KU LEUVEN

FACULTY OF PSYCHOLOGY AND

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Research unit for Methodology of Educational Sciences

Exploring The Conveyance Of

Europeans Norms And Values Through eTwinning Platform

Master's thesis submitted for the degree
of Master of Science in Educational
Studies by
Hoàng Bích Trâm La

Supervisor: Dr. Mathias Decuypere

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Summary

eTwinning, a digital platform launched in 2005 and funded by the European Commission, promotes collaborative online projects between schools in Europe (and beyond). An eTwinning project typically begins with educators from different European countries forming a collaborative partnership. Together, they design a project that aligns with their curriculum and educational objectives. Once the project is approved, participating classes engage in various collaborative activities, such as joint lessons, virtual meetings, and the exchange of resources and materials. Communication often occurs through eTwinning, allowing students and teachers to share their progress, insights, and experiences. Throughout the project, participants work towards common objectives, fostering cross-cultural understanding, language learning, and the development of digital skills. The project concludes with a final outcome or presentation, showcasing the collaborative achievements of the participating schools.

This study is interested in how knowledge is shared and transferred in the eTwinning platform, in other words, how certain norms and values are conveyed through the eTwinning project collaboration, which informs about the promotion of European integration and the understanding of shared values and identity in the context of multiculturalism. This study will first review the relevant literature on eTwinning, the forming and development of European integration and how it connects with Europeanisation and its dimension in education. Project-based learning and the characteristics of digital platforms are also discussed to highlight the crucial nature of eTwinning. To investigate this, I will present the methodology used to collect data from 4 semi-structured interviews and how thematic analysis is useful in analysing the data. I will also address some ethical considerations in conducting the study.

The research has found that academic and professional values are integral components in eTwinning collaboration, aligning with the spirit of Europeanisation in digital education, which is in line with the existing literature. These values signify a commitment to knowledge pursuit, pedagogical excellence, and collaborative teaching practices, fostering a shared dedication to enhancing the quality of education. Multicultural values emerge as central aspects influencing interactions on eTwinning, facilitating cross-cultural collaborations that extend beyond

geographical boundaries. The exchange of cultural nuances contributes to a richer learning experience, promoting a sense of shared citizenship and intercultural competence among participants. Additionally, social values, particularly teamwork, collaboration, and mutual respect, form a cohesive eTwinning community, fostering an inclusive environment where educators from different countries share and celebrate effective approaches to teaching and learning. Through continuous collaboration, this study suggests that soft governance in eTwinning is about fostering a collaborative and supportive community where shared values guide behaviour, promoting excellence and unity among participants without relying on rigid rules and regulations.

Acknowledgement

It was a long way to complete this thesis, but it was a fun, valuable and unforgettable journey!

I would like to give my sincerest thanks to my supervisor, Professor Mathias Decuypere, for his support through all the stages of completing the thesis. I have learnt a lot from you. Thank you for your time and guidance during every dialogic discussion.

I couldn't have made it without my family. Mum, dad and Hưng, thank you for always being there for me. I don't say it very often but I love you. The Master's degree is for you!

To all my friends and those I have met along the way, thank you for supporting me. Special thanks to A., whom I comfortably bothered for everything and for nothing. I want to share this achievement with all of you.

Last but not least, this thesis is also the acknowledgement of me growing up, out of my comfort zone, on my own in a new country. To the future Trâm, you may read this thesis later at different stages of your life, yes, you did it. You can do everything if you believe in yourself!

Clarification of the student's approach and contribution to the thesis

I am interested in studying digital education as I see the transformative power of technology in the educational landscape within the past decades, particularly how it leverages the geographical borders to foster a more transnational learning space. The topic on eTwinning proposed by Professor Mathias Decuypere was therefore one of my top choices, and finally was assigned to me in the first round of the topic allocation. I had a few dialogic discussions with Professor Mathias and his team (at the time) to grasp relevant knowledge on digital platforms/education before I finalised the focal point of my thesis on "Exploring the Conveyance of European Norms and Values through eTwinning platform".

Professor Mathias and I then scheduled regular meetings to refine my conceptual framework. This was instrumental in forming the theoretical underpinnings of my research, ensuring that the framework not only accounted for the dynamic nature of the learning space in digital platforms but also aligned with the broader landscape (Europeanisation in digital education, project-based learning, etc.). I also received constructive feedback from Professor Mathias for a more robust methodology, data collection and analysis. Additionally, his guidance on the writing styles, research skills and necessary literature was indeed beneficial for me to complete this thesis with a more argumentative discussion and study conclusion.

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1. Introduction

In the era of digitalisation, technological advancements appear in every facet of our lives, fundamentally altering how we navigate and engage with the world. This digital revolution has not only impacted sectors such as communication, business, and entertainment but has also revolutionised the field of education. Digital tools, ranging from computers and mobile devices to online platforms and educational software, have become ubiquitous in educational settings, transforming the traditional classroom into a dynamic and interactive learning environment. Within the European context, digitalisation has extended beyond its applications in education, playing a significant role in the process of Europeanisation (Landri, 2018). Europeanisation refers to the ongoing integration and harmonisation of policies and practices among European nations, aiming to foster cooperation, cultural exchange, and shared values (Carlson et al., 2018; Vukasovic & Huisman, 2018). Digital tools have emerged as active participants in this process, imbued with agency and influencing the governance of education (Decuypere, 2016; Landri, 2018). The governance of education in the era of digitalisation encompasses the structures, policies, and processes that guide the use of digital tools and technologies in educational settings (Landri, 2018; Williamson, 2016). With the widespread adoption of digital tools, the traditional model of education is being reshaped, and new approaches to governance are emerging to address the opportunities and challenges presented by this digital revolution, involving making decisions about the selection, implementation and regulation of digital technologies in schools. This research seeks to delve into the realm of digital education and Europeanisation and particularly examines how European norms and values are conveyed through learning and teaching on digital platforms, shedding light on the strategies, challenges, and potential impact of this emerging educational approach.

An essential rationale for examining the conveyance of European norms and values through digital platforms takes interest in how the understanding of belonging to Europe, and the preservation and cultivation of European identity take place in a transnational and complex, digital space. Europe's diversity of cultural, linguistic, and historical heritage often necessitates an active promotion and transmission of European norms and values to foster a sense of European identity (Miruna Butnaru Troncota & Makarychev, 2022). When referring to

European values and norms, several key principles and ideals come to the forefront. These values and norms are often associated with the European Union (EU) and its objectives, as well as broader cultural and historical foundations that have shaped Europe as a region. In an increasingly interconnected world marked by cultural exchange and global interconnectedness, digital platforms transcending geographical borders provide a virtual space for more collaborative cross-cultural discussions among teachers, students and other educational staff from different European countries. In this context, *eTwinning* emerges as a significant platform that facilitates the exchange and collaboration among educational communities across Europe (Papadakis, 2016). eTwinning is an initiative by the European Commission that enables teachers and students from different European countries to engage in joint projects, fostering cross-cultural understanding and the exploration of shared European values. By connecting classrooms digitally, eTwinning creates a transnational and complex space where the conveyance of European norms and values can occur.

Importantly, situated in critical educational research on digital platforms, the "social power of algorithmic systems" (Knox et al., 2020, p. 31) will also be the focal point of investigation and discussion. Research indicates that digital platforms possess agency, they actively shape and mediate the interactions and experiences of users (Clutterbuck, 2023; Decuypere et al., 2021). Specifically, the platform's design choices, features, algorithms, and functionalities influence how participants engage with content, connect with others, and construct their identities within the digital space. Platforms can enable or constrain certain actions, control the flow of information, and shape the visibility and accessibility of content. This research takes into account the agency of digital platforms in the transmission of norms and values. On the one hand, the platform's architecture can provide opportunities for participants to engage in collaborative activities that foster the understanding of European identity and values. On the other hand, the design choices and functionalities of the platform might also impact the representation of European norms and values, potentially reinforcing certain perspectives or marginalising others.

The agency of digital platforms in conveying European norms and values goes beyond their role as mere educational tools. As the literature on digital education has pointed out, the increasing significance and impact of digital tools have led to their recognition as policy

instruments that materialise and operationalise government policies (Landri, 2018; Romito et al., 2020). In this case, digital platforms offer a unique opportunity to reach a broad and diverse audience, transcending traditional boundaries of time and space, which will be discussed in the later section. These platforms foster intercultural dialogue and facilitate the dissemination of knowledge. The agency of digital platforms has positioned them as powerful tools for policy implementation, ensuring the widespread reach and effectiveness of initiatives aimed at conveying norms and values to a broad public. As in the research of Baioni et al. (2021), digital social platforms are used as a possible booster of stakeholders' participation and to foster innovation in practices related to cultural heritage management in the cultural heritage sector in Europe.

eTwinning is among the initiatives to foster European cooperation in education. eTwinning is an online platform and community that promotes collaboration and partnership among schools and educators across Europe. It was launched in 2005 as an initiative of the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme, part of the Erasmus+ programme, to promote collaboration and communication among schools across Europe through the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) (Miguela, 2007). Through the eTwinning platform, teachers and students can connect with their counterparts in other European countries, exchange ideas, share resources, and work together on joint projects.

Referring back to the existing knowledge of digital platforms, the Europeanisation of education through digital platforms represents a multifaceted and intricate process with significant potential for shaping the educational landscape. Current literature acknowledges the transformative impact of e-learning platforms on enhancing digital skills and literacy within the European workforce (Stan et al., 2023). Notably, the European Commission plays a pivotal role in formulating and disseminating education policies through digital channels (Decuypere, 2016). The ongoing digital transformation of education in Europe encompasses the revision of educational content, teaching methodologies, and the overall structure of educational services (Strutynska, 2020). This shift towards digitisation has captured the attention of researchers, particularly within the realm of technology, standards, and the broader scope of Europeanisation in education (Decuypere, 2016; Landri, 2018).

The existing studies recognise the potential of e-learning platforms to enhance digital skills and the significance of digital governance in European education (e.g. Decuypere & Lewis, 2023; Williamson, 2016). However, there is a notable lack of in-depth exploration into how platforms like eTwinning actively contribute to the construction and understanding of European identity through the dissemination of values. Moreover, while eTwinning is widely acknowledged as a platform that fosters international collaboration among schools in Europe (Alcaraz-Mármol, 2020; Papadakis, 2016; Vuorikari et al., 2011), its role as a mediator for the transmission of specific values in the digital realm remains under-addressed. This research gap calls for an exploration of the mechanisms through which eTwinning, as a specific digital initiative, contributes to the broader goals of Europeanisation and the formation of a shared European educational space. This study, therefore, aims to answer this research question:

- How are European norms and values conveyed through eTwinning, and how does this contribute to the construction and understanding of European identity?

