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Intercultural dialogue and skills development among young people: a case study of the Morocco–Belgium 2M1A programme

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Abstract

This article analyses the role of intercultural dialogue in the development of skills among young people through a case study of the Morocco–Belgium programme ‘Two Worlds, One Future’ (2M1A). In a context characterised by increasing international mobility and intercultural interactions, educational exchange programmes appear to be key drivers in the development of transversal skills. Drawing on the theoretical framework of interculturality, experiential learning and active citizenship, this research adopts an exploratory qualitative approach based on a case study. Data were collected from institutional documents, teaching materials and testimonies from 24 Moroccan and Belgian participants. The thematic analysis highlights three major areas of development: intercultural skills (openness, tolerance, adaptability), soft skills (communication, leadership, creativity) and civic engagement.

The results show that the 2M1A programme provides a non-formal learning environment that fosters the transformation of cultural perceptions, the strengthening of soft skills and the emergence of active citizenship. This study thus contributes to

enriching the literature on North–South educational dynamics and offers recommendations for the design of inclusive and effective intercultural programmes.

Keywords: Interculturality, international mobility, non-formal education, skills, youth.

1. Introduction

In a global context characterised by increasing human mobility, the diversification of cultural trajectories and the proliferation of interactions between individuals from different backgrounds, the issue of skills development among young people now occupies a central place in academic, educational and political debates. Contemporary societal transformations – driven by globalisation, the digitalisation of exchanges, the increased circulation of knowledge and shifting identities – require young people to develop not only technical and academic skills, but also intercultural, interpersonal, civic and adaptive skills that enable them to thrive in complex, diverse and changing environments. From this perspective, educational approaches based on experience, cooperation and intercultural dialogue appear to be particularly effective tools for addressing these new

challenges. Non-formal education, in particular, stands out as a prime learning environment in that it enables us to move beyond the limitations of traditional pedagogical approaches centred on the top-down transmission of knowledge, in order to foster dynamics based on active participation, experiential learning, reflection and constructive engagement with otherness. By enabling young people to interact, experiment, cooperate and question their own perceptions, it contributes to the acquisition of cross-cutting skills that are essential for their social, professional and civic integration.

Scientific literature has amply demonstrated that interculturality is not merely the coexistence of different cultures within the same space, but rather refers to a dynamic process of interaction, mutual adjustment and the co-construction of shared meanings between culturally situated individuals and groups. In this context, intercultural exchange experiences represent particularly fruitful opportunities for personal and collective transformation, insofar as they enable participants to develop capacities for openness, empathy, communication, adaptability and the ability to challenge their own frames of reference. Similarly, research into non-formal education highlights its pivotal role in the development of interpersonal, collaborative and civic skills, particularly amongst young people. Non-conventional educational settings, such as workshops, exchange programmes, stays abroad or collaborative projects, offer concrete opportunities for learning by doing, experimentation and critical reflection, whilst strengthening autonomy, creativity, leadership and the ability to work with others. Added to this is the growing importance attached to soft skills in today's employability landscape, where so-called cross-cutting skills — communication, adaptability, cooperation, critical thinking and problem-solving — play an increasingly decisive role in young people's entry into and progression within the workforce. Furthermore, active citizenship – understood as the ability of individuals to participate responsibly, critically and actively in social and community life – is now emerging as a natural extension of these learning processes, particularly when they take place within intercultural educational settings based on participation, collaboration and engagement.

Despite the richness of this body of work, one observation remains: the majority of research on intercultural exchanges and the development of young people's skills still focuses on institutionalised schemes, often set within traditional European academic frameworks, such as university mobility programmes. This focus leaves alternative forms of learning relatively overlooked, particularly community, cultural and civic initiatives that organise educational cooperation experiences outside the formal higher education system. Furthermore, North–South dynamics remain insufficiently

explored, even though they offer particularly rich contexts for analysing processes of intercultural learning, shifts in identity, and forms of educational cooperation based on reciprocity rather than on a simple logic of transfer. This lack of empirical research limits our detailed understanding of the mechanisms through which young people from different social, economic, cultural and historical backgrounds jointly develop skills, values and forms of engagement through the experience of dialogue, mobility and collaboration. It is therefore relevant to examine concrete schemes for educational and intercultural cooperation that enable us to grasp these processes in all their complexity.

