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Primary School Teachers' Perceptions and Teaching Strategies on Active Citizenship: A Preliminary Quantitative Study in Greece, Romania, Italy and Finland

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Abstract: Active citizenship has become a central objective of contemporary education, yet limited comparative evidence exists regarding how primary school teachers understand and promote it across European educational contexts. This study investigated the perceptions and practices of active citizenship among 168 primary school teachers from Greece, Romania, Italy, and Finland. A quantitative comparative design was employed using a self-administered anonymous five-point Likert-type questionnaire. Descriptive and non-parametric statistical analyses were conducted, followed by multiple regression analysis to examine whether teachers' personal values and teaching strategies predicted their classroom practices. The findings showed that teachers primarily associated active citizenship with participation in democratic processes, particularly voting, while responsibility, honesty, and justice emerged as the most highly valued citizenship values. Classroom discussion and learner-centred pedagogical approaches were the most frequently reported practices for promoting active citizenship. Although some statistically significant differences were identified across countries, teachers demonstrated broadly similar perceptions of active citizenship. Teaching strategies emerged as the strongest predictor of classroom practices for promoting active citizenship. The findings highlight the importance of strengthening teacher education and professional development to support participatory pedagogies that foster democratic participation in primary education.

Keywords: active citizenship, citizenship education, teaching strategies, primary school teachers, cross-national comparison.

Introduction

Active citizenship has become one of the key priorities of contemporary democratic societies and educational policy. The need to prepare citizens who can participate actively, critically, and responsibly in democratic life has been reinforced by rapid social, political, technological, and environmental changes, together with increasing social inequalities, political polarisation, misinformation, and declining civic participation (Council of Europe, 2018; UNESCO, 2015). Active citizenship is regarded as a cornerstone of democratic participation, social cohesion, respect for human rights and sustainable development within the European Union (Council of Europe, 2018; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017; Halman, 2022). Consequently, European education systems are increasingly expected to equip young people not only with civic knowledge but also with the values, skills, and dispositions required for meaningful democratic participation (Hoskins et al., 2008; Hoskins & Mascherini, 2009). In this context, schools play a central role in achieving these objectives, while teachers are key figures in fostering democratic values and active citizenship. Through their everyday classroom practices, teachers influence pupils' civic knowledge, democratic attitudes, critical thinking, collaboration, and social responsibility. As a result, the quality of citizenship education depends not only on curriculum content but also on teachers' own beliefs, pedagogical approaches, and their ability to create meaningful learning experiences that encourage democratic participation (Biesta, 2009, 2011; Council of Europe, 2018; Keser et al., 2011).

Although active citizenship has attracted increasing attention in educational research and policy, previous studies have focused primarily on conceptual frameworks, curriculum development and policy initiatives. Comparatively fewer studies have examined how primary school teachers understand active citizenship, the values they prioritise, the pedagogical approaches they employ, and the extent to which these differ across European educational contexts. Furthermore, although there is a growing recognition of the role of teachers in promoting democratic citizenship, there is limited empirical evidence regarding the factors that influence their classroom practices. In particular, there is a lack of research into the relationship between teachers' personal values and teaching strategies, and the implementation of active citizenship in everyday classroom practice (Kerr, 1999; Reichert & Torney-Purta, 2019; Schulz et al., 2018).

The need for further research is particularly evident within the European context. Although European countries share common educational objectives concerning democracy, human rights, and civic participation, they differ considerably in curriculum organisation, teacher education, and pedagogical traditions (Council of Europe, 2018; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017). Examining teachers' perceptions across different educational systems may therefore provide valuable insights into both the common principles and the contextual variations that characterise citizenship education in Europe.

The present study investigates primary school teachers' perceptions and practices of active citizenship in four European countries—Greece, Romania, Italy, and Finland—within the framework of the Erasmus+ project Shaping the European Active Citizen: Raising Intercultural/Transcultural Awareness through Life Skills Cultivation in Primary Education (iTACKLE). Specifically, it examines teachers' understanding of active citizenship, the values they prioritise, the teaching strategies and classroom practices they employ, differences among the participating countries, and the extent to which teachers' personal values and teaching strategies predict their classroom practices. The study contributes to the limited comparative literature on primary teachers' perceptions and practices of active citizenship across European educational contexts.

