

*Nino Jojua*

**DEVELOPING DEMOCRATIC CULTURE BASED ON DIVERSE TYPES OF EDUCATION –  
NON-FORMAL EDUCATION**

**Abstract**

Teaching and learning in a democratic and diverse environment mean facing the challenges of the 21st century. Therefore, to establish an appropriate democratic culture in this era of globalization and democratization, non-formal education has been accepted as a mechanism to enhance social beliefs, awareness, attitudes, values, living skills and even behaviour. Thus, the increase in diversity doesn't only relate to race and ethnicity. However, it can include students of different religions, economic statuses, gender identities and language backgrounds. If we, teachers, are eager to acquaint our learners with democratic values, we should evolve their intercultural competence through education. Developing intercultural competence is not only about teaching a particular subject; it is also about knowing different ways through various types of education.

This article highlights the benefits of implementing one of the ways of education, non-formal education, among the students of Chkhorja Public School located in Zugdidi municipality village Chkhorja. Moreover, we will also delve into the practice of non-formal education to evolve teaching and learning in a democratic atmosphere.

Generally, acknowledging and respecting every student is crucial. We also know that students may be violently abused or vice versa for religion, economic status, language background, social beliefs, attitudes, etc.

Therefore, the questions are as follows:

1. How can non-formal education support democratic culture in teaching and learning?
2. How can non-formal education reinforce skills such as empathy, flexibility/adaptability and conflict resolution?

3. Will the development of intercultural competence through education be made more efficiently?

I believe that it is possible to carry out the work in non-formal education.

Much has been written on the benefits of this issue. In the training course -“Democratic Culture from Onlookers to Engaged and Active Citizens” (Germany 2017, Council of Europe), I learned that non-formal education is essential to developing a democratic culture in our classes. We, teachers, can and are obliged to change passive onlookers into engaged and active citizens by enriching the learners’ awareness of the already mentioned issue. Accordingly, students learn and practice how to express empathy, adapt and resolve conflicts, use appropriate language, and speak benevolently and with compassion.

For this reason, I decided to try this type of education in my teaching experience.

**Keywords:** *democratic culture, non-formal education, intercultural competence.*

## 1. Introduction

When I found out more about the principles and importance of teaching and learning in the democratic environment based on non-formal education, I decided to read the related literature “Competences for democratic culture”, and “Developing intercultural competence through education” (Pestalozzi Series +3, Council of Europe). I also sought the information from Search Google. Teachers can identify and analyze students’ cultural awareness of the importance of diversity with the help of non-formal education. For instance, educators can empower learners’ intercultural competence as a foundation for dialogue and living together within all types of education, especially non-formal education. I have found out that we (teachers) can improve the range of skills and competencies outside the formal educational setting and throughout lifelong learning (Pestalozzi series +3).

As well as this, non-formal education provides intercultural competence as a pedagogical goal pursued by the deliberate inclusion of specific activities for learning. Furthermore, this means constructing the teaching and learning processes on democratic foundations.

Consequently, I endeavour to experiment with the already mentioned principles in the language teaching and learning processes. It is defined as an inclusion of the values of intercultural education and enables teachers to boost and enhance students' awareness of democratic principles for successful learning in diversity.

## **2. Advantages of non-formal education to reinforce intercultural awareness**

### *2.1. Allowing students to choose activity in frames of non-formal education*

Non-formal education means giving more freedom of choice and making decisions to students. Therefore, I allowed my learners to select an activity by themselves. In this particular case, they chose movie discussion. At the same time, I gave them an opportunity to vote for the extracts they desired to work on.

### *2.2. Meeting in teams to share useful information*

Non-formal education allows us to arrange things according to our situation or conditions. For instance, we held our meetings in an online regime in Teams platform, in case of necessity, to give my support to my students while working and cascading essential issues or to observe the pace of working process.

### *2.3. Sharing necessary resources/materials*

I provided my students with papers, markers, crayons, pencils, a laptop, projector, copies and all necessary stuff to make the working process more productive.