It is precisely within this framework that the 'Two Worlds, One Future' (2M1A) project is situated: an intercultural and educational exchange programme bringing together young people from Morocco and Belgium through a series of activities focusing on training, dialogue, mobility, immersion and co-creation. This project, led by the association Action in the Mediterranean (AIM) in collaboration with several institutional, cultural and voluntary sector partners in Morocco and Belgium, provides a particularly fertile ground for analysing how non-formal educational initiatives can foster the integrated development of intercultural, interpersonal, professional and civic skills. By bringing together 24 young participants aged between 19 and 29, from a variety of academic, professional and social backgrounds, the 2M1A programme is distinguished by its foundation in bilateral cooperation based on reciprocity, active listening, exchange and the valuing of lived experiences. It is not simply a matter of organising a meeting between two groups of young people, but rather of creating a learning environment where interactions, travel, training, workshops and exchanges with various social, cultural and institutional stakeholders become the building blocks of a genuine process of transformation. Within this framework, international mobility is not limited to geographical travel, but becomes a tool for training, socialisation, reflection and personal development, enabling participants to better understand others, to better understand themselves and to develop a more nuanced relationship with diversity, multiple identities, migration, shared history and the contemporary challenges of living together.

The scientific value of this research thus lies in its ability to bring together several dimensions that are often studied separately: interculturality, non-formal education, soft skills, active citizenship and international mobility. By focusing on the 2M1A programme, this study aims to analyse how these different dimensions intersect in practice within a voluntary North–South cooperation initiative and how, together, they contribute to the development of skills among the young participants. It adopts a qualitative approach that prioritises an

in-depth understanding of lived experiences, perceived transformations and the educational mechanisms at work within the project. More specifically, this research seeks to answer several key questions: how does an intercultural programme such as 2M1A foster the development of intercultural skills among young people? How do the activities on offer — training courses, workshops, exchanges, immersion programmes and mobility schemes — help to strengthen cross-cutting skills such as communication, leadership, autonomy, creativity and adaptability? To what extent does this type of initiative contribute to the emergence of active, reflective and engaged citizenship? And finally, what lessons can be drawn from this experience to inform the design and implementation of future educational exchange programmes between Africa and Europe?

Building on these questions, this article pursues a dual objective. On a theoretical level, it aims to contribute to research on educational and intercultural dynamics by offering an empirical analysis of a case that has as yet been little explored in the literature: that of a North–South partnership between civil society organisations based on experiential learning and intercultural cooperation. On a practical level, it aims to identify lessons that may inform educational, voluntary and institutional stakeholders involved in designing intercultural programmes for young people. In this sense, the study highlights not only the observable outcomes of the 2M1A project in terms of skills and engagement, but also the pedagogical, organisational and relational mechanisms that make these outcomes possible. It thus seeks to demonstrate that intercultural exchanges, when structured, supported and designed with a focus on participation and reflection, can serve as powerful tools for educational and social transformation. Ultimately, this work advocates the idea that non-formal educational programmes based on mobility, cooperation and intercultural dialogue now represent a strategic area for training young people to thrive in diverse societies, to grapple with complexity, to cooperate across borders and to engage responsibly in building a shared future.

2. Literature review

This literature review establishes a logical link between interculturality, education and the development of young people's skills. It first addresses interculturality as a space for identity formation and cultural openness, then examines the role of non-formal education in the acquisition of transversal skills. The study of soft skills reinforces this idea by highlighting their contribution to employability. We then introduce participation and educational collaboration as the civic extensions of these learning processes. In short,

international mobility is regarded as a space for integration where intercultural learning, social engagement and personal development converge.

2.1. Young People and Interculturality

Interculturality is defined as a process of interactions and relationships between and all persons or groups from different cultures, in which pr is given to, reciprocal adjustment and the elaboration of significations. In contrast to multiculturalism, which promotes the coexistence of separate cultures, interculturality requires dynamic exchange and mutual transformation among the participants involved (Guillén-Yparrea & Ramírez-Montoya, 2023). Contemporary research in intercultural communication highlights that misunderstandings between individuals from different cultures frequently result from differences in frames of reference, implicit norms and systems of meaning (Jackson, 2018). As for Geert Hofstede, he suggested a classification of cultural dimensions (hierarchical distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/ femininity, etc.) which remains an essential reference point for understanding behavioural differences between cultures (Hofstede, 1980). Darla Deardorff (2006) recently characterised intercultural competence as the set of cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions that enable people to interact efficiently in a diverse environment.

When applied to young people, interculturalism takes on a specifically educational dimension. Educational trips, stays abroad and intercultural exchanges transcend the academic setting to become genuine spaces for practical learning.