Theoretical context and literature review

Conceptualising Active Citizenship

Active citizenship extends beyond the legal status of citizenship and refers to individuals' active participation in the social, civic, and political life of their communities. It encompasses the exercise of citizens' rights and responsibilities through democratic participation, volunteering, community engagement, and collective action aimed at promoting the common good (Hoskins & Mascherini, 2009; Kennedy, 2018). Rather than representing a fixed legal status, it reflects citizens' willingness and ability to contribute responsibly to a democratic society that faces structural inequalities and fails to provide equal access to decision-making processes (Schlozman et al., 2012).

Although widely recognised as an important educational and political objective, active citizenship remains a dynamic concept that is interpreted differently across historical, cultural, political, and educational contexts (Maas & Molderez, 2025). As conceptions of citizenship evolve in response to social, political, economic, and cultural change, so too do expectations regarding citizens' roles and responsibilities in democratic societies (Beaven & Griffiths, 2008; Raadschelders, 1995). Within Europe, it is generally associated with democratic participation, respect for human rights, social responsibility, intercultural understanding, and sustainable development (Council of Europe, 2018; European Commission, 2018). Consequently, contemporary perspectives emphasise not only participation in elections or voluntary activities but also critical engagement with public affairs and collective responsibility for addressing social challenges (Gaynor, 2023).

The promotion of active citizenship is a shared responsibility involving multiple social actors, including local authorities, schools, universities, and civil society organisations (Council of Europe, 2026; Michels & De Graaf, 2010). While local authorities can promote democratic participation through community initiatives, schools occupy a particularly important position because they provide opportunities for children to develop democratic values, civic competences, and social responsibility from an early age. Contemporary citizenship education therefore extends beyond encouraging volunteering or environmentally responsible behaviour and seeks to cultivate political literacy, critical thinking, and active participation in democratic decision-making (Hoskins et al., 2008; Kennedy, 2018). Building on these perspectives, Westheimer (2020) argues that citizenship extends beyond personally responsible behaviour to include active participation in democratic life and critical engagement with issues of social justice.

Developing these competencies from an early age highlights the important role of schools and teachers in preparing pupils to participate meaningfully in democratic societies.

Over the past two decades, active citizenship has become a central priority of European educational policy. Through initiatives promoted by the European Union, the Council of Europe, UNESCO and Eurydice, citizenship education has increasingly emphasised democracy, human rights, social cohesion, intercultural understanding and lifelong learning as key educational objectives (Council of Europe, 2005, 2018; European Commission, 2017; UNESCO, 2015). Despite these developments, the concept continues to be interpreted and implemented differently across countries, reflecting diverse educational, cultural and political contexts (Maas & Molderez, 2025). These differences reinforce the importance of schools—and particularly teachers — in promoting active citizenship within different European educational systems.

Active Citizenship in School Education

Within this context, schools play a fundamental role in preparing young people to become active, responsible, and democratic citizens. Beyond transmitting knowledge, they provide pupils with opportunities to develop the values, attitudes, and competencies required to participate constructively in a democratic society. Accordingly, contemporary approaches to citizenship education emphasise that democratic learning should be embedded in everyday school life through participation, dialogue, collaboration, and shared decision-making, rather than being confined to a single curriculum subject (Council of Europe, 2018; UNESCO, 2014, 2015).

More specifically, primary education is widely regarded as a particularly important stage for citizenship education because it provides children with their first systematic experiences of democratic participation, collaboration, and social responsibility within a formal educational setting (Oxfam GB, 2015). Experiences acquired during the primary years contribute to the development of democratic values, civic attitudes, and patterns of participation that may influence later civic engagement (Dewey, 1916/2008; Council of Europe, 2018; Vygotsky, 1978). Consequently, primary school teachers have a unique opportunity to foster the knowledge, skills, and dispositions associated with active citizenship from an early age.