### *2.4. Reinforcing students' awareness*

Not only giving theoretical knowledge or lecturing the learners reinforce their awareness towards the particular issues but giving them clear examples, being a role-model and learning

by practicing or doing is the most essential teacher. Consequently, while cascading some ideas and attitudes, I tolerated and respected all stated ones despite their being different. Furthermore, the examples like this helped my students to realize that having diverse opinions and being differently aware of something never mean being excluded.

### *2.5. Providing encouragement to students*

Since the working process includes some difficulties or obstacles, and as we know, every student is unique with his/her ability/capability, my students and I encouraged the learners who faced the above-mentioned issues. Our support was gentle and cautious and helped them to perceive that making a mistake isn't a tragedy. On the contrary, despite the obstacles or failures, stepping forward to overcome them and learn from your mistakes is bravery and courage.

## **3. Methodology**

### *3.1 Research participants*

To carry out the research, I reckoned how its advantages could succour me in enhancing democratic culture in the classroom. Seeking out objectives and ways of finding a resolution to a problem is fruitful for every teacher. The systematic approach to identifying and analysing the problem is beneficial for us, teachers, to take further steps in the teaching and learning process.

So after acquiring some information about non-formal education, I selected the target groups – VIII, IX, XI, and XII grades - 39 students, aged – 14-to 18. I have been teaching English to my students for 11 years, and we created English Club within non-formal education (association “Atinati,” USAID, UNICEF).

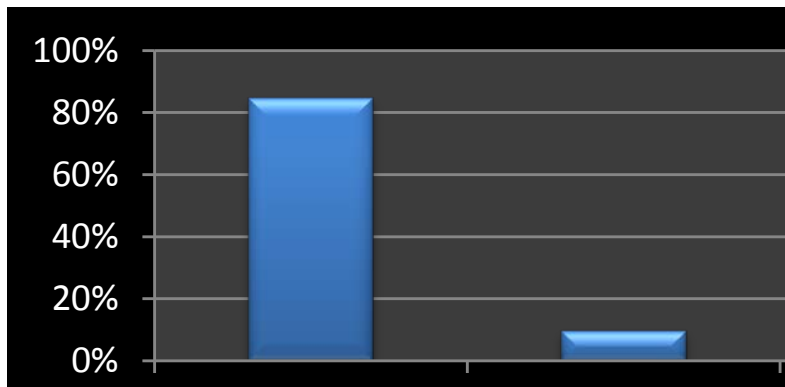
### *3.2. Instrument(s)*

At the start of a new term, using the quantitative method. I decided to check my students' awareness of non-formal education and a democratic classroom environment. Therefore, I designed a questionnaire with four questions and possible answers. I gave the questionnaire to

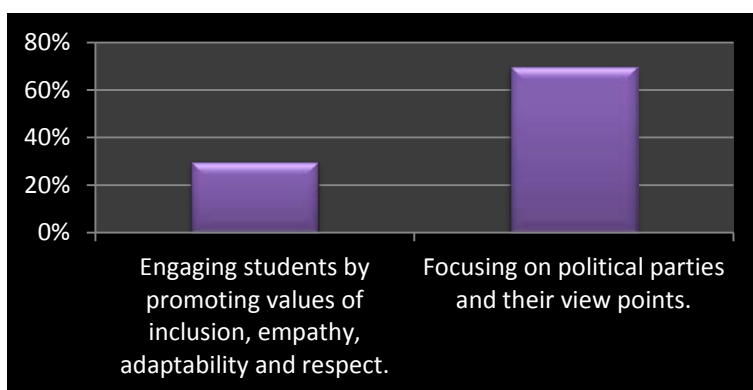
my target group of 39 students aged 14-18. Based on the results, it became obvious that the majority of students were aware of non-formal education, as 85% of students stated the relevant answer. However, I received a different picture regarding a democratic classroom. Only 25% of the participants answered the question correctly. As for question 3 (“From the passive observer toward the active citizen”), 40% of the participants guessed the principle and meaning of this phrase. Question 4 referred to the democratic characteristics. Here we got equal results, 50% for correct answers and 50% for incorrect ones.