Contemporary research emphasises that international experiences are a key driver of skills development, enabling young people to challenge their preconceptions, try out new practices and develop social and cognitive skills (Jackson, 2018; Dervin, 2016).

Furthermore, recent research highlights that intercultural experiences foster profound shifts in individual perspectives by encouraging self-reflection, openness and the ability to adapt to complex environments (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2020).

Numerous empirical studies corroborate these findings. According to Bart el-Radic et al. (2025), intercultural experiences stimulate the development of tolerance, adaptation to culture shock and collaboration in multicultural contexts. Furthermore, Hanley and Chankseliani (2025) emphasise that young people participating in international initiatives develop a crucial transferable skills, such as

intercultural communication and civic awareness. These observations are consistent with the contact theory developed by Gordon Allport (1954), who affirms that proximity and direct interaction between groups contribute to reducing pre judgements and to establishing more harmonious relationships.

Table 1: Interculturalism and skills development among young people

Key dimension	Mechanism	Competences developed	Main impact
Intercultural interaction	Direct exchange between cultures	Communication, empathy	Reduction of prejudice
Cultural adaptation	Adaptation to diverse norms	Flexibility, cultural intelligence	Easier integration
Experiential learning	Hands-on experience and reflection	Independence, problem-solving	Sustainable learning
Reflectiveness	Challenging preconceptions	Critical thinking, openness	Transforming perceptions
Intercultural cooperation	Collaborative work	Leadership, teamwork	Social cohesion

Source: Compiled by the author based on the literature

2.2. Non-formal education and skills development

The acquisition of skills among young people is not limited to traditional academic education: it also relies on non-conventional modes of learning, as known as non-formal education. According to the UNE SCO (2015), this concept refers to structured educational activities that take place outside the conventional school setting, but which nevertheless aim to foster the acquisition of knowledge, interpersonal and technical skills. It plays a crucial role as the formation of young people to meet the demands of a globalised world, where flexibility, originality and the ability to adapt have become essential assets.

Contemporary research on experiential learning emphasises the central role of experience in educational processes,

highlighting interactive environments in which learners' experiment, reflect and construct their knowledge. These approaches view learning as a dynamic process based on the interaction between experience, reflection and action (Kolb & Kolb, 2017). Furthermore, recent approaches to learning highlight that educational experiences, particularly in intercultural contexts, encourage a shift in individuals' frames of reference, leading them to reassess their perceptions and develop more open and reflective perspectives (Jackson, 2018).

Current research reinforces the relevance of this framework. According to Gaitán-Aguilar (2024), non-formal programmes, which emphasise collaboration and intercultural dialogue, contribute significantly to the development of universal citizenship. Furthermore, recent research highlights that training programs, collaborative initiatives, and informal educational experiences contribute to the development of interpersonal skills such as communication, problem-solving, and leadership (Rokos, 2025). These skills are currently regarded as crucial for young people's employability, complementing the theoretical knowledge acquired in the academic environment (Clarke, 2018).

Non-formal education therefore presents itself as a prime area for socialisation and skills acquisition, offering young people the opportunity to explore interculturality through practical situations whilst strengthening their professional and citizenship.

2.3. Soft skills and youth employability

In the face of rapid changes in the labour market, the issue of young people's employability has emerged as a key concern for education systems and public policy. Employability is not limited to the acquisition of technical or specific skills; it also encompasses a range of interpersonal skills, commonly referred to as soft skills, which determine individuals' ability to adapt and progress in constantly changing professional contexts (Yorke, 2006; Harvey, 2001).

Soft skills encompass a variety of abilities such as communication, cooperation, creativity, critical thinking, time management, leadership and problem-solving. Unlike so-called 'hard' skills, these are not developed solely through formal education, but are acquired in a variety of settings, particularly through informal learning, intercultural initiatives and experiences abroad (Tomlinson, 2017). These skills are a key driver of employability and a means of standing out in the labour market, enabling young people to distinguish themselves in competitive professional contexts (Jackson, 2018; Clarke, 2018).

Numerous studies confirm the crucial importance of soft skills for employability. According to Clarke (2018), the professional integration of young graduates is as much linked to their social and interpersonal skills as to their academic qualifications. Hanley and Chankseliani (2025), for their part, demonstrate that young people who have taken part in intercultural experiences show greater adaptability and more assertive confidence in their professional relationships. Rokos (2025) also emphasises that teaching intercultural competence acts as a driver of resilience during career transitions, thereby enhancing young people's ability to adapt to globalised workplaces.