Teachers play a central role in this process. Through their pedagogical practices, they influence pupils' democratic values, critical thinking, empathy, social responsibility, and willingness to participate in civic life. As role models, teachers influence not only what pupils learn about democracy but also how they experience it in everyday school life (Babalís & Tsoli, 2017; Biesta, 2009, 2011; Oxfam GB, 2015; Veugelers, 2007). This requires teachers not only to embrace democratic values but also to possess the pedagogical knowledge and skills needed to translate these values into meaningful learning experiences. Consequently, initial teacher education and continuing professional development should equip teachers to implement participatory, learner-centred approaches that promote discussion, collaboration, critical reflection, and engagement with social issues (Council of Europe, 2018; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Teaching for Active Citizenship

Teaching for active citizenship extends beyond the transmission of civic knowledge and requires pedagogical approaches that actively engage pupils in democratic learning. Contemporary citizenship education emphasises learner-centred strategies, including classroom discussion, collaborative learning, project-based learning, role-playing, problem-based learning, and the use of ethical dilemmas, all of which encourage critical thinking, participation, collaboration, and civic engagement (Biesta, 2009, 2011; Council of Europe, 2018; Veugelers, 2007). These approaches enable pupils to experience democratic values in practice by discussing authentic social issues, working collaboratively, considering multiple perspectives, and participating in shared decision-making.

In line with this approach, Westheimer (2020) argues that citizenship education should prepare citizens not only to take personal responsibility but also to participate actively in democratic processes and engage critically with social challenges in pursuit of social justice. Effective citizenship education therefore depends not only on what teachers teach but also on how they teach it. Examining the pedagogical strategies employed by teachers is therefore essential for understanding how democratic values are translated into everyday classroom practice and how schools prepare pupils for active participation in democratic societies.

Research Methodology

General Background

The present study was conducted within the Erasmus+ project Shaping the European Active Citizen: Raising Intercultural/Transcultural Awareness through Life Skills Cultivation in Primary Education (iTACKLE). The project aimed to promote Active European Citizenship through the development, implementation, and evaluation of educational resources for primary education. The current study focuses on primary school teachers from Greece, Romania, Italy, and Finland, examining their perceptions and classroom practices regarding active citizenship. These four countries represent different approaches to citizenship education, providing an appropriate context for comparative analysis.

Research Questions

This study investigated primary school teachers' perceptions and practices of active citizenship in four European countries. The following questions guided the research:

- How do teachers from the four participating countries define active citizenship?
- Which values of active citizenship do teachers consider most important?
- How do teachers from the four participating countries promote active citizenship in the classroom
- Are there any differences in teachers' perceptions and practices across the four participating countries?
- To what extent do teachers' personal values and teaching strategies predict their classroom practices for promoting active citizenship?

Sample / Participants / Group

A total of 168 primary school teachers took part in the study, 150 of whom were female and 18 of whom were male (see Table 1). Teachers' demographic characteristics are presented in Tables 1–3. Participants were recruited using convenience sampling, whereby they were selected based on accessibility and existing professional connections rather than randomly. Statistical comparisons between countries are presented in the Results section.

Table 1

Teachers' Gender Profile per country

	Female	Male	Total
Romania	54 (100%)	0 (0%)	54
Italy	36 (85.7%)	6 (14.3%)	42
Greece	44 (89.8%)	5 (10.2%)	49
Finland	19 (82.6%)	4 (17.4%)	23

Total	153 (91,1%)	15 (8,9%)	168 (100%)
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Table 2

Teachers' teaching experience per country

	More than 20years	10-19 years	Less than 10 years	Total
Romania	36 (66.7%)	10 (18.5%)	8 (14.8%)	54
Italy	25 (59.5%)	10 (23.8%)	7 (16.7%)	42
Greece	20 (40.8%)	13 (26.5%)	16 (32.7%)	49
Finland	4 (17.4%)	15 (65.2%)	4 (17.4%)	23
Total	85 (50.6%)	48 (26.8%)	35 (20.8%)	168

Table 3

Teachers' educational status per country

	BA	MA/MSc	PhD	Total
Romania	33 (61.1%)	18 (33.3%)	3 (5.6%)	54
Italy	31 (73.8%)	10 (23.8%)	1(2.4%)	42
Greece	15 (30.6%)	30 (61.2%)	4 (8.2%)	49
Finland	4 (17.4%)	15 (65.2%)	4 (17.4%)	23
Total	83 (49.4%)	73 (43.5%)	12 (7.1%)	168

Instrument and Procedures

A self-administered anonymous five-point Likert-type questionnaire was developed for the present study. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first collected demographic information, whereas the second included 29 items examining teachers' understanding of active citizenship, civic engagement, values associated with active citizenship, and classroom practices for promoting active citizenship. The questionnaire demonstrated excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .95$).