The structure of this study is as follows. In section 2, I review the relevant literature on eTwinning, the forming and development of Europeanisation and its dimension in education, the notions of project-based learning, the characteristics of digital platforms. Section 3 will detail the methodology adopted in this study, why the case study approach and purposive sampling were applied. In section 4, I present the 4 major findings of the research after thoroughly analysing the interview transcripts. The results presented in this section will be supported by the existing literature and relevant policies/documents on eTwinning. Section 5 is the conclusion which summarises the key points of the research, reiterating the significance of the study, and offering final thoughts on the conveyance of norms and values in the European digital education context of eTwinning. I also address some limitations and recommendations for further research in this section.

2   Conceptual framework

2.1 The context of eTwinning

Launched nearly two decades ago, eTwinning has now grown into an active community for schools around Europe to develop pedagogical and professional projects, with more than a million active eTwinners. This digital platform supports cross-border communication and collaboration between teachers and students to promote these four principles: intercultural

exchange and understanding, ICT skills, European identity, and teachers' professional development (Miguela, 2007).

A large body of literature eTwinning has recognised its ability to enhance educational practices by promoting active and collaborative learning, beneficial for different actors (students, teachers and school staff). For instance, regarding teaching practices, Papadakis (2016) claims that eTwinning promotes innovative teaching methods by facilitating collaboration between teachers from different countries. The platform offers a space for educators to share ideas, resources, and best practices, leading to the adoption of new pedagogical approaches and instructional strategies (Papadakis, 2016; Vuorikari et al., 2011). Teachers participating in eTwinning projects have reported increased motivation, professional development, and improved classroom management skills (Cinganotto, 2017). Additionally, eTwinning projects have been particularly effective in fostering intercultural understanding among students. Research by Alcaraz-Mármol (2020) demonstrates that collaborative activities with international peers on the platform promote cultural awareness, empathy, and tolerance. Miguela (2007) claims that "one of the main objectives of the eTwinning model of telecollaboration is to integrate a feeling of European identity as well as an awareness of the continent's linguistic diversity into the learning process" (p. 87). In other words, through engaging in joint projects, students develop a broader perspective of European diversity and build meaningful connections. Existing studies also emphasise the positive impact of eTwinning on the development of digital literacy, for example, Heindl (2018) argues that participation in eTwinning projects encourages the acquisition of digital competencies, including online communication, information literacy, and critical thinking. Students gain proficiency in using digital tools, collaborating remotely, and navigating online platforms, which are crucial skills for their future personal and professional lives (Papadakis, 2016).

While eTwinning is an initiative supported by the European Commission, it operates along with the participation of various European agencies and national support services:
- The European Commission plays a central role in overseeing and coordinating the eTwinning initiative. It provides funding, policy guidance, and strategic direction for the platform. The European Commission ensures that eTwinning aligns with the

broader objectives of European education policies, such as promoting digital skills, intercultural understanding, and collaborative learning.

- The Central Support Service (CSS) acts as the central coordinating body for eTwinning. The CSS is responsible for managing the overall operations of the platform, including user support, and training. It ensures the smooth functioning of eTwinning at the European level. CSS is operated by European Schoolnet, a network of European Ministries of Education to foster collaboration and innovation in European education, with a specific focus on leveraging technology to enhance teaching and learning experiences.

- Each participating country has its own National Support Service (NSS), which acts as the local contact point which approves the access of eTwinning users. The NSS provides support, training, and guidance to schools and teachers, promoting eTwinning activities at the national level by rewarding excellent projects.

- To maintain the quality and effectiveness of eTwinning projects, there are established quality assurance mechanisms. Quality labels are awarded to projects that meet specific criteria and demonstrate excellence in terms of collaboration, innovation, and impact. The evaluation process is conducted by a network of trained eTwinning Ambassadors and experts who ensure adherence to quality standards. eTwinning Ambassadors refer to those who play a key role in promoting and supporting the eTwinning program within their respective countries. They are experienced and enthusiastic eTwinners who voluntarily take on the role of facilitating communication, providing guidance, and encouraging the use of eTwinning among teachers and schools.

In terms of the platform development, users, at the beginning, could access the platform via www.etwinning.net. However, recently, there have been some major changes in the platform. In June 2022, eTwinning was merged into the European School Education Platform (ESEP) under school-education.ec.europa.eu. More features in ESEP were released in late 2023, such as Feeds in the eTwinning area, eTwinning Rooms, etc. Not only eTwinning but The School Education Gateway, which serves as a valuable resource for teachers and education stakeholders to stay updated on European initiatives and activities related to schools, is also merged into the new ESEP. The key principles behind this change aim at a more sustainable,

inclusive and digital education, without overlapping audiences and functionality (as communicated in the webinar 'Introducing the European School Education Platform in February 2023', the video recording can be found on the channel European School Education Platform on Youtube). Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that a part of the eTwinning teachers has been experiencing some inconvenience and discomfort with the new platform. Some eTwinning Ambassadors have presented a petition "We want the eTwinning platform back" (as a separate platform), in which they mention some difficulties working on the ESEP, for example "missing accounts, schools placed in wrong countries, difficulties in creating projects, continuous malfunctioning" (retrieved from www.change.org/p/we-want-the-etwinning-platform-back). Later on in this master's thesis, I will present some more updated information on the merged platform.

As we reflect on the development of eTwinning, initially as a single platform merging into a bigger platform of the community, it is essential to delve into the historical context of Europe, where the inclusion and collaboration also marked a crucial stepstone in the formation of the European Union. Understanding the aspirations and the radicals of a harmonious, collaborative European community could inform better the intricacy of relations and interactions involved in eTwinning.

2.2 From European integration to Europeanisation. An inclusive, collaborative community of Europe.

European integration, initiated in the post-World War II era, has aimed to foster peace, cooperation, and economic prosperity among European nations (Purnhagen, 2019). One of the milestones in European integration was when the Treaty of Rome was signed in 1957 establishing the European Economic Community (EEC), which aimed to promote economic integration and cooperation among member states. The formation of the European Union (EU) itself is also rooted in economic cooperation - each member state trades with others and becomes "economically interdependent and so are more likely to avoid conflicts" (European Commission, 2022, p. 7). Consequently, this socio-political aspect has been influential in forging closer ties between European nations and shaping the trajectory of European integration. Political cooperation is one of the fundamental aspects of European integration (Purnhagen, 2019). Through mechanisms such as intergovernmental conferences, treaty

negotiations, and the establishment of the European Council, European states have engaged in sustained dialogue and cooperation to address common challenges and pursue shared goals. The establishment and evolution of institutional frameworks have also played a crucial role in European integration. Institutions such as the European Commission and the European Parliament have contributed to the development of supranational decision-making processes, fostering cooperation and integration (European Commission, 2022). European integration has also been accompanied by efforts to consolidate democratic practices and norms across member states. For instance, the European Parliament, as an elected body representing European citizens, provides a platform for democratic deliberation and decision-making at the supranational level (European Commission, 2022). This socio-political aspect of European integration has significantly contributed to the democratic advancement of Europe as a whole.

Europeanisation, a consequence of European integration, encompasses the diffusion of European norms, policies, and practices that influence the socio-political dimensions of member states (Mikulec, 2017; Vukasovic & Huisman, 2018). It captures the complex interplay between the EU and its member states, encompassing the various ways in which European integration influences and shapes national governance, policy-making, and societal dynamics by providing the impetus and mechanisms through which European norms, policies, and practices permeate and are adopted by member states.

European integration engenders Europeanisation through interconnected mechanisms. First of all, the process of European integration equally entails the **formulation** and implementation of common policies and regulations aimed at harmonising standards and practices in member states (Carlson et al., 2018). As member states engage in the policymaking process at the European level, they become exposed to and influenced by EU policies, which Vukasovic & Huisman (2018) refer to as *the vertical or top-down dynamic* of the European Governance layer. Through the channels of policy transfer and convergence, member states adopt and adapt EU policies, aligning their national policies with EU regulations.

Moreover, European integration encompasses the **promotion** and dissemination of common values and norms among member states, in other words, *the horizontal dynamic* of governance (Vukasovic & Huisman, 2018). The EU serves as a norm entrepreneur, advocating

for specific norms and values such as democracy, human rights, and free market principles. These norms are diffused and socialised among member states through various channels, including policy dialogue and expert networks. As member states internalise these norms, they gradually incorporate them into their domestic policies, practices, and societal values, thereby contributing to the process of Europeanisation (Vukasovic & Huisman, 2018).

Research shows that Europeanisation relies on soft governance, a type of governance that refers to non-binding norms, principles, guidelines, and standards that are not enforceable through legal mechanisms (Lawn, 2006). The open method of coordination (OMC) is an example of soft governance in Europeanisation in education. The OMC is a policy coordination mechanism used within the European Union (EU) to facilitate the cooperation and exchange of best practices among member states. The OMC is employed in various policy areas, and its goal is to enhance the coordination and convergence of policies without imposing a harmonised legislative framework, by establishing European networks that include both public and private specialists (Grek & Lawn, 2012; Mikulec, 2017). These networks facilitate the exchange of information, knowledge, and best practices, thereby promoting mutual learning. Through these transnational interactions, member states are influenced by the experiences and approaches of their counterparts, furthering the process of Europeanisation (Grek & Lawn, 2012). Without relying on legally binding obligations, this approach allows for flexibility and adaptability, enabling member states to align their policies and practices with the broader objectives of Europeanisation while retaining a degree of autonomy. The use of soft governance instruments within the OMC demonstrates the recognition of the value of non-coercive mechanisms in fostering convergence and harmonisation of educational policies and practices across Europe.