Soft skills are an essential component of employability today. Their development, particularly in intercultural learning environments, highlights the importance of including social, interpersonal and civic aspects in any consideration of how to prepare young people for the world of work.

2.4. Active citizenship and educational cooperation

Active citizenship means empowering individuals, particularly young people, to engage fully with their community and to influence the democratic and social dynamics that shape their society. Far from a passive existence dictated by mere compliance with the law or the exercise of the right to vote, active citizenship involves concrete engagement in civic, social, cultural and educational initiatives (Hoskins & Mascherini, 2009). Built around values such as engagement, mutual support and shared responsibility, it is an essential binding force within societies shaped by cultural diversity.

Robert Putnam's (2000) work on social capital reveals that civic engagement and participation in voluntary organisations foster bonds of trust and cooperation, promoting the development of more cohesive communities. In the same vein, contemporary research highlights the importance of social and relational networks as drivers of social and professional integration, by facilitating access to opportunities and resources (Clarke, 2018). These theoretical foundations help to explain how the dynamics of educational and intercultural exchanges contribute, beyond the acquisition of individual skills, to fostering collective momentum. In the field of education, the rise of active citizenship undeniably depends on the development of international educational collaborations. International youth exchanges, such as those linking Morocco and Belgium, open up unprecedented prospects for intercultural dialogue and the development of shared values. Gaitán-Aguilar (2024) emphasises that student engagement in global citizenship initiatives sharpens critical thinking, strengthens commitment to social causes and refines an

understanding of global issues. The aim is to nurture young minds capable of combining strong local roots with a global vision – what some authors refer to as cosmopolitan citizenship (Delanty, 2000).

Furthermore, recent studies consistently show that educational exchanges are powerful catalysts for experience-based civic learning. According to Wood (2018), participatory teaching methods – which foster exchange, collaboration and co-decision-making – boost students' civic engagement. In a similar vein, Hoskins and Saisana (2019) emphasise that young people's involvement in the voluntary sector and collective projects acts as a real springboard for the acquisition of lasting civic and political skills. These findings confirm that an education which is open to intercultural understanding and focused on participation shapes young people capable of engaging responsibly and critically with society.

Civic engagement and educational synergy appear to be inseparable: they open up unprecedented opportunities for young people to participate, transcending national borders, and encourage them to build more inclusive and supportive societies. In the face of global cultural and political upheavals, these strategic initiatives aim to nurture generations capable of communicating, collaborating and driving collective projects, from the local to the international level.

2.5. Active citizenship and educational cooperation

In the 21st century, international mobility has become an essential pillar of the educational and training journey of younger generations. It encompasses all stays undertaken for educational, academic, professional or civic purposes, enabling young people to enjoy enriching intercultural experiences and acquire transferable skills. According to King and Raghuram (2013), international mobility is not limited to a change of location: it constitutes a genuine immersion in a process of learning and socialisation, where the individual adopts new points of reference, new values and new practices.

The rapid growth of student exchange programmes reflects the globalisation of higher education and the intensification of educational collaboration on an international scale. Beyond the strictly academic setting, mobility also takes more informal forms, whether through intercultural immersion, involvement in voluntary organisations or work placements. According to Urry's (2007) theory of 'societies of mobility', the dynamics of physical and symbolic movements shape the evolution of modern societies, weaving together networks, social ties and flows of knowledge.

The literature highlights the many benefits that international mobility brings to young people. It encourages language learning, cultural discovery, tolerance and the development of intercultural skills (Bartel-Radic et al., 2025). It also contributes to the development of interpersonal skills: independence, adaptability, managing sensitive situations... all of which are now essential for boosting employability (Rokos, 2025). According to Hanley and Chankseliani (2025), international mobility builds young people's ability to adapt to the realities of a globalised labour market, whilst fostering active civic engagement in the face of global challenges.

That said, international mobility is not without its pitfalls. Many authors highlight inequalities in access, often linked to economic, social or institutional barriers (Marginson, 2016). These disparities jeopardise the future of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, thereby exacerbating social divides in the acquisition of essential skills. Furthermore, some studies highlight the risk of a misleading experience if mobility is not underpinned by a framework for intercultural learning and self-reflection (O'Dowd, 2021). Ultimately, the recognition of skills acquired outside the traditional academic or professional pathways can sometimes remain a challenge.