Here are four questions with chart results below.

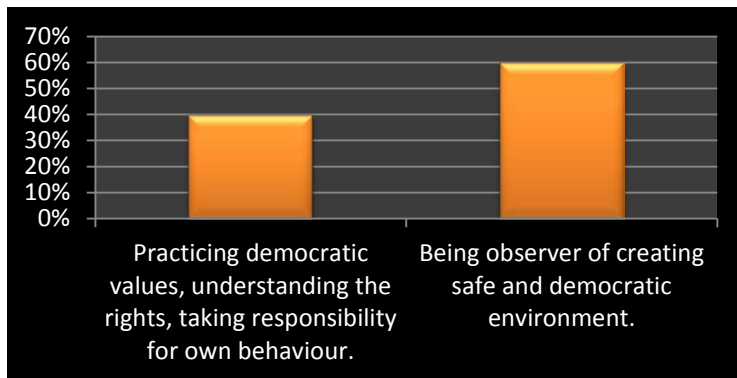
**Question 1:** What does non-formal education mean?



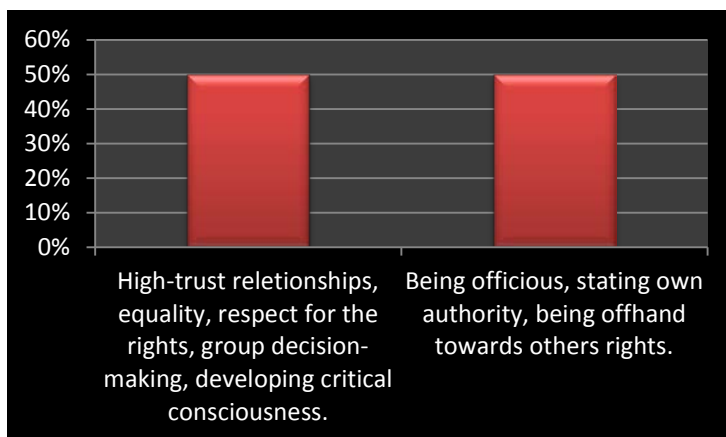
**Question 2:** What is a democratic classroom?



**Question 3:** “From a passive observer to active citizen” means:



**Question 4:** *Democratic characteristics:*



### ***3.3. Data collection procedures***

After collecting my data, I analyzed them. During the whole year, I permanently used the type of non-formal education in my teaching process. At the start of the second semester, I repeated the questionnaire with the modified questions and possible answers. A little change in the consequences was making one step forward. I had an e-diary on my tablet that I used for making necessary notes about students' working pace, obstacles met during the activities, how students adapted to new situations and novelties, and how the implementation of non-formal education affected and reinforced us, students and teacher, to attain an imminent result.

Therefore, I chose my questions based on data and details gathered while observing and making notes.

#### *3.4. Choosing an activity*

After collecting my data, I analyzed them. During the whole year, I permanently used the type of non-formal education in my teaching. At the start of the second semester, I repeated the questionnaire with the modified questions and possible answers. I had an e-diary installed on the tablet that I used for making necessary notes about the following: students' working pace, obstacles arising during the activities, how students adapted to new situations and novelties, and how the implementation of non-formal education affected and forced us (students and teachers) to attain an imminent result. Therefore, I chose my questions based on the data and details gathered while observing and making notes.