Data collection took place from September to October 2024. The questionnaire was first developed in English, then translated into Greek, Finnish, Italian and Romanian, before being administered online via Google Forms. Data were collected during this period. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and all ethical principles concerning informed consent, confidentiality, and participants' rights were observed. According to national institutional requirements, formal ethics committee approval was not required as the study involved anonymous questionnaire data collected from adult participants. Completion took approximately 30–40 minutes.

Data Analysis

The data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 25. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages) were used to summarise the demographic characteristics of the sample and describe teachers' responses to the questionnaire items. The level of statistical significance was set at $p \leq .05$. The overall questionnaire demonstrated excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .95$), indicating high reliability of the instrument (Bryman, 2016).

As the study employed ordinal Likert-type data and repeated measurements, non-parametric statistical techniques were applied. Friedman tests were conducted to examine differences among the repeated measures, followed by Wilcoxon signed-rank tests with Bonferroni-adjusted significance levels for pairwise comparisons. Kruskal–Wallis tests were used to investigate differences among the four participating countries, and statistically significant findings were followed by pairwise Mann–Whitney U tests using Bonferroni-adjusted significance levels.

To address the fifth research question, Pearson correlation coefficients were initially computed to examine the relationships among the study variables. Subsequently, a multiple linear regression analysis was performed to examine whether teachers' personal values and teaching strategies for promoting active citizenship predicted their classroom practices for promoting active citizenship. For this purpose, composite variables were computed by averaging the corresponding questionnaire items. The composite measure of classroom practices for promoting active citizenship comprised the three items that directly reflected active classroom implementation (classroom discussions, classroom activities, and promoting pupils' participation in community life). The items referring to assigning extra homework and not incorporating active citizenship into teaching were retained in the descriptive analyses. However, they were not included in the composite measure because they represented conceptually distinct aspects of classroom practice. The internal consistency of the composite measures was assessed using Cronbach's alpha.

Research Results

Defining active citizenship

Regarding the definition of active citizenship, teachers rated participation in voting as the most important indicator ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 0.90$), followed by making or signing petitions ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 0.77$), whereas campaigning for elections received the lowest ratings (see Table 4).

Table 4

Teachers' perceptions of the indicators defining active citizenship and Friedman test results

Indicator	Mean (M)	SD
Participation in voting	4.43	0.90
Making or signing petitions	4.11	0.77
Organizing community activities	2.92	1.12
Campaigning for elections	2.39	0.95
Note. Higher scores indicate greater agreement. Mean ranks are derived from the Friedman test.		

A Friedman test revealed statistically significant differences among the four indicators, $\chi^2(3, N = 168) = 329.48$, $p < .001$. Pairwise comparisons using Wilcoxon signed-rank tests with a Bonferroni-adjusted significance level of $\alpha = .008$ confirmed that all six pairwise comparisons were statistically significant (all $p < .001$). Specifically, participation in voting received significantly higher ratings than making or signing petitions, organising community activities, and campaigning for elections. Likewise, making or signing petitions was rated significantly higher than organising community activities and campaigning for elections, while organising community activities was rated significantly higher than campaigning for elections (see Table 5).

Table 5

Pairwise Wilcoxon signed-rank comparisons of teachers' perceptions of the indicators defining active citizenship (N = 168)

Pairwise comparison	Z	p
Participation in voting vs. Making or signing petitions	-4.340	< .001
Participation in voting vs. Organizing community activities	-9.930	< .001
Participation in voting vs. Campaigning for elections	-10.808	< .001
Making or signing petitions vs. Organizing community activities	-8.565	< .001
Making or signing petitions vs. Campaigning for elections	-10.714	< .001
Organizing community activities vs. Campaigning for elections	-6.079	< .001

Note. Pairwise comparisons were performed using Wilcoxon signed-rank tests with a Bonferroni-adjusted significance level of $\alpha = .008$. All reported comparisons remained statistically significant after adjustment.