2.3 Europeanisation in education

When the Treaty of Rome was signed, education was not strongly considered a key aspect of European cooperation and was "treated as an item of the national sphere" (Landri, 2018, p. 45). As European countries strived for closer cooperation and integration, education gradually emerged as a key domain where shared values, goals, and policies were being pursued. It was not until the Strategy of Lisbon in 1990 that education officially became one of the crucial aspects of European cooperation and the forming of a European space (Landri, 2018; Mikulec,

2017). Grek & Lawn (2012) claim that Europeanisation in education results from "the creation of European Education Space", which is rooted in the attempt to " [create] Europe by creating policy areas in its own new images [...] knitting together the public and the private sectors, and overcoming older national bordered systems" (p. 12). Over the past decades, numerous policy initiatives and actions have been implemented at both national and European levels to foster European integration in the field of education (Carlson et al., 2018). Noteworthy among these initiatives are prominent endeavours such as the Bologna process - which seeks to guarantee the comparability of higher education credentials, the establishment of a common European Higher Education Area (EHEA), European Research Area (ERA), and the mobility programs such as the Erasmus+.

Europeanisation in education holds considerable significance as it represents a convergence of national education systems towards common goals and practices of a larger community (Antunes, 2020). It reflects a commitment to building a shared European identity, fostering mobility and cultural exchange, and addressing the challenges of a globalised world. For example, as shown on https://www.eursc.eu/en/European-Schools/mission, the establishment of the European School System is aimed at building a shared community for students who are family members of staff who work for European institutions. To illustrate this, in Erasmus+ exchanges, students have the opportunity to study or undertake internships in different European universities or organisations (R. Brooks, 2018). On the one hand, this exchange reinforces students' intercultural competencies, language skills, and a deep appreciation for Europe's cultural diversity. On the other hand, Erasmus+ encourages the recognition and transferability of learning outcomes and credits across European educational systems. This recognition promotes the integration of diverse educational experiences and qualifications within the European framework. It reinforces the notion of a European educational space where learning achievements are valued and acknowledged collectively, further reinforcing the construction of a European educational space. By promoting cooperation and harmonisation in education, Europeanisation aims to enhance the quality of education, facilitate recognition of qualifications, and create opportunities for academic and professional mobility (Antunes, 2020; Vukasovic & Huisman, 2018). The European Union plays a central role through its educational policies and initiatives aimed at fostering collaboration and integration. The desire to create a European Higher Education Area, encourage student

and staff mobility through programs (e.g. Erasmus+), and establish common standards and frameworks for qualifications (e.g. the European qualifications frameworks) are some examples of the key drivers of Europeanisation in education.

Research also suggests that Europeanisation equally has implications for national education systems. It necessitates the alignment of national policies, curricula (Carlson et al., 2018), and practices with European frameworks and guidelines, impacting governance structures and decision-making processes. National education systems are influenced by European initiatives, leading to the transfer and adaptation of policies and practices from one country to another. As Mikulec (2017) points out, the development of the National Qualification Frameworks of the member countries is greatly based on the European Qualifications Frameworks. For example, The European Education Area (EEA) is a visionary framework within the European Union, fostering collaboration and inclusivity in education across member states. Envisioned as a space for learning that is accessible and efficient, the EEA aims to break down barriers, promote mutual recognition of qualifications, and encourage cooperation among EU countries. Simultaneously, the Education and Training 2030 (ET2030) strategic framework outlines the EU's educational priorities until 2030, emphasising key areas such as digitalisation, the development of essential competencies, social inclusion, and green skills, aligning education with broader EU goals for sustainable growth.

Additionally, the European Union's Education and Training Monitor, alongside other benchmarking tools, enhances Europeanisation by providing a comprehensive evaluation of education systems in European countries. Through a comparative analysis of key indicators, performance outcomes, and policy developments, member states can assess their performance against European standards and reference points (Landri, 2018). This process fosters transparency and accountability in education, enabling countries to identify areas requiring improvement. Furthermore, the benchmarking process facilitates knowledge transfer by allowing member states to learn from best practices implemented in other European countries. By aligning their policies with European guidelines and recommendations, member countries can promote the dissemination and adoption of European norms, values, and practices, ultimately strengthening the European dimension within their educational systems.

Europeanisation has historically underscored the collaborative efforts among European Union member states to harmonise educational practices and foster cross-cultural understanding, as argued above. Project-based learning (PBL) has the potential to catalyse transnational collaboration (Adiningrum et al., 2023), elevating the cooperative spirit inherent in Europeanisation. To be more specific, this dynamic approach facilitates the boundaries of collaborative learning, beyond national borders, students and educators engage in shared activities while interacting with people from different backgrounds. Therefore, the collaborative nature of PBL not only enhances the learning experience but also contributes to the broader European goal of creating a more interconnected and unified educational landscape. As projects unfold, project collaboration becomes a conduit for the exchange of cultural values and norms, enriching the educational journey with a depth of understanding that extends far beyond national boundaries. For example, Fitzsimons & Johnson (2020) and McDonald & Cater-Steel (2016) highlight the potential for project collaborations to evolve into sustainable communities of practice, with the latter providing specific principles for guiding international curriculum partnerships. In this way, PBL might serve as a powerful manifestation of Europeanisation, embodying the spirit of cooperation and unity in the ever-evolving landscape of education. The next section will shed light on the PBL and its significance in connecting and transferring knowledge.

2.4 Project-Based Learning (PBL): A catalyst for transnational collaboration and digital knowledge transfer

Project-based learning (PBL) is an instructional approach that centres on participants' active engagement in designing, planning, and executing projects that address real-world challenges or questions (Kokotsaki et al., 2016). By project, Lewis & Decuypere (2023) refer to "a temporary, activity-focused enterprise with clear aims that are usually established to achieve certain known objectives or outcomes" (p. 23). The researchers argue that the crucial aspect of project-ification is its non-permanent structure in a specific time-space. Specifically, in a project form, there is a temporary relation of actors that interact to achieve a specific outcome at one or a period of time. For example, the professionality of teachers (as actors) in this case is constantly modified as in the course of interaction, the project form enables these actors to see themselves, and identify themselves "both objectively and in relation to others" (Lewis &

Decuypere, 2023, p. 27). In terms of student learning, Kokotsaki et al. (2016) also claim that "learning is context-specific, learners are involved actively in the learning process and they achieve their goals through social interactions and the sharing of knowledge and understanding" (p. 267-268). To put it more broadly, students take on active roles as project managers and collaborators, fostering autonomy and self-directed learning. Teachers become facilitators, guiding the learning process, providing support, and ensuring that the project aligns with educational goals (Kokotsaki et al., 2016). Thus, PBL significantly impacts the agency of the actors involved. Besides, PBL has been shown to have a positive impact on student outcomes, including increased content knowledge, skill development, motivation, and engagement (Kokotsaki et al., 2016).

Extending the principles of PBL to a transnational and digital context, such as eTwinning, adds a layer of complexity and richness to the learning experience. The collaborative and interdependent nature of eTwinning aligns seamlessly with the core tenets of PBL.

PBL in a transnational context has been shown to enhance cross-cultural understanding and appreciation. Syzenko & Diachkova (2020) found that collaborative technology-enhanced projects significantly improved language proficiency and cross-cultural competence. First, Transnational collaboration in PBL involves students from different countries working together on common projects, providing a rich environment for cultural exchange (Syzenko & Diachkova, 2020). Not only students but educators also are key actors in PBL. As facilitators of transnational PBL, they also benefit from the cultural exchange inherent in collaborative projects. According to Beaton et al. (2021), educators play a crucial role in creating an inclusive learning environment in transnational project-based learning. The role of teachers extends beyond subject matter expertise to include guiding students in navigating cross-cultural dynamics. Project-based learning is an effective strategy in promoting tolerance and acceptance of cultural diversity, as demonstrated in a study in Russia (Voronchenko et al., 2015) and an intercultural educational program in Greece (Govaris & Kaldi, 2012). These studies collectively highlight the role of educators in fostering an inclusive learning environment that values and promotes cultural diversity in transnational project-based learning.

Project-based learning, at its core, thrives on collaboration. When embedded within the digital realm, this collaboration fosters a profound sense of interconnectedness among learners, transcending geographical barriers (Williamson, 2015). Learning is no longer confined to a single location, but spills out into a virtual world brimming with possibilities such as Geographical Inclusivity, Diverse Perspectives, knowledge conveyance, etc. eTwinning is one of the ultimate examples of digital, transnational project-based learning. While collaborating, teachers and students become co-creators of shared outcomes, their diverse perspectives and experiences weaving together to construct knowledge. This collaborative aspect, as (Wenger, 1998) suggests, forms a "community of practice," where individuals learn not only from each other but also from the collective wisdom amassed through shared endeavours. The digital dimension amplifies this interconnectedness, enabling students to share ideas, resources, and feedback across vast distances, fostering a sense of shared purpose and European citizenship.

As we have discussed the transformative role of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in fostering transnational collaboration and facilitating the transfer of digital knowledge, the focus now shifts to the underlying structures that enable such dynamic interactions. Digital platforms, as a socio-technical architecture, play a pivotal role in shaping the landscape of collaborative learning (Clutterbuck, 2023; Decuypere et al., 2021). In the forthcoming section, we delve into how these platforms enact a form of digital governance, influencing the dynamics of online education, structuring interactions, and guiding the flow of information in the digital realm. Understanding the socio-technical underpinnings of digital platforms is crucial for unravelling the complexities of their governance mechanisms and comprehending the impact they yield on the evolving landscape of educational practices.

2.5 Digital platforms: A socio-technical architecture enacting a form of digital governance

Digital platforms refer to "a programmable digital architecture designed to organise interactions between users – not just end users but also corporate entities and public bodies" (van Dijck et al., 2018, p. 9). In the educational context, platforms can take many forms, including learning management systems (LMS), social media, video conferencing tools, and online collaborative platforms. They provide a range of functionalities, such as sharing course materials, delivering instructional content, facilitating communication and collaboration

between students and teachers, and tracking student progress and performance. Digital platforms have become increasingly important in education as technology has become more pervasive and accessible, and they are often used to supplement traditional classroom-based instruction (van Dijck et al., 2018).

A digital platform consists of two main interfaces: Graphical User Interfaces (GUIs) and Application Program Interfaces (APIs) (Decuypere et al., 2021). GUIs provide visual elements such as icons, menus, and buttons that allow users to interact with the platform easily. APIs, on the other hand, enable different software applications to communicate with each other. The layout of a platform is intentionally designed to guide user experience and influence user activities (Kelkar, 2018). For example, edX's Studio GUI provides standardised templates for creating educational content, shaping user actions. This illustrates how digital platforms shape decision-making power and autonomy, as seen in the hypertextuality of Blackboard Learn's GUIs influencing student choices and task ordering (Grimaldi & Ball, 2021).