#### *3.5. Selecting an activity*

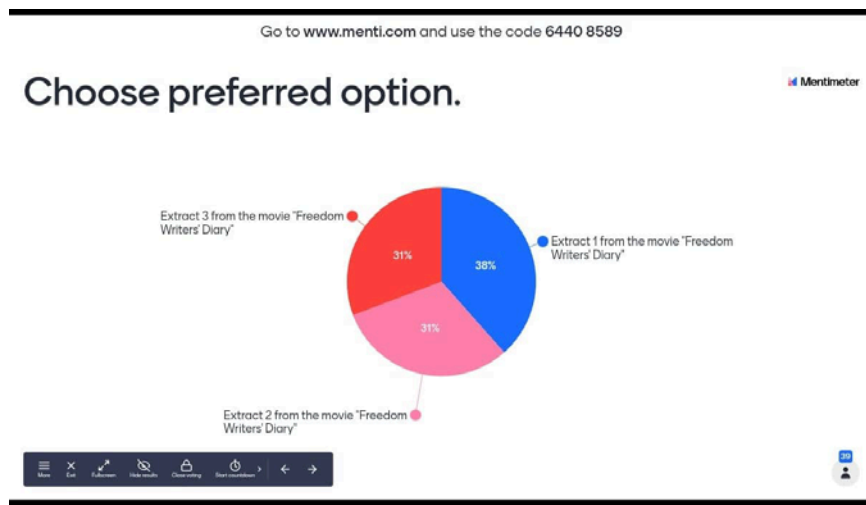
Non-formal education helped me to create the English language club. As a non-formal setting never limits ages, groups, the number of students or working format, we gathered students with different abilities and capabilities. Therefore, we created an English language club in our school.

Meeting the diverse needs of students, for instance, their mental, physical or psychological condition; is one of the most challenging aspects of teaching. Thus, activities in the frames of non-formal education encouraged learners to identify intercultural values easily and contributed me to perceive their improvements by practicing in real situations, outside the classroom. How did the non-formal education help me?! As is known, non-formal education establishes democratic competence based on teaching a particular subject. Since I am an English teacher, I decided to enhance civic awareness through the English language. To be more unbiased, I gave my students freedom of choice and voted for the preferred option on mentimeter.com. We held an online meeting in Teams to choose the preferable extracts from the movie "Freedom Writers' Diary" for the next activity. I prepared voting options in mentimeter.com and shared my screen with the students so that they could see and enter the code using their phone applications, and then click the option they desired. Of 39 students, 15

selected the first extract, 12 – extract 2 and 12 – extract 3. In this way, three groups were created.

Choose the preferred option

- Extract 1 from the movie “Freedom Writers’ Diary” – 15 students
- Extract 2 from the movie “Freedom Writers’ Diary” – 12 students
- Extract 3 from the movie “Freedom Writers’ Diary” – 12 students



After figuring out the voting results, we created three groups, as I have already mentioned: group 1 – to work on the first scene [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bENwM8liCsQ&list=PLQWrg\\_lzz6L6TRish8ZVBjheXnD43t-S0&index=16](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bENwM8liCsQ&list=PLQWrg_lzz6L6TRish8ZVBjheXnD43t-S0&index=16); group 2 – to work on the second scene [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jkyhf4G0YMs&list=PLQWrg\\_lzz6L6TRish8ZVBjheXnD43t-S0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jkyhf4G0YMs&list=PLQWrg_lzz6L6TRish8ZVBjheXnD43t-S0); group 3 – to work on the third scene [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eYYf-mUmPqI&list=PLQWrg\\_lzz6L6TRish8ZVBjheXnD43t-S0&index=21](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eYYf-mUmPqI&list=PLQWrg_lzz6L6TRish8ZVBjheXnD43t-S0&index=21). After that, every group chose the preferable environment for them to work. One group picked out school library, the others – the meeting room and the third group worked in a square. These gave my learners more freedom in behavior. Furthermore, they were less afraid of making mistakes and more self-confident while working on their extracts and discussing their ideas. For instance, since



every single student chose movie parts, groups and environment they would like to work, this gave them equal opportunity to participate in every activity. Moreover, as they felt that nobody was controlling them or dictating what to do and how or counting their mistakes, they became more free and confident. Definitely, I facilitated and observed all groups in turn.