Ultimately, international experiences prove to be a powerful catalyst for the personal development, career progression and civic engagement of younger generations. As a well-defined educational pathway, they serve as a vital lever for intercultural understanding, skills development and civic engagement on a global scale. Nevertheless, to realise its full potential, it must imperatively combine inclusion and accessibility and form part of a structured educational pathway, forging links between theoretical knowledge, alternative forms of learning and practical experience.

Table 2: Summary framework of the challenges and impacts of international mobility on the development of young people's skills

Analytical axis	Challenge and limitation	Strategic mechanisms	Impacts on skills
Accessibility	Socio-economic inequalities in access	Scholarships, hybrid funding, institutional partnerships	Democratisation of mobility
Quality of learning	Less structured experiences	Intercultural training, preparation and debriefing	Development of intercultural skills
Building of skills	Low level of formalisation of learning outcomes	Workshops, collaborative projects, coaching	Strengthening soft skills and employability
Recognition	Lack of institutional recognition	Certifications, digital badges, accreditation of prior learning	Validation of acquired skills
Civic engagement	Limited participation	Social projects, co-creation of activities	Development of active citizenship
Cultural adaptation	Culture shock	Mentoring, intercultural mediation, support	Improved intercultural integration
Sustainability of impacts	Lack of long-term follow-up	Alumni networks, post-mobility follow-up	Sustaining learning

Source: Compiled by the author based on the literature

3. Research methodology

In order to analyse the dynamics of the development of intercultural, cross-disciplinary and civic skills within the framework of the 2M1A programme, this research adopts a qualitative methodological approach. This choice is justified by the nature of the phenomenon under study, which is embedded in complex processes of social interaction, experiential learning and meaning-making. The qualitative

approach thus enables an in-depth exploration of the participants' lived experiences, as well as the individual and collective transformations brought about by their participation in the programme, whilst capturing the subjective, relational and contextual dimensions of skills development, which are difficult to measure using quantitative methods. With this in mind, the research draws on a case study of the 'Two Worlds, One Future' (2M1A) programme, regarded as an emblematic initiative for intercultural cooperation between Morocco and Belgium, enabling the phenomenon to be analysed in its real-world context by linking empirical data with theoretical frameworks. The methodology adopted is therefore based on multi-source data collection and rigorous thematic analysis, enabling the identification of the main areas of skills development among the young participants.

3.1. Research approach and design

The data analysis is based on a thematic approach, enabling the identification and interpretation of recurring patterns within the qualitative data. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a rigorous method for identifying, organising and interpreting significant themes within a body of data.

The analysis process followed a coding and categorisation approach, drawing on the principles of content analysis (Bardin, 2013). The data were structured around several analytical axes, enabling empirical observations to be linked to the theoretical concepts employed.

Furthermore, this approach forms part of a qualitative analytical framework aimed at producing a contextualised interpretation of the data (Miles et al., 2014), whilst ensuring the credibility and consistency of the results (Nowell et al., 2017).

3.2. Data collection and sample

Data collection is based on a qualitative approach utilising multiple sources, in order to ensure the richness and validity of the information gathered. With this in mind, the research relies on data triangulation, enabling different sources to be cross-referenced and strengthening the robustness of the analysis.

The data used are drawn primarily from institutional documents relating to the 2M1A programme, notably activity reports covering the various phases of the project. These documents provide detailed information on the objectives, teaching methods and activities implemented.

In addition, teaching materials (workshops, training sessions, educational content) and feedback from participants were utilised. These elements provide a detailed understanding of the learning processes and intercultural interactions experienced within the programme.

The study focuses on a sample of 24 young Moroccan and Belgian participants who took part in all phases of the programme. The sampling is purposive, in that participants were selected on the basis of their direct involvement in the programme under study. This approach prioritises the relevance and depth of the data over statistical representativeness.

The diversity of the participants' profiles (subjects, academic and professional backgrounds) is a key element of the analysis, as it enables an understanding of the variety of intercultural experiences and pathways of skills development.

3.3. Data analysis method

The data analysis is based on a thematic approach, which enables the identification, organisation and interpretation of recurring patterns within the qualitative corpus. This method is particularly well-suited to the study of complex social experiences and dynamics, as it allows data from a variety of sources to be structured.

In line with the work of Braun and Clarke (2006), the analysis followed a process of progressive coding aimed at identifying significant themes from the collected data. This process involved examining the content, identifying units of meaning, and then grouping these elements into coherent analytical categories.

In this regard, the analysis also draws on the principles of content analysis (Bardin, 2013), organising the data around interpretative categories that link empirical observations to the theoretical framework.