To investigate whether teachers' perceptions differed across countries, separate Kruskal-Wallis tests were conducted for each indicator of active citizenship. No significant differences were found for participation in voting, $H(3) = 3.95$, $p = .267$, or campaigning for elections, $H(3) = 1.40$, $p = .705$. However, significant between-country differences were observed for making and signing petitions, $H(3) = 20.97$, $p < .001$, and organising community activities, $H(3) = 77.20$, $p < .001$. Pairwise Mann-Whitney U tests with a Bonferroni-adjusted significance level of $\alpha = .008$ (.05/6) indicated that, for making and signing petitions, significant differences were identified between Greece and Romania ($p = .008$), Italy and Finland ($p < .001$), and Finland and Romania ($p < .001$). In contrast, no significant differences were found between Greece and Italy, Greece and Finland, or Italy and Romania after Bonferroni adjustment. Similarly, for organising community activities, significant differences were observed between Greece and Italy, Greece and Romania, Italy and Finland, and Finland and Romania (all $p < .001$). In contrast, the comparisons between Greece and Finland ($p = .935$) and between Italy and Romania ($p = .798$) were not statistically significant.

Values of active citizenship

About the second research question, which concerned the values underpinning active citizenship, teachers assigned the greatest importance to responsibility ($M = 4.70$, $SD = 0.52$), followed by honesty ($M = 4.65$, $SD = 0.62$) and respect for justice ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 0.66$). Tolerance received comparatively lower ratings ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 1.19$) (see Table 6).

Table 6

Teachers' ratings of the core values of active citizenship and Friedman test results (N = 168)

Value of active citizenship	M	SD
Responsibility	4.70	0.52
Honesty	4.65	0.62
Respect for justice	4.54	0.66
Tolerance	4.05	1.19

Note. Higher scores indicate greater agreement. Mean ranks are derived from the Friedman test.

A Friedman test revealed statistically significant differences among the four values, $\chi^2(3, N = 168) = 87.66, p < .001$. Pairwise comparisons using Wilcoxon signed-rank tests with a Bonferroni-adjusted significance level of $\alpha = .008$ confirmed that responsibility was rated significantly higher than respect for justice and tolerance. In contrast, honesty was rated significantly higher than tolerance. In addition, respect for justice received significantly higher ratings than tolerance. In contrast, no statistically significant differences were found between responsibility and honesty ($p = .155$) or between respect for justice and honesty ($p = .010$) after Bonferroni adjustment.

Country-level differences in teachers' perceptions of the values underlying active citizenship were examined using separate Kruskal–Wallis tests. No significant differences were found in respect for justice ($H(3) = 1.63, p = .653$) or responsibility ($H(3) = 5.56, p = .135$). However, the Kruskal–Wallis test for honesty reached statistical significance ($H(3) = 8.48, p = .037$). Nevertheless, subsequent Mann–Whitney U tests with a Bonferroni-adjusted significance level of $\alpha = .008 (.05/6)$ revealed that none of the comparisons was statistically significant. In contrast, significant between-country differences were observed for tolerance, $H(3) = 38.04, p < .001$. Pairwise Mann–Whitney U tests with a Bonferroni-adjusted significance level of $\alpha = .008 (.05/6)$ indicated significant differences between Greece and Italy ($p < .001$), Greece and Finland ($p = .001$), Greece and Romania ($p < .001$), and Finland and Romania ($p = .008$). No significant differences were found between Italy and Finland ($p = .029$) or between Italy and Romania ($p = .761$) after Bonferroni adjustment.

Classroom practices for promoting active citizenship

The third research question examined how teachers incorporate lessons on active citizenship into their teaching. According to the results, teachers gave the highest ratings in classroom discussions ($M = 4.46, SD = 0.73$), followed by activities such as recycling ($M = 4.30, SD = 0.87$), and promoting pupils' participation in community life, e.g. volunteering ($M = 3.87, SD = 0.96$). The lowest ratings were given for assigning extra homework ($M = 2.21, SD = 1.22$), and the lowest of all was for "I do not incorporate lessons on active citizenship into my teaching" ($M = 1.46, SD = 0.86$).

A Friedman test revealed statistically significant differences among the five ways of practising active citizenship, $\chi^2(4, N = 168) = 476.83, p < .001$. Pairwise comparisons using Wilcoxon signed-rank tests with a Bonferroni-adjusted significance level of $\alpha = .005$ indicated that incorporating classroom discussions did not differ significantly from implementing classroom activities (e.g., recycling) ($p = .015$). In contrast, classroom discussions received significantly higher ratings than promoting pupils' participation in community life (e.g., volunteering), assigning extra homework, and not incorporating active citizenship into teaching. Similarly, classroom activities (e.g., recycling) were rated significantly higher than promoting pupils' participation in community life, assigning extra homework, and not incorporating active citizenship into teaching. Furthermore, promoting pupils' participation in community life received significantly higher ratings than assigning extra homework and not incorporating active citizenship into teaching, while assigning extra homework was rated significantly higher than not incorporating active citizenship into teaching (all $p < .001$).