Digital platforms are intricate and dynamic environments that go beyond being mere connective mediums. According to Lewis (2020), platforms serve as a useful lens to understand the characteristics of the actors involved and the contextual factors shaping their interactions. Similarly, van Dijck et al. (2018) argue that platforms form ecosystems that are not neutral or value-free but rather imbued with specific socio-political norms and constructs. This has been reported by several studies that digital platforms are congested *spaces* in the sense that they reflect the broader societal and cultural contexts in which they exist (Grimaldi & Ball, 2021; Hartong & Decuypere, 2023; Lewis & Decuypere, 2023). The platforms are not created in a vacuum but are shaped by a variety of factors, including historical, political, economic, and cultural forces (Decuypere et al., 2021). As a result, digital platforms can be seen as reflecting the complexity and diversity of the societies in which they exist, as well as the tensions and conflicts that arise within them. Understanding digital platforms requires recognising the complex interplay between the social and technical aspects of these platforms (Decuypere et al., 2021). It encompasses the interactions, behaviours, and relationships of individuals and groups using the platforms, as well as the underlying technological infrastructure, algorithms, and data processing systems that enable platform functionalities. The design, features, and functionalities of digital platforms are influenced by various

stakeholders, including platform owners, developers, policymakers, users, and wider societal contexts (Nichols & Garcia, 2022). These stakeholders contribute to the creation and the governance of platform rules, policies, and norms, which in turn have a governing effect on the behaviours and activities of platform users.

The complexity of digital platforms' socio-technical structures poses challenges and opportunities for Europeanisation efforts. On the one hand, digital platforms provide opportunities for collaboration, knowledge exchange, and the dissemination of European norms and values. They can facilitate cross-border cooperation, enable the sharing of best practices, and contribute to the harmonisation of digital education practices within Europe. On the other, ensuring compliance with European standards, regulations, and values becomes more complex as digital platforms evolve and new issues arise. These aspects are equally what the present research attempts to investigate on eTwinning.

2.6 The purpose of this study

The present study delves into the specific mechanisms and processes through which eTwinning collaborations effectively convey European norms and values in a digital context. By examining the platform's infrastructure, including communication means, project frameworks, and collaborative spaces, this research seeks to uncover how these elements facilitate the dissemination and integration of European values among its users. Moreover, the study intends to shed light on the platform's agency, exploring how teachers perceive its influence on the construction and comprehension of European identity within the digital education realm. The research also recognises the significance of eTwinning's governing form and its implications for Europeanisation in the digital realm. By analysing the platform's governance structures and policies, I aim to gain insights into how eTwinning operates as an agent of soft governance, shaping educational practices aligned with European values. Understanding the platform's governing form not only contributes to the broader discourse on digital platforms and their socio-political economy but also provides valuable insights into the dynamics of Europeanisation in digital education.

3   Methodology

The nature of the research question necessitates an approach that delves deeply into specific instances and settings where eTwinning activities unfold. To achieve this, I used the case study approach, which provides a comprehensive and in-depth exploration of a particular event within its real contextual environment (Ravitch & Mittenfelner Carl, 2021), allowing me to capture the complexity, richness, and intricacies in the eTwinning platform and its impact on knowledge transmission. The approach also facilitates the exploration of the temporal dimension inherent in eTwinning initiatives. Given that eTwinning projects/collaboration unfold over time, involving various stages of planning, implementation, and reflection, a case study design allows me to follow the evolution of these events. This perspective enables the identification of patterns, changes, and developments in how European norms and values are communicated and assimilated, offering a more nuanced understanding of the process. Additionally, the case study design lends itself to a holistic examination of the eTwinning environment, encompassing not only the direct participants but also the broader institutional and cultural contexts in which these projects are embedded. By considering factors such as institutional support (e.g. National Support Services), community engagement (teachers, students, principals and other educational staff), and the broader socio-political climate, the research can capture the multifaceted influences that contribute to the understanding of one's identity, values through eTwinning.

3.1 Data collection

The chosen method for data collection was through semi-structured, open-ended interviews, a rich source of information allowing participants to express their perspectives in their own words. The interviews, each lasting approximately 60 minutes, provided ample time for participants to delve into nuanced aspects of their experiences with eTwinning and its role in shaping perceptions of European norms and values. Also, the open-ended nature of the questions aimed to capture the richness and diversity of individual experiences, allowing for the emergence of themes and patterns. These interviews were conducted in English, on the platform Microsoft Teams, leveraging the advantages of technology to connect with participants irrespective of geographical distances. The online setting not only facilitated a flexible and convenient interaction but also allowed for the recording of the interviews. This

recording served as a crucial component in enabling a comprehensive review of participant responses during the subsequent stages of the research.

3.2 Participant selection

The selection of participants for this research followed a purposive sampling strategy, seeking individuals with specific characteristics and experiences conducive to addressing the research questions comprehensively (Ravitch & Mittenfelner Carl, 2021). Potential participants were contacted through LinkedIn, the eTwinning Flanders Facebook page, and the official eTwinning platform. Four participants volunteered to contribute to the study, with no compensation, underscoring their commitment to advancing the understanding of eTwinning impacts. Their diverse roles within the educational landscape and considerable eTwinning experience, ranging from 6 to 13 years, offer the ultimate opportunities to uncover the holistic viewpoint of eTwinning. Three of the participants are eTwinning Ambassadors, one of them is working for NSS. They have already won eTwinning prizes for the projects. There is also another participant who currently works as the Coordinator in Internationalisation. Despite the relatively small number of participants, the depth and richness of the data collected are underpinned by the careful design of the interview protocol. More specifically, first, the interview questions were open-ended and had the potential for probing and follow-up, allowing participants to express themselves freely and share detailed responses, also allowing the interviewer to delve deeper into specific aspects of the participants' responses. Second, the questions were organised in a logical sequence beginning with broad, introductory questions and gradually moving towards more specific inquiries, from the general information such as the types of collaborative projects, communication methods, and cultural exchanges facilitated through eTwinning, then moving on to the impact of eTwinning on participants' cultural awareness and sensitivity. Third, the dimensions of the questions also leave space for the interviewees to reflect on the challenges, opportunities and impact of eTwinning in the long term.

To ensure transparency and ethical conduct, participants were provided with an informed consent document outlining the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of their participation, and assurances of confidentiality; all the participants' names were

pseudonymised. They were encouraged to read the document thoroughly and to seek clarification or ask questions before providing their consent.

3.3 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is known for its flexibility, allowing the researcher to adapt to the diverse nature of qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). In the context of this research, which involves interviews with experienced educators in eTwinning, the richness of the data requires a method that can accommodate varied perspectives. Thematic analysis offers the flexibility to explore a wide range of themes and subthemes, capturing insights of how different knowledge is communicated and exchanged through the platform. Besides, thematic analysis is inherently inductive, allowing themes to emerge organically from the data rather than imposing preconceived categories (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This aligns with the exploratory nature of the study, where the goal is to uncover insights into the ways eTwinning influences the understanding of European identity among its users. The inductive nature of thematic analysis ensures that the findings are grounded in the participants' narratives, enhancing the authenticity and validity of the research.

The process of the data analysis was as follows. Initial familiarisation with the data was done through multiple readings of interview transcripts to find out patterns. Next, codes were generated after two rounds of analysis, capturing meaningful segments related to the research question. I first went through the transcript and assigned the codes. In the second round, I read line-by-line to grasp the in-depth sense of data and generated as many codes as possible. These codes were then organised into overarching themes that enclosed key aspects of participants' experiences. The themes were also refined with existing literature and documents, policies on eTwinning. The validation process, including regular discussions with other experienced researchers, enhanced the reliability of the analysis, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the nuanced interplay between eTwinning, cultural identity, and the participants' lived experiences.

3.4 Ethical consideration

In designing this research, a range of ethical considerations needed to be addressed. One ethical concern lay in the informed consent process as it was essential to transparently

communicate the purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits of participation. Additionally, given the diversity of European norms and values, the researcher (me) approached the study with respect to cultural differences. At the same time, I maintained a reflexive stance throughout the study, acknowledging my own cultural positionality and biases. This self-awareness was crucial in ensuring an unbiased and respectful examination of data analysis and interpretation, contributing to the overall nuance in my approach. The study is also approved by the Social and Societal Ethics Committee of KU Leuven (SMEC).

4   Results

In delving into the multifaceted interplay in eTwinning collaborations, the thematic analysis has shown four key main themes. These themes, derived from in-depth interviews with four experienced eTwinners, serve as critical lenses through which we can comprehend the nuanced dynamics within the eTwinning context. They are: (1) eTwinning as a digital space for cross-cultural exchanges, (2) diverse teaching and learning pathways for eTwinners, (3) emphasising the importance of digital skills, e-safety, and online etiquette in eTwinning, (4) transitioning from networking to a community focused on shared values and unity. This discussion section aims to unpack these themes, intertwining participant narratives with relevant literature to offer a comprehensive understanding of how eTwinning functions as a conduit for the transmission of European norms and values, subsequently influencing the construction of European identity within diverse cultural and educational settings.

4.1 eTwinning as a digital space for cross-cultural exchanges

eTwinning, launched in 2005, represents a pioneering initiative within the European Union's broader efforts to foster collaboration and understanding among its member states. The roots of eTwinning trace back to the European SchoolNet project, which began in 1997. The European SchoolNet project aimed to explore the potential of information and communication technologies (ICT) in education, laying the groundwork for the later eTwinning.

On this platform, the European School Education Platform (ESEP) offers a filter option for eTwinning subjects. This filter categorises projects into various themes, such as European

Studies, History, Geography, Citizenship, and more. As students participate in collaborative projects, they explore themes related to European cultural heritage, historical events, and common societal values (cuisines, fashions, music, etc.). Simultaneously, the inclusion of STEM themes expands the scope of learning, showcasing how eTwinning encompasses a broad spectrum of subjects (not only in social sciences but also natural sciences and technology), and how the platform suggests opportunities to foster a holistic learning experience.