The results have been structured around three main themes: the development of intercultural skills, the acquisition of soft skills, and civic engagement. This structure ensures the coherence of the analysis and facilitates the interpretation of the data in relation to the research objectives.

4. Results

In order to analyse in depth, the dynamics of learning and skills development within the 2M1A programme, it is necessary to examine the structure of the activities implemented throughout the project. Indeed, the project is based on a progressive approach combining phases of

training, intercultural immersion, co-construction and evaluation.

This structure enables us to understand how the various experiences of the participants contribute to the development of intercultural, cross-disciplinary and civic skills. The following table therefore provides an analytical summary of the programme's main activities, highlighting their objectives, the skills involved and the observed effects.

Table 3: Analytical summary of the 2M1A programme's activities (Phase 1)

Date	18 January 2025	19/01/2025	15/02/2025
Title	Training course on intercultural understanding and the history of Morocco	Training on Belgium and immigration	Group preparation & Coordination
Objective	To understand the Moroccan cultural context	To understand migration dynamics	Organising collaborative work
Skills developed	Cultural openness, historical understanding	Critical thinking, social analysis	Teamwork, organisation
Observed outcomes	A better understanding of Morocco	A more nuanced view of migration	Initial group cohesion
Scientific analysis	Development of an intercultural framework	Deconstruction of stereotypes	Collaborative learning

Source: Prepared by the author based on data from the 2M1A programme

Table 4: Analytical summary of the 2M1A programme's activities (Phase 2)

Date	20–28 February 2025
Title	Study trip to Morocco
Objective	Cross-cultural immersion
Skills developed	Adaptability, communication, independence
Results observed	A “rich and transformative” experience
Scientific analysis	Experiential learning (Kolb)

Source: Compiled by the author based on data from the 2M1A programme

Analysis of the data from phases 1 and 2 of the 2M1A programme, summarised in Tables 3 and 4, highlights a progressive structuring of learning, organised around a continuum ranging from theoretical training to collective experimentation. This dynamic enables the identification of significant effects on the development of participants' intercultural, cross-cutting and reflective skills. During Phase 1, which focused on preparation and training, the educational activities presented in Table 3 helped to build an essential cognitive and cultural foundation. Training sessions on interculturality, the history of Morocco and migration dynamics enabled participants to develop a better understanding of socio-cultural contexts, whilst fostering the development of critical thinking. The results show, in particular, a shift in initial perceptions, characterised by a more nuanced view of migration realities and a gradual deconstruction of stereotypes. Furthermore, the collective preparation activities strengthened group cohesion and laid the foundations for collaborative learning, fostering the acquisition of organisational and interpersonal skills. This phase can thus be interpreted as a stage of ‘constructing an intercultural framework’, providing participants with the necessary frameworks for understanding when interacting with otherness. Phase 2, focused on immersion and experimentation, and presented in Table 4, marks a transition towards more in-depth experiential learning. The study trip to Morocco constitutes a key moment in the programme, in that it enables participants to apply the knowledge they have acquired to real-life situations. The results show that this immersion fostered the development of skills such as

adaptability, intercultural communication and autonomy. Participants describe this experience as ‘enriching and transformative’, reflecting a learning process based on direct experience, in line with the principles of experiential learning. This phase also strengthened social interactions and intercultural exchanges, contributing to greater mutual understanding and a more practical grasp of cultural differences. Across the board, a joint analysis of Tables 3 and 4 highlights a cumulative and evolving learning process. The training phase helps to structure knowledge and prepare participants, whilst the immersion phase facilitates the application and transformation of that knowledge. This interplay between theoretical learning and lived experience appears to be a key factor in the development of skills. It contributes not only to the acquisition of knowledge and know-how, but also to the transformation of attitudes, perceptions and behaviours. Finally, the results show that these two phases jointly contribute to the development of essential cross-cutting skills, such as critical thinking, communication, teamwork and adaptability. They also serve as a key driver of personal development, by boosting participants’ self-confidence and their ability to navigate complex intercultural environments. Thus, Phases 1 and 2 of the 2M1A programme, as summarised in Tables 3 and 4, can be interpreted as an integrated framework for intercultural learning, combining preparation, interaction and experimentation, and contributing significantly to the overall development of the young participants’ skills.