This study also examined whether teachers' perceptions differed across countries. Accordingly, separate Kruskal–Wallis tests were conducted for each way of practising active citizenship. After applying a Bonferroni adjustment for multiple comparisons, no significant differences were found for classroom discussions, $H(3) = 1.95, p = .583$, classroom activities (e.g., recycling), $H(3) = 5.03, p = .170$, or not incorporating active citizenship into teaching, $H(3) = 10.91, p = .012$. However, significant between-country differences were observed for promoting pupils' participation in community life (e.g., volunteering), $H(3) = 13.84, p = .003$, and assigning extra homework, $H(3) = 24.20, p < .001$. Pairwise Mann–Whitney U tests with a Bonferroni-adjusted significance level of $\alpha = .008 (.05/6)$ indicated that, for promoting pupils'

participation in community life, significant differences were found between Italy and Finland ($p = .003$) and Finland and Romania ($p = .005$). In contrast, no significant differences were observed for the remaining country comparisons. Similarly, for assigning extra homework, significant differences were identified between Greece and Finland ($p < .001$), Italy and Finland ($p = .003$), and Finland and Romania ($p = .001$). In contrast, the remaining pairwise comparisons were not statistically significant after Bonferroni adjustment.

Teaching strategies for promoting active citizenship

About the fourth research question, which concerned the teaching strategies used to promote active citizenship, teachers reported the highest use of project-based learning ($M = 4.04$, $SD = 0.87$), followed by role-playing ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 1.03$) and problem-based learning ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 1.01$). Comparatively lower ratings were assigned to lectures and presentations ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 1.09$), whereas ethical dilemmas received the lowest ratings ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 1.38$).

A Friedman test revealed statistically significant differences among the five teaching strategies, $\chi^2(4, N = 168) = 35.88$, $p < .001$, indicating that teachers reported using some instructional strategies more frequently than others. Pairwise comparisons followed, using Wilcoxon signed-rank tests with a Bonferroni-adjusted significance level of $\alpha = .005$, indicated that project-based learning was reported significantly more frequently than problem-based learning ($p = .001$), ethical dilemmas ($p < .001$), and lectures and presentations ($p < .001$). In addition, role-playing was reported significantly more frequently than ethical dilemmas ($p < .001$) and lectures and presentations ($p = .003$). No statistically significant differences were found between problem-based learning and role-playing, problem-based learning and ethical dilemmas, problem-based learning and lectures and presentations, project-based learning and role-playing, or between ethical dilemmas and lectures and presentations after Bonferroni adjustment.

This study also examined, according to its objectives, whether teachers' use of teaching strategies differed across countries. Separate Kruskal–Wallis tests were therefore conducted for each teaching strategy. After applying a Bonferroni adjustment for multiple comparisons, no significant differences were found for project-based learning, $H(3) = 2.07$, $p = .558$, or role-playing, $H(3) = 6.90$, $p = .075$. However, statistically significant between-country differences were observed for problem-based learning, $H(3) = 14.10$, $p = .003$, ethical dilemmas, $H(3) = 19.75$, $p < .001$, and lectures and presentations, $H(3) = 20.20$, $p < .001$. The pairwise Mann–Whitney U tests with a Bonferroni-adjusted significance level of $\alpha = .008$ (.05/6) followed, indicated that for problem-based learning, a significant difference was found only between Greece and Finland ($p < .001$). For ethical dilemmas, significant differences were observed between Greece and Italy ($p < .001$) and between Greece and Romania ($p < .001$). Finally, for lectures and presentations, significant differences were found between Greece and Finland ($p < .001$), Italy and Finland ($p < .001$), and Finland and Romania ($p < .001$). In contrast, the remaining pairwise comparisons were not statistically significant after Bonferroni adjustment.