(Source: https://school-education.ec.europa.eu/en/networking/projects)
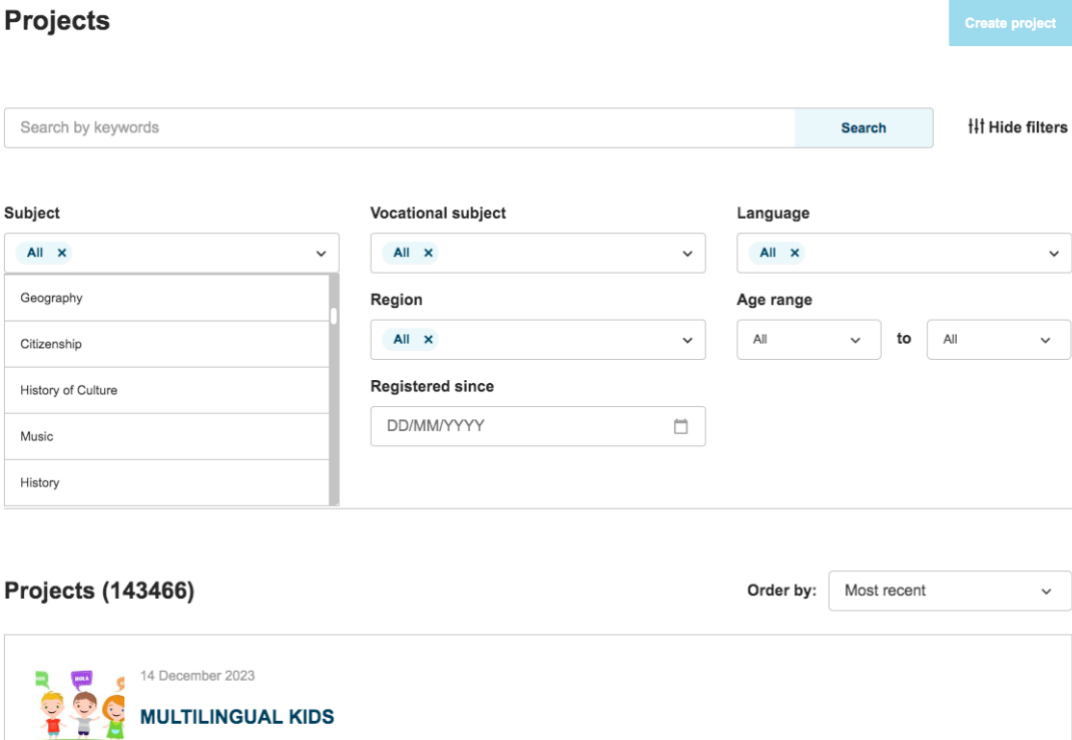
The primary impetus behind the initiation of eTwinning was the recognition of the transformative power of technology in enhancing educational practices and promoting European cooperation (Papadakis, 2016). As the European Union sought to deepen integration and strengthen cultural ties among member states, the potential of ICT to facilitate cross-border collaboration in education became evident (Salajan, 2019). The European SchoolNet project is a successful platform easing the journey for the development of the later

one, eTwinning, that would leverage digital tools to connect schools across Europe, fostering collaborative projects and cultural exchange. All four participants also shared this view:

"The good thing about eTwinning is that when you do one project and you get all the classes from Europe involved. So your students can work with international teams." (Glenn, a former eTwinning ambassador, currently working for the NSS)

"I really like the platform because you can do a lot of internationalisation even if you're not in another country." (Stefanie, an experienced eTwinner and a coordinator in Internationalisation).

Or with Eline, another eTwinning ambassador who has had more than 13 years of experience with eTwinning, when I asked what came to her mind when she heard of an eTwinning project, she said "communication, cooperation and exchanging internationally".

As mentioned in the previous section, in eTwinning projects, at least two classes are twinned on shared educational activities. Teachers initiate collaboration through the registration process on the eTwinning platform and actively search for suitable partners. This has highlighted the agency of eTwinning in its ability to empower teachers to take control of the collaborative learning process, and to empower teachers to make informed decisions about the projects that align with their teaching goals and preferences. It is also worth highlighting that eTwinning collaboration is beneficial for all age groups and school types, from primary to secondary students, from public schools to vocational schools. For example, Katharina, an eTwinning ambassador who also has had considerable experience working with exchange projects such as Comenius and Erasmus+, shared that her 15-year-old students are often asked to make a small documentary about their school, their town and region. For younger pupils, another participant provided interesting information:

"Even if they don't speak English, they can communicate with drawings or arts and crafts or just waving at the camera. Even when they only have an online meeting with the other schools, that's already a nice international experience for our small ones because in the 5th and the 6th grade, 10-11 years old, we prepare them for the Erasmus

exchanges. So they already have some international experience when they are small."
(Stefanie)

This emphasises a valuable aspect of eTwinning: that the platform facilitates exposure to international collaboration. This early exposure enhances the students' cultural awareness and sensitivity, laying the groundwork for effective intercultural communication and collaboration in the future. Stefanie went on to share one of the successful projects that shows the role of eTwinning in the conveyance of values and how this enhances the pupils' awareness of the multicultural but connected Europe.

"We had a little mascot, a little star. Some children took the star home to take photos of what they do, how they have breakfast, how they sleep. We took pictures of the language lesson, with arts and crafts, with all the different things at our school, then we put the photos on the platform and we sent our little stars to Spain. And the Spanish class did the same. Even though the children didn't really communicate with each other, they saw the pictures of each other and they said: oh, that's different from our school, but that is the same. That's a really nice experience as a star went from Belgium to Spain to Poland and to France and then France, after that the star came back to our classroom. It was just something they do daily (eating breakfast, having lessons), but they could compare with others."

This extract makes clear that the interactive nature of eTwinning transcends the geographical barriers to foster communication and collaboration among students from different cultural backgrounds in the digital realm. This engagement allows for the exchange of traditions, customs, and daily practices that embody the cultural identity of each participating group, which facilitates a more profound understanding of each other's ways of living. Through the shared photo exchange, students not only have a first-hand glimpse into the daily lives of their peers in different countries but also recognize both similarities and differences, and actively engage in the process of comparative cultural analysis between countries. If we put this in a bigger picture, what values have been revealed here are tolerance and respect for diversity, which are broadly promoted under several initiatives by the European Union (some of the

recent ones are EU Diversity Month in May 2023, Agenda of European Inclusion and Diversity 2023-2025).

In this example, when interacting with other peers, the children are receptive to both similarities and differences in terms of sociocultural values (e.g. what is for breakfast in each country). Relating to this, another interviewee, Eline, shared one interesting side of the eTwinning collaboration. Once, her students refused to work with their peers from country X as the surnames of these peers did not sound like they were natives of that country. The teacher realised that her students had made the comment based on generalisations and stereotypes. Therefore, her initial project ideas which were about coding and programming were changed to making games based on "stereotypes and against racism" (the participant's own words). Stefanie happily said that the students accepted her challenge and the new project even won the eTwinning prize. This case specifies how eTwinning unfolds in a complex space-time continuum, intricately interwoven with the complex social context of diverse actors. The social context within eTwinning is inherently interconnected, bringing together students, teachers, and sometimes even community members from diverse cultural backgrounds. This has been reported by existing research that digital platforms represent intricate and congested spaces, serving as reflections of the overarching societal and cultural contexts in which they are situated (Hartong & Decuypere, 2023; Lewis & Decuypere, 2023). On the one hand, eTwinning, as a platform, acts as a facilitator, providing the infrastructure for students and teachers to collaboratively work within their shared virtual space. On the other hand, eTwinning fosters a sense of shared responsibility among users. The agency of the platform lies in recognising that students, teachers, and the broader community within eTwinning share a collective responsibility to address challenges when they arise. Moreover, the agency of eTwinning extends the interactive context beyond individual classrooms or local communities. Students learn to navigate within a multicultural context, understanding that their acts may impact and be influenced by the diverse perspectives and social contexts of their peers from other countries.

To sum up this section, eTwinning emerges as a digital space that transcends geographical boundaries, serving as a dynamic platform for cross-cultural and collaborative exchanges. The interactions within this space-time continuum, intricately woven into diverse social contexts,

contribute significantly to the Europeanisation of digital education. Through digital cross-cultural collaboration, cultural awareness and sensitivity are two values that are actively promoted, encouraging an appreciation for diversity. This is also seen in previous research: (Sorensen, 2018), for instance, emphasises the role of digital technologies in promoting inclusive, empowering, and teaching/learning processes, particularly in the context of digital democratic citizenship. The recognition of shared and social practices among the different, eTwinning actively fosters a sense of unity in diversity—a fundamental pillar of European identity. In other words, the interconnected social fabric of eTwinning mirrors a multicultural Europe. Furthermore, the agency of eTwinning lies in its facilitation of a shared virtual space where students and teachers engage in frequent experiences with their European counterparts, cultivating a sense of belonging to a broader European educational community. eTwinning's role as a digital space for cross-cultural exchanges aligns seamlessly with the broader goals of Europeanisation, enhancing the educational landscape by creating a collaborative, inclusive, and interconnected European identity among its users within the digital realm.

4.2 Diverse teaching and learning pathways for eTwinners

Next to the facilitation of multicultural exchanges, eTwinning consistently shows its capacity to offer diverse learning and teaching pathways. First of all, the collaborative projects on the platform provide a dynamic approach to achieving educational goals, as echoed in the experiences of the interviewees. This showcases the platform's versatility in accommodating various learning styles and preferences. For instance, Stefanie gave an example of a reading project between her pupils and another class in the Netherlands, in this shared reading activity, the children read the same book both in English and in their common language (Dutch). Compared to the individual reading in class, the teacher observed that:

"eTwinning gives more to you, more value to your lesson, to your book because they will remember that book, because that book was with the duck, and they saw in the Netherlands [people] also do some activities with little ducks or activities with water, and then they could share their opinions."

From this example, it can be interpreted that eTwinning promotes diverse ways in which students access and retain knowledge. Instead of the individual reading in class, reading in the context of twinning classes provides a multicultural value to the lesson, students not only improve their reading skills but also extend their comprehension to a comparative level.

Katharina also shared this perspective:

> "You can reach a goal in another way than you are used to doing and that's something I think makes eTwinning so rich."