As we know every student is unique in their awareness, consciousness, attitudes, values and competences. So non-formal education helped them to express and reinforce their skills and values. It's absolutely obvious that students learn better then when they are able to make purposeful connection between the curriculum, learnt and real world, life experiences. Genuineness and authenticity based on natural atmosphere are the best teachers to evolve students' personality. For instance, while working on movie extracts, my students discussed the scene where the students with diverse values and attitudes behave aggressively. They identified the main problems: lack of trust, empathy or safety, and a skeptical attitude towards teachers and education. Then, we drew a parallel to our real life and concluded that lack of respect, empathy, tolerance, or intercultural values cause a crucial collapse in relationships.

After watching and discussing the videos in own groups, we held next meeting in Teams platform. Online meeting made them feel more significant and secured because they were working in a condition they desired. It was very flexible and exultant. As we had three groups, I created three channels: Group 1 in channel 1, group 2 in channel 2 and the third one accordingly in channel 3. I observed all three groups by switching from channel to channel time by time. All group members were actively involved in the working process. They shared roles and tasks so that nobody was left in the shade. Based on the main principle - everybody is equal despite ability or capability; we tried to support the students who needed our encouragement in terms of English language and Civic awareness.

We, teacher and students, chose the way for every group, how they would represent their extracts and share gained information. The first group picked out PPT presentation, the second one designed poster and the others prepared extract review booklet. All groups were making notes while presenting the final products because we should create one entire story.

The first group – PPT presentation example:

The screenshot shows a PowerPoint slide with a red title bar and a white background. The slide content includes:

- Text:**
  - *The Freedom Writers Diary: How a Teacher and 150 Teens Used Writing to Change Themselves and the World Around Them;*
  - a non-fiction 1999 book written by The Freedom Writers, a group of students from Woodrow Wilson High School in Long Beach, California;
  - Their teacher Erin Gruwell. It is the basis of the 2007 movie *Freedom Writers*, starring Hilary Swank.
- Image:** A movie poster for *Freedom Writers* featuring Hilary Swank and other students.
- Diagram:** A central grey circle labeled "Freedom Writers' Diary (the first scene)" is surrounded by seven colored circles connected by arrows:
  - Orange: Diverse class: intercultural environment
  - Green: Distrust, lack of interest and motivation
  - Light Green: New teacher, new class, new impressions
  - Blue: Students with different personalities, values, attitudes and beliefs
  - Red: Disrespect, uncertainty, negligence
  - Dark Blue: Unexpected obstacles for teachers and students as well
  - Light Blue: Abused, irritated, bullied
- Links:** [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Freedom\\_Writers\\_Diary](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Freedom_Writers_Diary)

All these have provided the evolvement of the collaboration and cooperative skills which are one of the main values for boosting democracy in every student.

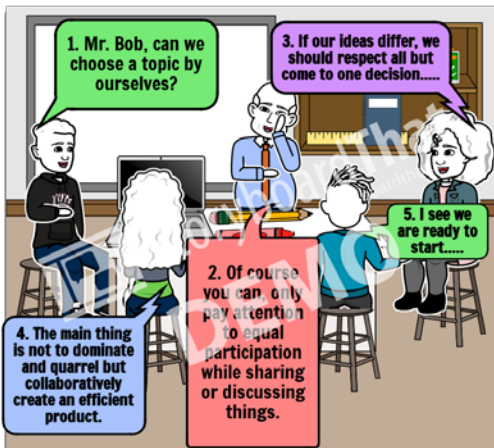
As I have already mentioned, I repeated the questionnaire with the modified questions and possible answers. But this time, I held the next meeting in a real classroom environment. I asked my students to bring their laptops or tablets, and I provided ones who had no opportunity to have any with the necessary gadgets. The task was to create scenes exposing non-formal education and democratic classroom environment using storyboard creator comic strip. They could add some words, expressions, or phrases if desired.

Here are the final products created by three groups.

Group 1



Group 2



Group 3



Providentially, we have made some more changes in results. Checking students' condition helps me to analyze the situation, to scan and plan the next step in accordance with this.

Consequently, we, teacher and students, made a mini-project: "Generosity is contagious". We gave candies, sweets, fruits and other staffs to school community that includes as socially vulnerable students, so refugees from Abkhazia, since our village is close to border. <https://www.facebook.com/100003559625767/videos/3767975979997686/>.