Predictors of Classroom Practices for Promoting Active Citizenship

To address the fifth research question, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine whether teachers' personal values and teaching strategies for promoting active citizenship predicted their classroom practices for promoting active citizenship. Prior to the analysis, composite scores were computed for each construct based on the corresponding questionnaire items. The resulting composite scales demonstrated acceptable internal consistency (Personal Values: Cronbach's $\alpha = .738$; Teaching Strategies for Promoting Active Citizenship: Cronbach's $\alpha = .713$; Classroom Practices for Promoting Active Citizenship: Cronbach's $\alpha = .704$). Furthermore, multicollinearity diagnostics indicated no evidence of problematic multicollinearity, as tolerance values (.878) exceeded the recommended

threshold and variance inflation factors (VIF = 1.139) were well below the recommended cut-off value (see Table 7).

The overall regression model was statistically significant, $F(2, 165) = 26.61$, $p < .001$, explaining 24.4% of the variance in teachers' classroom practices for promoting active citizenship ($R^2 = .244$, Adjusted $R^2 = .235$). Both predictors made statistically significant positive contributions to the model. Specifically, teachers' personal values positively predicted classroom practices ($B = .227$, $SE = .083$, $\beta = .198$, $t = 2.74$, $p = .007$). In contrast, teaching strategies for promoting active citizenship emerged as the stronger predictor ($B = .355$, $SE = .066$, $\beta = .389$, $t = 5.38$, $p < .001$) (see Table 7).

Taken together, these findings suggest that teachers who place greater importance on the values underpinning active citizenship and who employ a wider range of teaching strategies for promoting active citizenship are more likely to implement classroom practices that foster pupils' active citizenship. Notably, teaching strategies emerged as the stronger predictor of these classroom practices.

Table 7

Multiple linear regression predicting classroom practices for promoting active citizenship (N = 168)

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p	VIF
Constant	1.860	.371	—	5.009	< .001	—
Personal Values	.227	.083	.198	2.736	.007	1.139
Teaching Strategies for Promoting Active Citizenship	.355	.066	.389	5.383	< .001	1.139

Note. Dependent variable: Classroom Practices for Promoting Active Citizenship. Model statistics: $R = .494$, $R^2 = .244$, Adjusted $R^2 = .235$, $F(2, 165) = 26.61$, $p < .001$.

Discussion

The findings suggest that participating teachers primarily associate active citizenship with conventional forms of democratic participation, such as voting and signing petitions, whereas campaigning for elections received considerably lower levels of endorsement. This pattern indicates that teachers perceive active citizenship mainly through socially accepted forms of civic participation rather than direct political engagement. This finding is consistent with previous research showing that citizenship education often emphasises responsible participation and community involvement while giving less attention to political activism and critical engagement with democratic institutions (Hoskins & Mascherini, 2009; Kennedy, 2018; Westheimer, 2020). One possible explanation is that teachers may avoid activities perceived as politically partisan, particularly in primary education, where political neutrality is often regarded as an important professional principle. Consequently, pupils may have fewer opportunities to develop political literacy and engage critically with democratic processes.

Regarding the values underpinning active citizenship, responsibility, honesty, and justice emerged as the most highly valued, whereas tolerance received comparatively lower ratings. This finding suggests that teachers place greater emphasis on individual moral responsibility than on the intercultural and inclusive dimensions of democratic citizenship. This finding is also consistent with previous studies indicating that teachers associate citizenship education with character development, democratic responsibility, and the cultivation of competencies such as critical thinking (Leenders et al., 2008; Pliogou & Karakatsani, 2022; Tsiougkou et al., 2017). Nevertheless, the comparatively lower emphasis placed on tolerance is noteworthy given that contemporary European citizenship education increasingly promotes diversity, inclusion, and intercultural dialogue as core democratic values (Council of Europe, 2018).

The findings further indicate that classroom discussion and learner-centred activities were the most frequently used approaches for promoting active citizenship, whereas assigning additional homework was used considerably less often. These findings support contemporary perspectives on citizenship education, which emphasise participation, collaboration, and authentic learning experiences rather than the transmission of civic knowledge alone (Council of Europe, 2018; UNESCO, 2015, 2021). Previous studies have similarly shown that participatory learning environments enhance pupils' understanding of democratic values and civic engagement (Karakatsani et al., 2022), while active-learning experiences increase the likelihood of civic participation later in life (Owen, 2013). By contrast, earlier research has shown that citizenship education in some educational contexts continues to rely primarily on teacher-centred approaches and knowledge transmission (Kılınç, 2026; Zaman, 2009). The present findings suggest that the participating teachers in our study are adopting learner-centred pedagogies more widely. Although some statistically significant differences were identified between countries, they were limited in number and suggest a broadly shared European understanding of active citizenship.