From these two extracts, it is apparent that eTwinning places a strong emphasis on project-based learning, previously reported in existing research (Lewis & Decuypere, 2023). This approach acts as a fertile ground for creativity to flourish. eTwinning empowers teacher creativity to tailor projects to the needs and interests of their students. In the extract of Stefanie, the project-based learning inherent in eTwinning becomes evident as students move away from individual reading to a collective exploration of the material. The opportunity for students to share their opinions and reflections within this collaborative setting emphasises the lasting impact on students' memory.

eTwinning teachers have the freedom to design and implement projects that encourage more creative and engaging lessons. The platform's collaborative environment promotes the exchange of ideas more inclusively and interculturally, inspiring and empowering teachers to infuse their lessons with innovative elements that captivate students' interest. This is also what the eTwinning Annual Conference 2023 aims to foster, as in the conference theme "Education and Innovation - being creative with eTwinning". Interestingly, more student engagement is closely related to the intrinsic motivation in learning among students, as observed by the interviewee Eline. She mentioned that instead of completing the same task in class, but with eTwinning, her students felt that:

> "It's not for the teacher, it's for other youngsters in other countries. They want to respond and to talk and to write correctly because other youngsters will read it. So it's more like intrinsic motivation."

This is also seen in Stefanie's pupils:

> "We made one PowerPoint and a movie about Belgium, but they (the pupils) were more motivated to make it because they were going to show their country to somebody else. So even when it was playtime, when it was break time, they came to the classroom and asked me: "Are we going to do some arts and crafts to show them, or our national recipe?"

The shared goals and cooperative nature of these projects create a sense of purpose and ownership, which leads to participatory learning. Participants are not passive recipients but actively contribute to discussions, activities, and project outcomes, driving participants to actively engage in the learning process. The intrinsic motivation stemming from collaborative efforts contributes to a more enthusiastic and committed approach to education. Research has consistently highlighted the positive impact of intrinsic motivation on student engagement and learning outcomes (Ryan & Deci, 2020). When students engage in collaborative projects on eTwinning, they are not only motivated by a sense of shared purpose and accomplishment but also by the inherent enjoyment derived from working collectively toward a common goal. This motivation is driven by the social aspect of collaborative learning, where students find value not only in individual achievements but also in contributing to the success of the group. As a result, the values conveyed through this engagement extend beyond academic knowledge and include teamwork, cooperation, and a sense of responsibility toward the collective learning experience:

> "eTwinning is working, really working together." (Stefanie)

Besides, creative styles of learning and teaching have promoted alternative assessment methods that go beyond conventional metrics. Students can showcase their understanding through multimedia presentations, collaborative reports, or even interactive digital artefacts. This departure from traditional assessments not only accommodates diverse learning styles but also emphasises the acquisition of skills beyond rote memorisation. Two interviewees claimed this view:

"In my project with the sixth graders I have been working with for a long time, they have to make an interview with each other to present themselves. But they also have to make a little documentary about the subjects, about the school, about our town, about our region. And this is really a documentary that counts for an English oral test." (Katharina)

"You give the materials that you have to teach to the students, for example, grammar or vocabulary or mathematical texts when you teach maths. And then you get students involved by giving them a project that they have to do research by themselves. I had this topic about the Sustainable Development goals. In international teams, they had to find out more about one goal of their choice and there were like 2 students in my class, two from Italy, and one from France, depending on your class size, you can put international teams together and they learn from each other's culture. What do you think in your country about this topic? They learn how to communicate." (Glenn)

The assessment focused not only on language proficiency but also on cultural awareness, and digital literacy. This alternative approach not only diversified the learning experience but also provided a more comprehensive understanding of each participant's abilities. By being evaluated on a range of skills and competencies, students are empowered to take ownership of their learning, fostering a sense of agency, which aligns with the democratic values of active citizenship and individual responsibility. This approach resonates with numerous European initiatives aimed at strengthening active citizenship. The EU Skills Agenda, for example, emphasises the development of essential skills for employability and active participation. eTwinning's focus on transferable skills like critical thinking, creativity, and digital literacy, and assessment based on the results of hands-on practice, ensures that students are equipped not just for theoretical knowledge or academic success, but for responsible and ready for further engagement in the European community.

Additionally, the emphasis on continuous improvement and professional growth within eTwinning fosters educational excellence and a dynamic and adaptive learning environment. More specifically, eTwinning encourages educators to engage in reflective practices which involve educators deliberately thinking about their teaching methods, strategies, and overall

instructional approach, evaluating how well the project achieved its learning objectives, the level of student engagement, and the overall impact on student learning outcomes. Through this reflective process, teachers identify areas for improvement and iterate upon their teaching methods. Taking the example above of the refined project in coding in Eline's class, it is apparent that the iterative refinement of projects and teaching approaches allows for a continuous cycle of enhancement, ensuring that educators are responsive to the evolving needs of their students and the changing educational landscape. eTwinning provides a space for educators to engage in peer learning and professional exchange.

> "It's great that you can enlarge your network and share your ideas and there's always someone who can add some good ideas to it." (Glenn)

Collaborative projects facilitate the sharing of educational values such as best practices, innovative approaches, and successful teaching strategies among participants. This peer-to-peer learning model creates a community of educators who actively contribute to each other's professional growth through shared experiences and insights.

Moreover, eTwinning's culture of continuous improvement encourages educators to experiment with innovative teaching methodologies. One interviewee shared that she had the opportunity to design and infuse in her lessons with more ideas inspired by her real-life experiences or what she has learnt from other fellow teachers. This teacher highlighted that this helps the lessons become more engaging, going beyond the traditional teaching method, which "stimulates the appetite for learning" (Eline). This has pointed out that the platform provides a safe environment for trying out new approaches, fostering a spirit of innovation. As Holmes & Sime (2014) have reported, eTwinning empowers teachers by providing them with the opportunity to apply their learning in practice and reflect on it with peers, leading to the development of knowledge-in-practice and belief in the value of changes. This is also reflected in the Full Monitor Report of eTwinning 2023, that "eTwinning provides a safe space for student teachers to experiment and practise in, which is essential for gaining valuable experience." (p. 21) The platform serves as a space for ongoing professional development, where educators actively seek opportunities to expand their knowledge, refine their skills, and stay informed about emerging trends in education.

Through diverse and inclusive learning pathways, eTwinning encourages the exchange of ideas, cultural perspectives, and innovative teaching strategies, aligning with the broader goals of Europeanisation in education. This section aims to inform that by embracing diverse teaching methods, eTwinning goes beyond a one-size-fits-all approach to education. This inclusivity allows for the incorporation of various cultural elements into the learning process, providing students with a broader understanding of European diversity. As students collaborate on projects that explore topics, they actively contribute to the construction of a shared European identity, what is similar and what is different and what and why they are connected.

> "In eTwinning, they learn so much from each other. Every country is different with different cultures, different rules, but then again, we're all linked by this European Union. [...] They can see what's going on and how it is in other countries and how the European Union has an impact on the people in other countries. They can see with their own eyes" (Stefanie)

Lastly, diverse teaching and learning pathways in eTwinning support the development of essential skills such as critical thinking and communication. These skills are crucial not only for academic success but also for active participation in a globalised and interconnected world. As students navigate diverse learning experiences, they not only enhance their knowledge but also develop a sense of adaptability and open-mindedness that are integral to European citizenship.

4.3 Emphasising the importance of digital skills, e-safety, and online etiquette

Beyond its core function of fostering cross-cultural collaborations, the platform significantly contributes to the development of digital skills such as the promotion of e-safety and the cultivation of online etiquette. The platform serves as a dynamic digital learning environment, encouraging participants to actively engage with various digital tools and technologies, which was confirmed among all the interviewees and supported by the existing literature (see (Heindl, 2018; Papadakis, 2016; Vuorikari et al., 2011).

Secondly, e-safety, encompassing the responsible and safe use of digital platforms, is a paramount concern in the digital age. According to Glenn, eTwinning actively addresses this by incorporating guidelines and resources for promoting online safety within its framework. The platform emphasises the importance of safeguarding personal information, respecting online privacy, and cultivating a secure online learning environment. For example, to register for an eTwinning account, teachers first are required to create an EU login account, a centralised authentication system designed to streamline access to a range of EU digital services and applications securely. Participation in eTwinning projects sensitises educators and students to the principles of e-safety.

> "eTwinning gives a great deal about e-safety and etiquette. So at the beginning of each project, students also learn how to behave on the Internet. How can they secure themselves? The GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) is also very important. Do not share anything that does not belong to you. Make sure you are polite. Make sure you don't click on links that you're not sure about. Check email addresses so they'll learn how they can be safe online and also of course have to protect the others to not bring the other students in danger online." (Glenn)

Through collaborative interactions, eTwinning presents itself as a premise for the commitment to ensuring a secure online environment. The EU has initiatives such as the European Strategy for a Better Internet for Kids (adopted in May 2022), emphasising the importance of online safety. In this sense, eTwinning, by promoting e-safety, contributes to the realisation of these EU goals and expands the desire to cultivate responsible digital behaviour among students and educators. They become adept at navigating online spaces responsibly, identifying potential risks, and implementing measures to protect themselves and their peers. This heightened awareness extends beyond the platform, influencing participants' broader online behaviour. In addition, Glenn's sharing also adheres to the much bigger policy, Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027 for example, which promotes digital competencies to enable individuals to participate fully in the digital society.

In terms of online etiquette, three participants mentioned that teachers made use of the eTwinning platform to teach students how to behave online - the socially complex and

culturally diverse space. Katharina shared that one of her classes and another participating class experienced a miscommunication due to cultural differences or Glenn's students once uploaded inappropriate content in the common working space. In these two cases, both teachers highlighted the importance of strengthening online etiquette as well as the role of eTwinning in facilitating this aspect. To put this more broadly, the platform encourages respectful and constructive interactions, emphasising the important values of clear communication, active listening, and cultural sensitivity in the digital realm. By instilling a culture of online etiquette, eTwinning contributes to positive and inclusive collaborative dynamics. Participants learn to navigate diverse perspectives with respect, leading to a more harmonious and productive virtual collaboration.

By prioritising digital competencies and fostering e-safety and responsibility norms, eTwinning aligns with the broader European agenda, such as Europe's Digital Decade 2030, highlighting the importance of preparing individuals for active participation in a digitally-driven society. This emphasis on digital literacy resonates with the democratic values embedded in European identity, underlining the need for citizens to navigate the digital landscape responsibly and adeptly (Livingstone et al., 2018).