After that we had another meeting in Teams and analyzed the importance of generosity <https://learningapps.org/watch?v=peo9af41521>. Moreover, this non-formal format raised students' democratic awareness and their consciousness so that we realized if we want to be supported, tolerated and empathized, we should do likewise. Ultimately, these all reflected in my students' academic results, as they tried to implement gained skills and experience in our classroom.

### *3.6. Teaching and Learning*

The advantage of implementing democratic culture based on non-formal education isn't just giving the instructions, ordering the tasks and providing students with theoretical knowledge but it means proffering genuine examples, being role models, and teaching/learning by doing and practising.

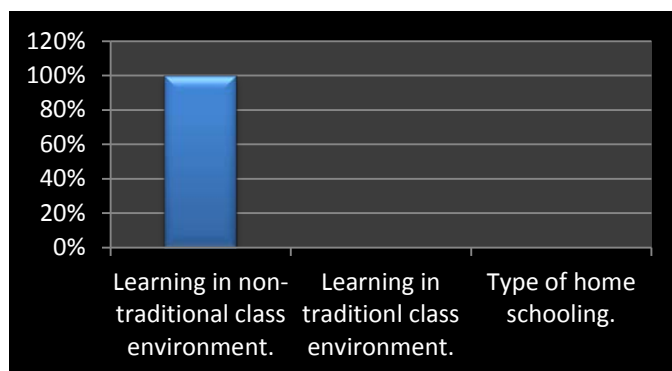
Another issue worth being highlighted is: that allowing students to modify their working environment by themselves boosts and empowers their motivation and eagerness for more active involvement. We frequently guide this principle for feeling equality and supporting students to identify that they are a crucial indivisible part of the teaching/learning process.

One of the main principles we carried out in frames of non-formal education was: freedom of choice. As a teacher, I constantly endeavour to make my learners' freed from timidity, lack of openness and confidence. So we strive to apply the gained knowledge outside the classroom in a non-formal setting so that students become aware of the teacher's role. They analyze that a teacher isn't only a transmitter of information and one-on-one sovereign of the teaching/learning process but also a facilitator of the pursuit of innovation and supporter.

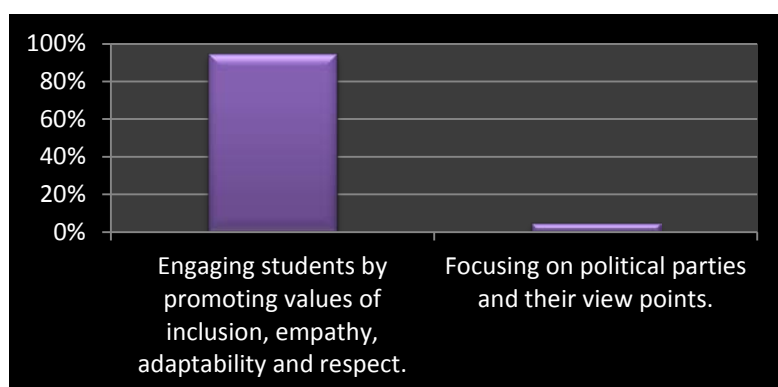
#### 4. Results/Findings

I implemented democratic culture in frames of non-formal education for seven months (during the whole year). At the end of the year, I used the same questionnaire. When I compared the first with the final results, I intelligibly perceived the differences in progress. My students' awareness of non-formal education was appropriate, whereas they weren't utterly confident about democratic values and skills. Furthermore, finally, we managed to enhance our skills for creating a better democratic environment.