Table 5: Analytical summary of the 2M1A programme’s activities (Phase 3)

Date	25 Oct – 1 Nov 2025	During the stay	Nov – Dec 2025
Title	A stay in Belgium	Meetings with cultural stakeholders	Final evaluation and project closure
Objective	Genuine intercultural exchange	Understanding the professional environment	Measuring the overall impact and showcasing the results
Skills developed	Leadership, communication, adaptability	Networking, inspiration	Reflectiveness, analysis, expression, synthesis
Results observed	Strengthening of relations between	Young people’s career prospects	Increased self-confidence and a

	Morocco and Belgium		sense of achievement
Scientific analysis	Contact theory (direct interaction)	Situated learning	Identity formation and transformational learning

Source: Author’s own analysis based on data from the 2M1A programme

Analysis of the data from phase 3 of the 2M1A programme highlights a progressive learning dynamic based on intercultural immersion, social interaction and engagement with the socio-political realities of the Belgian context. From the very first activities, the results show a high level of engagement and cohesion amongst participants, reflecting a rapid ability to adapt and the continuity of relationships despite the time gaps between meetings. This phase is characterised by a significant cognitive transformation, particularly through activities raising awareness of migration and visits to institutions, which enabled the young people to develop an in-depth understanding of migration issues, human rights and public policy. The participants gradually deconstructed their initial perceptions to adopt a more critical, nuanced and informed perspective, based on direct experience and the analysis of testimonies.

Interactions with cultural, voluntary and institutional stakeholders fostered situated learning, rooted in real-life contexts, enabling the young people to link theoretical knowledge to practical applications. These experiences reinforced the development of cross-cutting skills such as intercultural communication, leadership, analytical skills and civic engagement. Meetings with role models, particularly from the arts, politics and the voluntary sector, played a decisive role in building the participants’ motivation, self-confidence and career aspirations. They also helped to broaden the scope of possibilities by showcasing success stories from similar backgrounds.

This phase fostered a collective awareness of contemporary social issues, notably inequalities, precariousness, discrimination and questions of identity. The young people were encouraged to reflect on their own life journeys, their multiple identities and their role as social actors, thereby strengthening their civic engagement and their ability to participate in international cooperation initiatives. Activities involving debate, intercultural comparison and collaborative learning fostered greater self-reflection, enabling participants to integrate their experiences into a framework of sustainable learning.

The results highlight that Phase 3 constitutes a pivotal moment in the programme, marking the transition from theoretical preparation to a transformative immersive experience. It plays a central role in the integrated development of intercultural, professional and civic skills, by combining direct interaction, experiential learning and critical reflection. This phase thus contributes to the development of sustainable intercultural and social capital, fostering not only young people's adaptability to diverse environments, but also their ability to engage actively in collective and transnational initiatives.

5. Discussion

The findings from the analysis of the 2M1A project make significant contributions to the fields of intercultural studies, non-formal education and youth mobility. The body of empirical data highlights a structured process of skills development, based on a progressive integration of theoretical training, intercultural immersion and active participation. This dynamic confirms that non-formal educational programmes, when designed with an integrated and experiential approach, constitute powerful drivers of learning and of individual and collective transformation. The results obtained are thus discussed in the light of the theoretical frameworks employed, highlighting strong convergences with the existing literature whilst emphasising the specific contributions of the case studied.

5.1. Confirmation of the intercultural competence model

The empirical observations confirm the conceptual models developed by Deardorff (2006), according to which intercultural competence is based on an integrated set of cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions. In the case of the 2M1A programme, these dimensions appear to be particularly well-articulated. The cognitive dimension is manifested through the acquisition of knowledge relating to historical, cultural and migratory contexts, particularly during training sessions and institutional visits. The affective dimension is reflected in the development of openness, empathy and tolerance, observed during interactions between participants and encounters with various social actors. Finally, the behavioural dimension is reflected in improved abilities in intercultural communication, managing differences and adapting to new environments.

These results also confirm contact theory (Allport, 1954), according to which direct interactions between groups, when structured and egalitarian, help to reduce stereotypes and improve mutual understanding. The reciprocal nature of the project, based on bilateral exchanges between Morocco and Belgium, reinforces this dynamic by creating conditions

conducive to genuine intercultural dialogue. The participants' experience thus demonstrates that intercultural competence is not built solely through theoretical content, but results from a process of interaction, experience and reflection.

5.2. Experiential learning and identity transformation

The findings support approaches to experiential and transformative learning, particularly those developed by Kolb (1984) and Mezirow (1991). The alternation between training phases and immersion phases, observed in the 2M1A programme, fostered learning based on direct experience, reflection and practical application. Participants were confronted with real-life situations, notably through field visits, discussions with institutional stakeholders and meetings with beneficiaries of social policies, which helped them to re-examine their initial perceptions.