4.4 Transitioning from networking to a community focused on shared values and unity

Research shows that the use of digital tools in collaborative education is a driving factor in the development of a sustainable and democratic learning environment (Carayannis & Morawska-Jancelewicz, 2022). With the vision and the experience of working in the NSS, Glenn also implied that:

> "The impact of eTwinning may be even stronger when you think about democratic participation and the importance of the European Union because not everyone can join the Erasmus+ project. With eTwinning, it's free to use and available for all and everyone. Wherever you live, no matter how much money you have or where your school is, whether it is in a rural area, in a city, in the poor city or the poor country, no matter whether your students have disabilities or from a poor background, it all doesn't matter. Everyone can participate."

In other words, the application of eTwinning in schools ensures inclusive participation, accommodating students of diverse abilities and backgrounds. This inclusivity aligns with democratic principles, promoting an educational environment where diverse voices are not only heard but also valued, as Glenn added:

"Everyone can join. And everyone can feel the impact that Europe has on their lives and how it is also important to let their voice here and to show, they can also be part of this community."

To Stefanie, when asked about the role of eTwinning in the long term:

"I hope that eTwinning connects more, in a sense that we become one big family, that we are a European family, not just small pieces of Europe. We belong to Europe. In reality, we don't always see the difference, but rather what we have in common, for example, we have some commonalities in teaching mathematics or our free time sport. We often see the things that we have in common."

Research has shown that digital tools, when used effectively, can help build a community of learning and collaboration (Gouseti, 2013; Pausan, 2019), as demonstrated in several initiatives on digital learning in Europe, e.g. European Digital Education Area. In this case study, eTwinning acts as a virtual meeting place for educators from diverse European countries, fostering a sense of community. This relates to the aims of merging eTwinning into The European School Education Platform in 2021.

"The upcoming integrated platform will allow you to discover and explore all the content and services under one roof, creating a sense of "home". It aims to provide a unique and personalised experience, while also fostering a sense of community and collaboration. The new platform will further contribute to the professional development of practitioners in education and training, in Europe and beyond." (retrieved from www.schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/latest/news/countdown-school-edu-platform)

The community-building aspect of eTwinning aligns with the idea of the "interlinked networks of practice" compiling to the key points of the European Digital Education Area (Salajan, 2019), where educators interact, share insights, and collectively contribute to the development of a shared professional identity. This shared identity is not monolithic; it arises from the constant interaction, exchange of insights, and collective learning that occurs within the network, or "ongoing state of figuration" (Lewis & Decuypere, 2023, p. 37). Firstly, teachers engage in self-directed learning as they prepare for eTwinning projects, utilising the platform's self-teaching materials (Lewis & Decuypere, 2023). This process empowers educators to acquire new skills, adapt to innovative teaching methodologies, and stay updated on current educational trends. Moreover, teachers are continually immersed in completing ongoing projects and developing subsequent ones. The collaborative environment of eTwinning encourages educators to seek out and connect with like-minded individuals, fostering a community of practice. The shared professional identity then becomes a bridge, connecting the individual educator to the broader European educational landscape. This aligns with Wenger's (1998) theory of communities of practice, groups of people who come together around a shared domain of interest, engaging in joint activities and developing a shared repertoire of knowledge, skills, and experiences. These communities act as learning environments where individuals develop not only technical skills but also their own identity and sense of belonging. Learning is not just about acquiring skills, but also about making sense of the world and developing a sense of who you are. Communities provide the context for individuals to develop their meanings and identities in relation to the practice. This is also what we see in the eTwinning collaboration,

> "It's so important that you see the strength of the community, like helping each other, trying to find other ways to work together. This community's feeling is very strong, the sharing of materials, of ideas." (Glenn)

Glenn's perspective illustrates that through the platform, teachers from different European countries collaboratively co-design, develop, and share a variety of teaching materials, lesson plans, and multimedia resources. As section one has explained, when teachers contribute their teaching materials and ideas, they bring unique perspectives shaped by their cultural, educational, and professional contexts. This diversity presents a holistic understanding of

educational concepts, which stimulates creativity and innovation in the presentation and exchanges of teaching techniques, for example how to teach foreign languages considering the mother tongues of the students, or how to raise student awareness about Sustainable Goals considering each country's social context.

In the context of eTwinning, diverse perspectives converge to create richer, more comprehensive educational content. In turn, this collaborative resource development contributes to collective intelligence. In other words, "this type of learning is born in the validation and recognition of talents, since these are not given in isolation, but they are part of the interaction in the globalised world, social networks, communities of practice and networked communities that make possible the generation of collaborative learning environments." (Nájar Sánchez & Morales Morgado, 2021, p. 681). The collaborative nature of resource development within eTwinning also aligns with literature emphasising the benefits of collaborative knowledge construction in the digital space (Ghazal et al., 2019). In eTwinning, the exchange of ideas and expertise among educators results in the co-creation of resources that are culturally diverse, pedagogically sound, and contextually relevant. In turn, the collaborative co-creation of resources in eTwinning might serve as a mechanism for quality enhancement as "knowledge advancement is the collective work shared between the members of a group, and that knowledge is improvable through discourse" (Ghazal et al., 2019, p. 63). Educators bring their expertise to the table, and through iterative feedback and refinement from other stakeholders, the resources undergo continuous improvement. This collaborative quality assurance process aligns with the principles of participatory design in education (Brandau & Alirezabeigi, 2023), where end-users actively contribute to the creation and refinement of educational tools. This participatory approach not only enriches the learning experience but also contributes to building a more inclusive and dynamic educational landscape where everyone has a voice in shaping the future of learning. Furthermore, the collaborative feedback process inherent in eTwinning encourages open dialogue and the exchange of ideas across diverse backgrounds. This reflects the European values of tolerance, intercultural understanding, and respect for different perspectives, be it professional skills or educational knowledge. Students learn to appreciate and value the contributions of others, strengthening a united and inclusive Europe.

This section has argued that the community-building and professional development dimensions of eTwinning work synergistically to create a networked educational community. This community not only serves as a repository of shared knowledge and practices but also acts as a driving force for the harmonisation of educational values across the diverse European educational landscape. eTwinning emerges not merely as a platform for educational collaboration but the promotion of inclusivity, democracy, and collective intelligence in shaping the educational landscape. Through the shared vision of educators like Glenn and Stefanie, eTwinning contributes not just to the exchange of teaching materials but to the cultivation of a united and inclusive European identity grounded in several social values such as respect, understanding, and shared values, which echoes the broader discourse on the impact of digital tools on collaborative education.

5 Conclusion

This research has delved into how norms and values are conveyed through eTwinning, shedding light on the multifaceted aspects of academic, professional as well as sociocultural values. The exploration has unearthed the specific manifestations of these values, illustrating their profound influence on the participants' shared identity and educational practices within the eTwinning community.

This study has argued that academic and professional values are integral components that contribute to the vibrancy and success of the eTwinning community, aligning with the spirit of Europeanisation in digital education. In the context of eTwinning, academic values imply a commitment to the pursuit of knowledge, excellence in pedagogy, and the sharing of innovative teaching practices, as from the example projects of the participants. Educators on the platform are driven by a shared dedication to enhancing the quality of education through collaborative projects, embodying academic values that prioritise continuous learning and professional growth.

Additionally, multicultural values, constituting traditions, customs, and beliefs, also emerge as central components influencing the dynamics of interactions on the eTwinning platform. As noted by the existing literature on eTwinning (see Alcaraz-Mármol (2020) and Papadakis (2016)), collaborative projects on eTwinning transcend geographical boundaries, enabling

teachers and students to share cultural nuances that contribute to a richer learning experience. This cultural exchange goes beyond the mere sharing of academic content; it becomes a vehicle for fostering deep cross-cultural understanding. This study argues that cross-cultural collaborations in digital environments promote a sense of global citizenship and intercultural competence among participants, for example, the study of Lenkaitis & Loranc (2022) also underscores the role of intercultural virtual exchanges in developing global citizenship competencies.

Besides, what this thesis has attempted to show is that, social values, notably teamwork, collaboration, and mutual respect, constitute the bedrock upon which a cohesive eTwinning community is built. As for teamwork, project collaboration allows participants to share their cultural perspectives, traditions, and practices, fostering a greater understanding and appreciation for diversity. Through collaborative endeavours, participants cultivate essential further teamwork skills, such as communication, task distribution. This collaborative spirit extends not only to the project teams but also to the broader eTwinning community, fostering a supportive environment where educators share resources, insights, and best practices. Additionally, mutual respect serves as a guiding principle, influencing how participants engage with diverse perspectives and ideas. The emphasis on social values within the eTwinning community aligns with the broader literature on collaborative learning environments, emphasising their positive impact on motivation, engagement, and the overall learning experience (e.g. see Yang et al. (2018) and Durksen et al. (2017)).

Besides, the agency of digital platforms, notably exemplified through eTwinning, introduces a nuanced challenge in European education: the delicate equilibrium between fostering unity and embracing diversity. Collaborative practices within eTwinning contribute to the cultivation of a shared commitment to a European identity. However, a critical examination of this unity indicates the necessity of carefully navigating the complex web of diverse cultural, historical, and educational contexts that form the rich tapestry of European identity.

Rather than overshadowing individual educational contexts, the platform serves as a facilitator that values and integrates the local and national nuances that contribute to the overall European identity. To be more specific, by valuing the distinctiveness of each

participant's educational background, the platform fosters an inclusive environment where educators from different countries are encouraged to share and celebrate their unique approaches to teaching and learning. This has aligned with the results of the previous studies, for instance, Vuorikari et al. (2011) highlight that eTwinning's interaction with national and local teachers' professional development schemes underscores its commitment to respecting and incorporating local and national contexts, or Gajek (2012) shows that the program's use of ICT tools aligns with constructivist and constructionist ideas, further supporting the integration of local and national specificities. This inclusive aspect resonates with the European Union's commitment to cultural diversity as a fundamental aspect of the shared European identity.