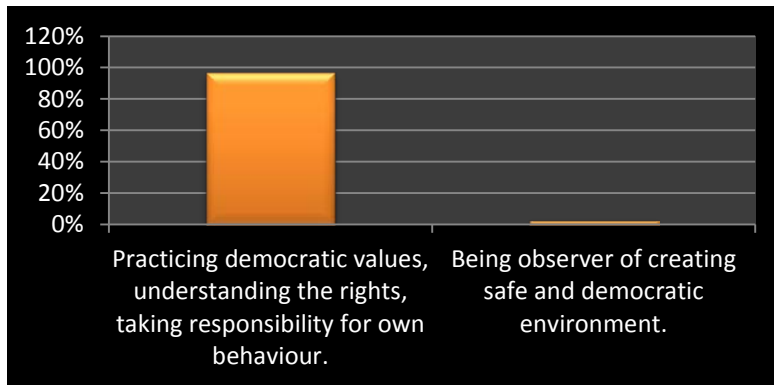
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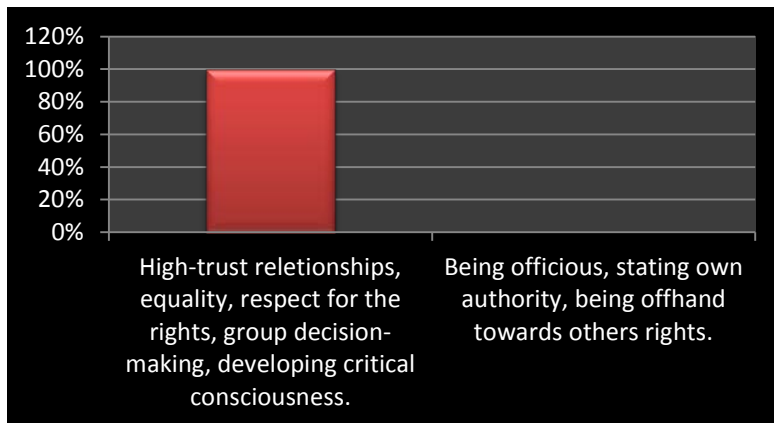
**Question 2:** What is a democratic classroom?



**Question 3:** From onlooker to active citizen means:



**Question 4: Democratic characteristics:**



**5. Discussion**

By differentiating consequences, we can claim that technique was victorious. Students could participate in the face-to-face discussion as well as online. One of the most essential factors for us, teachers, is that non-formal education offers flexible time, place and atmosphere to students that guarantee equal involvement of learners and parents can adjust their overloaded schedule by observing non-formal activities as in face-to-face format so online as well.

Consequently, the advantages and results of the research were presented to my colleagues. They noted students' supportive attitude toward making mistakes which means that they have realized that nobody is infallible and that making mistakes is a natural part of learning and practising novelties. My colleagues liked the fact that students could arrange the environment and share responsibilities of selecting activities or topics.

The 21st-century skills are a set of abilities and values that students need to develop to become fully-fledged citizens based on Civic responsibilities, such as,

*Learning skill* – analytical and critical thinking;

*Cooperation skill* – participating successfully with others in shared activities, tasks;

*Listening and observing skills* – noticing and understanding what is being said and how it is being said;

*Autonomous learning skill* – organizing and evaluating own learning in accordance with own needs;

*Life skill* – flexibility, empathy, adaptability;

These are the skills crucially essential for students in every era.

## **6. Conclusions**

Since I implemented a democratic culture environment in my classes, based on non-formal education, it brought me a variety of good changes, including a better way of managing time, place and environment, an easier and more efficient method of involving students in their learning process, a more flexible way of giving a freedom of choice. It's obvious that non-formal education, to accomplish democratic culture, has been efficiently blended into the curricula of these classes. Giving freedom of choice and diminishing the image of the traditional classroom increased students' motivation.

The new approach was effective for my colleagues as well. Therefore, we decided to use it for more prosperity of democratic values.

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**Author's email:** [nino.jojua12@gmail.com](mailto:nino.jojua12@gmail.com)

### **Author's biographical data**

*Nino Jojua has been teaching English for 14 years. Nino's goal, as a teacher, is not only teaching vocabulary and grammar but enhancing Civic awareness and consciousness through English language to support her students to become better citizens. Thus, Nino strongly believes in student-centred environment, behavioural learning, where students are given opportunities to learn through interaction with the environment. That's why she endeavours to focus on Civic and Democratic values through English language.*