of educational and psychological support specialists.

Art therapy uses various techniques engaging multiple forms of artistic expression, such as art therapy (oryg. *plastykoterapia*), bibliotherapy, dance therapy (choreotherapy), drama therapy, music therapy, and crafting therapy (Korbut 2016). Each of these forms – based respectively on visual arts, literature, movement, theatre, music, or manual and everyday activities such as crafts or cooking – aims to support participants' mental health, emotional and social development, and rehabilitation. The formal application of these methods requires appropriate training and qualifications from the practitioner. They are often used as a complement to traditional forms of psychological and pedagogical assistance.

Such methods are also helpful for improving the quality of communication among students learning in the same class or group, especially when they come from different linguistic traditions. As one psychotherapist explained, she uses such methods in almost every situation with children – most often visual metaphors – and when she cannot express something clearly with words, she turns to images, photographs, or small cards, regardless of whether she is providing therapeutic or educational support.

According to the psychologists, using methods that engage artistic expression helps children learn and memorise educational material much more effectively than lecture-based methods. All participants admitted that they try to use art-based techniques in their work with students. One of the intercultural assistants was fully convinced that art plays an important role in the learning process – “when you want to teach something to a large group of children, by using art you achieve better results, because they remember the material faster than when it is given *dryly*”.

However, when asked about the relation between art-based methods and other teaching strategies, respondents acknowledged an evident imbalance. They explained this by teachers' hesitation to use such methods; therefore, art-based activities are often introduced by support staff or realised through separate, occasional projects rather than within regular lessons. At the same time, participants emphasised that involving children in artistic activities supports their emotional development and can serve as a form of peer integration or therapy. Many of them also use artistic activities as a form of reward for engagement in the regular learning process.

Engagement with art and culture, even in a passive way (for example, during a museum visit), was observed to have a positive impact on students' retention of content and on the development of their interests – much more than traditional teach-

ing methods. Respondents underlined that this largely depends on the teacher's personality, creativity, and motivation. One example was given of a mathematics teacher who plays relaxing music during individual work to help students concentrate and calm down while solving tasks. These experiences confirm the findings discussed in the theoretical part of this paper – that art-based methods have a developmental, performance-enhancing, and stress-reducing character. One respondent pointed out the universality of art in social modelling, explaining that "art is a resource that can show a child how to calm down, but also how to activate certain emotions". Another participant, a speech therapist working with children with disabilities, highlighted the significance of rhythm-based exercises embedded in broader artistic activities, which have a strong impact on speech development.

One of the respondents agreed with the existence of many positive practices and examples, but emphasised that Polish schools still focus too much on results, grades, rankings, and averages. Teachers may see the potential of using artistic methods to activate students, but not for every topic. They also face infrastructural and resource limitations – a lack of art materials, classroom space, and proper tools. According to participants, these are among the main causes of educational poverty. They recalled that in the past, such materials and workshops were much more accessible, whereas today this depends entirely on the specific school and its own initiatives.

Participants mentioned examples of theatre classes that are highly developed, engaging, and creative in some schools, while completely absent in others. In this context, one educational psychologist recalled her own experience in Ukraine – she had not used drama therapy before, but through an NGO program she learned it and later applied it in her professional work. She noted that drama-based activities have a very positive impact on children who experience difficulties in peer relationships, especially in verbal and emotional communication. Unfortunately, there is no systematic exchange of information between schools regarding methods, ideas, available tools, or sources of funding – either with local governments or with the NGO sector. Yet such cooperation is both inspiring and intercultural in nature. The participants observed that even in schools with sufficient resources, artistic activities are often limited to specific events such as the beginning of the school year or Christmas plays, making the school's artistic engagement formulaic rather than continuous.

According to respondents, this situation could be improved by appointing a dedicated, competent person responsible for developing and coordinating art-based initiatives in schools. In schools where such positions exist, their impact on students is remarkable – children experience the entire creative process, from planning and preparation to performing and co-creating. When asked what prevents broader use of art-based methods, especially considering their many benefits, such as improved comprehension of subjects like physics, participants pointed to the lack of time for preparation, limited knowledge and experience, and rigid curriculum requirements that discourage innovation. They compared this to their experiences in Ukraine, where art-based approaches were far more present and even institutionally encouraged. There, artistic methods were used to popularise even STEM subjects, and lesson plans were structured to alternate between academic and creative classes. The system was

logistically and financially supported, and new teachers were directly introduced into this framework. In contrast, in Poland, teachers' enthusiasm to transfer such practices into their classrooms is often stifled by logistical, temporal, and structural barriers.

Respondents nevertheless appreciated that Kraków, as a city, offers students numerous opportunities for contact with art and culture, which schools actively use by organising extracurricular activities and cultural outings. Sometimes these activities are passive, other times participatory – allowing students to take part in creative projects. Professionals in psychological support roles emphasised the therapeutic aspect of artistic activities but noted that they are more effective with younger children. Older students, especially teenagers, often show less interest, are reluctant to engage in additional activities, and participate less frequently in art programs outside school.

## Conclusion

The collected data clearly indicate that implementing art-based methods in general education in Poland requires systemic changes – in legislation, funding, teacher training, and educational policy. Modern schools need structures that allow for the lasting and conscious inclusion of artistic activities in the learning process – not as purely aesthetic or decorative elements, but as legitimate didactic tools that support language acquisition, emotional development, and social integration.

Our findings and the literature review confirm that art-based methods – including theatre, music, dance, visual arts, film, storytelling, and multimedia – create unique environments for developing students' language competences, especially among those with migration experience. Art, as a space of non-verbal and symbolic communication, allows children from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds to express themselves, participate in dialogue, and gradually build communicative confidence. The creative process supports natural language immersion, which – much like in native language acquisition – integrates sensory stimuli, movement, rhythm, and emotions with verbal communication.

Art-based activities also help reduce language anxiety, enhance motivation to speak, and, through rhythm, imagery, and narrative, facilitate the memorisation of vocabulary and linguistic structures. Collective artistic creation – such as singing, improvisation, or visual design – fosters spontaneity in communication and promotes the transfer of language skills from the classroom to real-life social contexts. Thus, art becomes not only a didactic aid but also a bridge linking language and emotion – a catalyst for integration and intercultural development.

In the context of intercultural education, art-based methods play both inclusive and transformative roles. They help overcome linguistic and cultural barriers, fostering empathy, cooperation, and mutual understanding. For children with migration experience, art often provides a safe space for expression – a way to articulate emotions, experiences, and identity before mastering the host country's language. Creative activities thus contribute not only to the development of intercultural competences but also to building openness among their peers.

For these reasons, further scientific research should focus on:

- the effectiveness of art-based learning in developing multilingual students' language competences,
- the role of art in overcoming communicative and emotional barriers,
- innovative teaching strategies combining language, culture, and artistic expression, and
- the impact of art education on the integration of children with migration experience in school environments.

Future empirical research and pilot actions should explore various art forms, including visual arts, music, theatre, dance, and storytelling, as tools that support both language acquisition and socio-emotional development. Only through interdisciplinary and innovative approaches to education can we realise the vision of a school that does not exclude but connects through art and language, making them instruments of equality and dialogue.

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