What has been highlighted through the discussion is, that norms and values are not static, they are not fixed or unchanging. In the eTwinning environment, the aforementioned norms and values are subject to continuous evolution. This arises from the ongoing interactions among participants who bring diverse perspectives, experiences, and backgrounds to the collaborative space. Through the process of collaboration, participants not only share their cultural norms but also challenge assumptions and co-create new understandings (Vangen, 2017). The iterative nature of collaboration allows for a continuous exchange of ideas, fostering an environment where shared European values are constructed and reconstructed. This iterative process is fundamental to the evolution of a shared professional identity among educators on the platform, contributing to a cohesive sense of belonging to a larger European educational, professional community, which is characterised by common sociocultural, educational goals and values.

Again, this research is in accordance with the previous research that eTwinning serves as a facilitator of dynamic interactions, which aligns with the existing literature in the field of digital platforms (e.g. see Decuypere & Lewis, (2023)). The eTwinning platform, being a digital space, facilitates connectivity and transnational communication. Participants can quickly adapt to emerging ideas, respond to cultural nuances, and engage in ongoing discussions, creating a dynamic and responsive learning environment. What can also be seen here is, the eTwinning platform stands as a testament to the transformative power of collaborative learning practices and their role in the soft governance of education. To put it more broadly, the soft governance

mechanism within eTwinning is particularly evident in the shared commitment to educational excellence. Through collaborative learning, participants are exposed to a spectrum of pedagogical approaches, innovative teaching methods, and diverse perspectives. This exposure not only broadens their educational horizons but also instils a collective desire for excellence. The commitment to excellence becomes a shared value that guides participants in their individual and collaborative educational endeavours. In turn, the eTwinning's collaborative practices actively contribute to the cultivation of a robust sense of community among educators and students. Soft governance, in this context, is manifested through the organic development of a community-driven by mutual respect, shared goals, and a commitment to collaborative learning. The collaborative practices become the glue that binds participants, fostering a supportive environment where everyone plays a role in the collective success of the community.

In conclusion, the conveyance of norms and values on eTwinning constructs the understanding of European identity by creating an environment where participants, through dynamic interactions and collaborative learning, actively contribute to a shared commitment to excellence. This shared commitment, coupled with the soft governance mechanisms embedded in collaborative practices, fosters a sense of unity amid cultural diversity. The eTwinning community becomes a microcosm reflecting the fluid and diverse nature of European identity, where shared educational values and practices contribute to the overarching construction of a European identity that transcends national boundaries.

While my research has contributed certain valuable insights into the conveyance of European norms and values through eTwinning and its impact on the construction of European identity, it is essential to acknowledge some limitations that may influence the scope of my findings. Firstly, using self-reported data through interviews introduces the possibility of social desirability bias, as the participants may shape their responses to align with perceived societal expectations. Additionally, the sample size may not fully capture the breadth of experiences across the eTwinning community.

In terms of future research, an exploration of the long-term impact of eTwinning on participants' European identity and cross-cultural understanding would be valuable.

Longitudinal studies tracking participants over an extended period could provide insights into the sustainability of the observed outcomes. Besides, comparative analyses across different eTwinning projects, educational levels, and cultural contexts could deepen the understanding of the diverse ways in which European norms and values are conveyed through collaborative online platforms. And more interestingly, investigating the problems of the platform or the perspectives of different stakeholders could offer viewpoints, enhancing the comprehensiveness of our understanding of how eTwinning applications in schools could explain or relate to certain educational phenomena in digital and broader contexts.

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Appendix 1

<center>**Interview protocol**</center>

Title: Exploring the Conveyance of European Norms and Values through eTwinning platform

Research question: How are European norms and values conveyed through eTwinning, and how does this contribute to the construction and understanding of European identity?

Duration: 60 minutes

Opening speech: (5 minutes)

Hello. Thank you for participating in this interview. My name is Tram, I am doing a Masters degree in Educational Sciences at KU Leuven. This interview is part of my thesis which explores digital platforms in education in the European context. I am going to ask you a few questions about your experience with this platform. These are the open questions, there is no right or wrong answer, you can answer based on your experience, feeling and understanding. This interview is not going to evaluate your techniques or experiences. Also, every information that you share is completely confidential, your name and the name of your school are pseudonymised. You can choose not to answer any questions or stop participating at any moment with no consequences. This interview will be recorded and stored for 10 years in the internal cloud (OneDrive) from KU Leuven. I have sent you the informed consent form, if you have any questions, don't hesitate to let me know.

Interview questions: (40 minutes)

1. Can you introduce a bit about yourself?
   - Which subject do you teach?
   - Which grade do you teach?
   - How long have you been teaching?
2. Can you tell me about your experience with eTwinning so far?
   - How did you know about eTwinning?
   - Why did you decide to use the platform to teach?
   - When did you start working/teaching with eTwinning?

3. What does eTwinning bring to the class that other teaching methods do not?

   - What are some distinct aspects of eTwinning collaborations that help you teach?

   - Do you think what eTwinning projects are good at teaching?

   - How do you define an eTwinning project?

   - How do you define a successful eTwinning project?

4. How does using eTwinning make your students feel more like they're part of Europe?

   - Can you give examples of a specific eTwinning project? What was it about? Which countries/schools participated in the project? How did you use eTwinning in this project?

   - Have you noticed any specific changes or outcomes in your students' understanding of what is Europe, what belongs to Europe through their participation in eTwinning projects?

   - How do you evaluate the impact of eTwinning projects on your students' understanding of European values and identity?

5. What are your experiences with other teachers on eTwinning?

   - How do you collaborate with teachers from different European countries while planning the projects and during the projects? Which features of eTwinning do you use?

   - How do you include the diverse cultures and shared values of Europe into your eTwinning activities and projects?

   - What strategies or methods have been effective in eTwinning in fostering a sense of European citizenship among your students?

6. How do you address potential challenges or conflicts that arise when working with students or teachers from different European countries and cultures?

   - Do you have any examples from your eTwinning experience?

   - What was the role of eTwinning in that issue?

7. What do you think about the role of eTwinning in the future in Europe? (in schools, between schools)

8. What recommendations would you give to other teachers who want to effectively teach through eTwinning:

   - in terms of working with digital technologies?

- in terms of working in the multicultural context?

9. Is there anything that we did not mention and you would like to add?

Closing speech: (5 minutes)

This is the end of the interview. Thank you again for your participation. For your information, this interview will be transcribed and later analysed by the researcher, me. I also want to remind you that every information that you have shared with me is kept confidential. The data from this interview is stored in a file protected by a password and in the internal cloud (OneDrive) of KU Leuven network drive, which is secured with encryption. You can contact me at any time if you have further questions regarding the interview. (Stop the recording).

Appendix 2

<table>
<tr><td align="center">**Informed consent**</td><td align="right">51</td></tr>
</table>

Title of the master's thesis: Exploring the Conveyance of European Norms and Values through eTwinning platform

Name and contact information:

Dr. Mathias Decuypere: mathias.decuypere@kuleuven.be

Supervisor

Hoàng Bích Trâm La: hoangbichtram.la@student.kuleuven.be

Researcher

Aim and methodology of the research:

The aim of this research is to explore the conveyance of European norms and values through the eTwinning platform and examine the impact of eTwinning on the construction and understanding of European identity among teachers and students. The study specifically investigates the experiences, perceptions, and challenges faced by Flemish teachers and staff engaging in eTwinning projects and shed light on the ways in which eTwinning facilitates the transmission and integration of European norms and values within the Flemish educational context. To achieve this, the study will involve semi-structured interviews with a selected sample of Flemish teachers and staff who have participated in eTwinning projects. This interview will be recorded and the collected data will be thematically analysed to identify patterns, recurring themes, and variations in the experiences and perspectives of participating teachers. Every personal information from the interview will be carefully anonymised, assigning pseudonyms to participants to ensure confidentiality. This data will be kept confidential and stored for 10 years on the internal cloud (OneDrive) from KU Leuven, which is secured with encryption.

Duration of the interview: approximately 60 minutes

Procedure of the interview:

The interview will be conducted individually with each participant through virtual platforms, based on the participants' preferences. It will also be recorded with the participants' consent to ensure accurate data capture. The interviewer, me, will create a comfortable and non-judgmental environment, encouraging the participant to share their experiences openly. The interview begins with an introduction to the research purpose, confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of participation. Probing and follow-up questions will be asked to gain deeper insights and clarify any ambiguous responses. The interviewer will adopt active listening skills, allowing participants to express their thoughts fully while ensuring that the interview remains focused on the research objectives.

Benefits and risks:

The interview provides valuable insights into the experiences of participants and the impact of eTwinning projects on teaching and learning. The benefits of the interview extends to the research itself, enabling a deeper understanding of the research question, as well as to the schools/teachers that use eTwinning, offering context-specific knowledge, stakeholder engagement, professional development opportunities, and opportunities for the platform improvement. Participating in the interview process for this research does not pose any significant risks to the participant. The research strictly adheres to ethical guidelines, ensuring participant confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation.

❖ I have received sufficient information about the purpose of the research.

❖ I understand what is expected of me in the study.

❖ I am aware that I will participate in the following interview answering questions relating to the platform eTwinning and my experiences.

❖ I consent to the interview being recorded.

❖ I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary. I am aware that I can discontinue my participation at any time. I will not have to provide a reason for this and I will not suffer any disadvantages.

❖ I can decide not to answer a question without having to explain why.

❖ Under the GDPR, the data collected during the study will be processed on grounds of public interest. This means that if I withdraw from the study, any previously collected data can still be lawfully processed and do not need to be deleted by KU Leuven.

❖ The findings may be used for research purposes and may be published. My name will not be published; anonymity and confidentiality is guaranteed at every stage of the research project. The complete dataset can be made available to the research community in the anonymised manner described.

❖ My participation offers a contribution to the research. I know that I will not receive any further reward or compensation for my participation.

❖ I would like to be informed of the results of this research. The student researcher may contact me at the following e-mail address: …

❖ I understand that I can contact:
  ➢ the supervisor: Mathias Decuypere: mathias.decuypere@kuleuven.be
  ➢ the student researcher: Hoàng Bích Trâm La: hoangbichtram.la@student.kuleuven.be

for any questions or to exercise my rights (access to or correction of data, ...) after participating in the study.

❖ For any complaints or other concerns about ethical issues relating to this study, I can contact KU Leuven's Social and Societal Ethics Committee: smec@kuleuven.be.

I have read and understood the information in this document and I have received an answer to all my questions regarding this research. I give my consent to participate.

Date:

Name and signature of the participant   Name and signature of the student researcher