This dynamic has sparked a process of identity transformation, characterised by changing perceptions, a better understanding of social realities and a greater ability to incorporate diverse perspectives. Intercultural discussions, the sharing of experiences and collective reflection activities have enabled participants to develop a reflective mindset, which is essential for sustainable learning. As such, the project goes beyond the scope of a simple cultural exchange to form part of a process of gradual transformation of individual and collective frames of reference.

5.3. Soft skills and employability in an intercultural context

Empirical data confirm the findings of Clarke (2018) and Tomlinson (2017), who highlight the importance of non-formal experiences in the development of transferable skills. Within the 2M1A programme, soft skills are developed in real-life and complex contexts, requiring constant adaptation, effective intercultural communication, collective coordination and the management of unforeseen events.

The results show that participants strengthened key skills such as leadership, self-confidence, the ability to work in a team and stress management, particularly during public speaking activities, collaborative workshops and interactions with professionals. Meetings with role models also helped to strengthen the young people's career aspirations and broaden their career prospects. This approach confirms that intercultural mobility acts as a genuine catalyst for professional skills, preparing young people to thrive in globalised and culturally diverse environments.

5.4. Contribution to North–South literature

A specific contribution of this study lies in its Africa–Europe focus. Whilst the majority of research on student mobility focuses on intra-European or North American contexts, the 2M1A project offers an analysis of a structured cooperation scheme between Morocco and Belgium. This case highlights a partnership model based on reciprocity, dialogue and co-construction, breaking with unidirectional approaches centred on the transfer of skills.

The findings show that this cooperation not only promotes the development of individual skills, but also the building of transnational social capital and a global outlook. Intercultural exchanges enable participants to better understand the similarities and differences between contexts, whilst developing an awareness of global issues. This dimension helps to enrich research on cosmopolitan citizenship (Delanty, 2000) and social capital (Putnam, 2000), by providing an empirical perspective drawn from a North–South context that has as yet been little explored.

5.5. Scientific contributions and limitations

This study makes several major contributions. Firstly, it offers an empirical analysis of a structured intercultural programme operating outside the dominant institutional frameworks, highlighting the role of voluntary initiatives in developing young people's skills. Secondly, it emphasises the importance of non-formal education as a lever for integrated learning, enabling the combination of intercultural, professional and civic dimensions. Finally, it highlights the specific characteristics of North–South cooperation dynamics, demonstrating their potential for educational and social transformation.

However, certain limitations must be noted. The analysis relies primarily on qualitative data drawn from reports and feedback, which limits the generalisability of the results. The absence of quantitative indicators means that long-term changes in skills cannot be measured accurately. Furthermore, the study focuses on a single case, which calls for caution when interpreting the results. Future research could incorporate mixed-methods approaches and longitudinal evaluation methods in order to better understand the lasting impact of this type of programme on the life trajectories of the young participants.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to analyse the 'Deux Mondes, Un Avenir' (2M1A) intercultural project as an educational initiative promoting the development of intercultural skills, soft skills and active citizenship among young people from Morocco and Belgium. Using a qualitative approach based on a documentary analysis of the project reports, the results highlight the consistency between the stated educational objectives and the observable effects on the participants.

The analysis shows that the 2M1A programme constitutes a hybrid learning environment combining theoretical training, local immersion and international mobility. This combination fosters the simultaneous development of cognitive skills (understanding of historical and institutional contexts), interpersonal skills (intercultural communication, managing differences) and professional skills (leadership, teamwork, adaptability). The project thus appears to be an effective vehicle for non-formal education, helping to prepare young people to thrive in globalised and culturally diverse environments.

Beyond individual skills, the study also highlights the importance of the programme's civic dimension. By promoting dialogue, the dismantling of stereotypes and transnational cooperation, 2M1A helps to build social awareness and cross-border relational capital. The Morocco–Belgium case enriches the existing literature on youth mobility by proposing a model of North–South cooperation based on reciprocity and mutual recognition.

In practical terms, these findings encourage education policymakers and civil society organisations to strengthen intercultural initiatives that integrate mobility, active learning methods and reflective support. However, the inclusion of longitudinal evaluation mechanisms would enable a more accurate assessment of the long-term impact of this type of initiative on the academic, professional and civic trajectories of the young participants.

Ultimately, the 2M1A project illustrates the potential of structured intercultural programmes as tools for educational and social transformation, helping to shape a generation of young people capable of engaging in dialogue, cooperating and taking action in an international context characterised by complexity and diversity.

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