Perhaps the most important finding of the present study is that teachers' pedagogical strategies emerged as the strongest predictor of their classroom practices for promoting active citizenship. This finding suggests that promoting active citizenship depends not only on teachers' democratic values but also on their pedagogical capacity to translate those values into meaningful learning experiences. Although some differences were observed between countries—for example, Greek teachers reported discussing politics and voting more frequently than their Finnish counterparts—these differences were limited to specific classroom practices. In contrast, teachers across the four participating countries demonstrated broadly similar perceptions of active citizenship. Furthermore, the significant relationship between teachers' personal values and their classroom practices highlights the importance of teachers as democratic role models whose beliefs and pedagogical choices shape pupils' civic learning experiences.

Overall, the findings suggest that although teachers across the four participating countries share a common understanding of active citizenship, they differ primarily in the pedagogical approaches they employ to promote it. Strengthening teachers' pedagogical repertoire through initial teacher education and continuing professional development may therefore broaden citizenship education beyond conventional forms of civic participation and better prepare pupils for active participation in increasingly complex democratic societies.

Conclusions

This study examined how primary school teachers in Greece, Romania, Italy and Finland perceive and practise active citizenship within the framework of the Erasmus+ project iTACKLE. The findings suggest that, despite their different national contexts, teachers in the four participating countries share a broadly similar understanding of active citizenship, emphasising democratic participation, responsibility, honesty, and justice. While some statistically significant differences in specific classroom practices and teaching strategies emerged, these were limited and did not reflect systematic differences in teachers' overall perceptions of active citizenship. Instead, the findings suggest that, despite their different European educational contexts, teachers embrace common democratic values while adapting their pedagogical approaches to their respective national settings.

The most important contribution of this study is the finding that teachers' pedagogical strategies are the strongest predictor of classroom practices that promote active citizenship. While teachers' personal values also made a significant contribution, the findings demonstrate that democratic values alone are insufficient unless teachers have the pedagogical capacity to translate those values into meaningful learning experiences. These results emphasise the pivotal role of pedagogy in citizenship education, reinforcing the notion that democratic competencies are best cultivated through participation, dialogue,

collaboration, and authentic engagement with social issues, rather than merely transmitting civic knowledge (Biesta, 2009, 2011; Council of Europe, 2018).

The findings have several practical implications for educational policy and teacher education. Initial teacher education and continuing professional development should strengthen teachers' capacity to implement learner-centred pedagogies that promote democratic participation, critical thinking, collaboration, political literacy, and intercultural understanding. At the policy level, citizenship education should continue to be embedded across the curriculum through authentic learning experiences that provide pupils with meaningful opportunities to participate actively in democratic school and community life. The broadly shared perceptions observed across the four participating countries also provide a promising foundation for developing common European educational resources and collaborative initiatives that strengthen active citizenship education while respecting national educational contexts.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

Limitations

The present study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the use of convenience sampling limits the generalisability of the results, as neither the overall sample nor the country-specific samples are fully representative of the broader population of primary school teachers. Second, the study relied exclusively on self-reported questionnaire data, which may have been influenced by social desirability bias. Third, the quantitative design did not allow for an in-depth exploration of teachers' experiences or the contextual factors shaping their classroom practices. Furthermore, the study focused solely on teachers' perspectives, excluding those of pupils and parents, whose views could provide a more comprehensive understanding of active citizenship education. Nevertheless, the present study forms part of the wider Erasmus+ project Shaping the European Active Citizen: Raising Intercultural/Transcultural Awareness through Life Skills Cultivation in Primary Education (iTACKLE), which also collected data from pupils (Tsoli et al., in press) and parents across the four participating countries. Finally, although gender differences were initially explored, no statistically significant differences were identified, and therefore gender was not examined further.

Suggestions for Future Research

Building on these limitations, future research should examine pupils' and parents' perceptions of active citizenship to provide a more comprehensive understanding of citizenship education within school communities. Mixed-methods and longitudinal studies could explore how teachers' perceptions and classroom practices evolve and examine the contextual factors influencing the implementation of active citizenship education. Finally, intervention studies evaluating programmes designed to strengthen democratic participation, civic engagement, and active citizenship among pupils would provide valuable evidence for improving educational policy and practice.

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Conflict of Interest

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