
Folk Art as the Precondition for Developing Ethnic Culture

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Abstract. Folk art is part of ethnic culture consisting of cultural heritage and living traditions and reflects the experience which has been accumulated by most people of the nation since the ancient times. The present-day transfer of values of traditional ethnos from generation to generation depends on the succession of education, customs and traditions, hence, the significance of ethno-cultural education for the preservation of national identity is emphasized in the General Programmes for Secondary Education. The youth's negative attitude to upholding ethno-culture, their treatment of folk art as a "relic" determined the goal the research – to review the 11th–12th formers' cognition of folk art as the precondition for the development of ethnic culture. The paper presents the data of the survey which included the 11th and 12th formers (N = 534) of fourteen general education schools in Lithuania and reveals the learners' attitude to folk art. The interview with teachers of art (N = 25) demonstrated that they identify the cognition of folk art with ethnic art, and notice a lack of attention for this topic in the programmes of art education.

Keywords: *ethnic culture, folk art, art education.*

Introduction

Since Lithuania joined the European Union, the significance and meaning of the perception of the uniqueness of ethnic culture and the ability to present it as an exclusive feature of the Lithuanian nation have become increasingly important. Ethnic culture is part of social education which intrinsically develops general and ethno-cultural competences based on the creative interception of the nation's cultural experience, the traditional

norms of morality, national and civic consciousness, respect for the native environment, the traditions inherited from the family, community and nation and other cultural values of the nation (The General Programme of Ethnic Culture for Basic Education and the General Programme of Ethnic Culture for Secondary Education, 2012). Ethno-cultural education is one of the most relevant topics in the discussion on the present-day education reform (Gvildienė, 2008), since the socio-cultural goals of the reformed education are closely interrelated with ethno-cultural education, answer the nationality principle of Lithuanian education and are defined as a commitment to Lithuanian culture to take care of its preservation and historic succession (Čepienė, 2009).

The significance of ethno-cultural education is emphasized in the Strategy for Development of Ethnic Culture in Educational Institutions (2009), the General Programmes of Ethnic Culture for Basic and Secondary Education (2012) and other national documents. The development of ethnic culture and folk art, as its constituent part, is closely connected with the general education curriculum by rendering the knowledge to learners on the basis of topical integration (Čepienė, 2009). In the curriculum of art education, the fine arts are integrated with ethnic culture and folk art aiming to guarantee a mature development of art and folk art cognition, i.e. “to educate a citizen of Lithuania upholding phenomena of ethnic culture, to unfold the learners’ visual expression of the past and the present-day, and to develop their aesthetic perception and cultural competence (General Programmes of Secondary Education: Art Education, 2013, p. 1–2).

Nevertheless, at school the goals of ethno-cultural education frequently become just the programme preconditions, learners hardly perceive the distinction of their national ethno-culture, the necessity for upholding the Lithuanian folk art, and ethno-culture is explicitly termed as a relic (Razmienė, 2009; Grigas, 2001). Thus, the youth’s negative attitude to upholding of ethno-culture and folk art determined the goal of the research – to review the 11th–12th formers’ cognition of folk art as the precondition for the development of ethnic culture. The research **objectives**: 1) to investigate the 11th–12th formers’ attitude to folk art; 2) to reveal the art teachers’ attitude to the cognition of folk art in art lessons. The research **methods**: quantitative (the learners’ survey) and qualitative (an interview with teachers of art).

The research basis and sampling. The research was conducted using the method of probability sampling in fourteen general education schools of Lithuania: five schools were in the cities, six – in the towns and three – in small towns. 534 pupils were surveyed. Aiming to reveal the art teachers’ attitude to the development of folk art cognition in art lessons, by means of a purposive typical case sampling there was a standardized interview with 25 art teachers conducted. The distribution of the participants according to their place of residence is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Research Participants According to Place of Residence

Place of residence	Pupils (P)	Teachers (T)
Cities	205	11
Towns	255	8
Small towns	74	6
Total	534	25

The research results. Folk art education is based on ethno-cultural system which is meant to help a personality to fully reveal itself, acquire knowledge, form skills and cultural assumptions (Braslauskienė, 2002). Under the influence of the surrounding cultures folk art can survive if innovations are adapted to the national traditions (Čepienė, 2008). The research results revealed that only less than one tenth of the pupils believed that folk art is a relic which does not fit in the modern lifestyle (Table 2).

Table 2. The Pupils' Attitudes to Folk Art (%)

Statements	Cities	Towns	Small towns	Total
A relic which does not fit in the modern lifestyle	7.8	6.3	12.2	7.7
Ethnic art, which is passed on from generation to generation, is valued even today	29.8	31	27	30
Valuable ancient works of folk artists belong in museums	9.8	10.6	14.9	10.9
Our national crafts, which we can be proud of as they reflect our history, are unique and different from crafts of other nations	35.6	25.5	20.3	28.7
No opinion on the issue	17.1	26.7	25.7	22.7

One third of the pupils view folk art as ethnic art which reflects the national history. Therefore, in their opinion, folk art cognition is promoted by folk artists (29 %) and educators (26 %), and then by parents (10.9 %), television (6 %) and other factors. The comparison of the research data according to the place of residence did not return a statistically significant difference.

The backgrounds of ethnic culture differ from the other school subjects because of their specificity. Children acquire the fundamentals of this culture in the family, home environment and kindergarten. A further development of ethnic culture takes place by integrating ethnic culture into the school subjects. The results of the pupils' survey revealed that most frequently they familiarize themselves with folk art when the topic of a specific lesson is related to ethno-culture: in art lessons – 46.8 %, in other lessons – 40.8 %. It can be argued that the integration of the content of ethno-culture into separate school subjects is fragmentary due to considerable requirements of their programmes.

An important condition for teaching / learning folk art is various ways of education available for pupils outside school which provide the preconditions to perceive folk art

as a lasting value: the employment of natural and cultural environment of the school, museum exhibitions and galleries, local heritage objects and their surroundings. It was determined that most frequently teachers choose excursions to museums as a supplementary form of teaching folk art (Fig. 1).

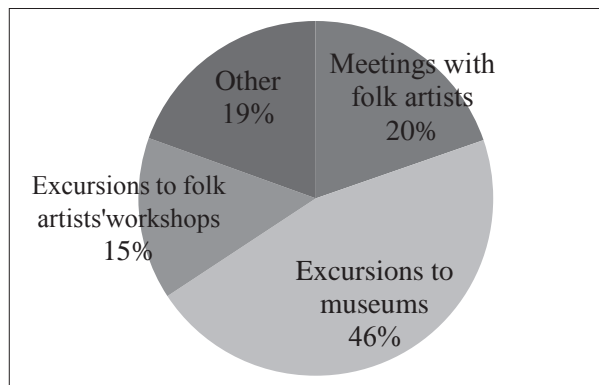


Fig. 1. Forms/Ways of Teaching Folk Art

Teachers also choose such ways / forms as meetings with folk artists, excursions to folk artists' workshops and regional studies museums. Even though 35 percent of the pupils indicated that they are not interested in folk art, they still acknowledge its significance for preserving our national identity: for forming people's attitude to ethnic art (43.1 %), matching the old with the new (34.5 %), rendering spiritual, cultural heritage (28.8 %). It is interesting to note that in modern life 25.8 percent of the pupils would use folk art as decorative elements for the interior and exterior when designing the style of their living place.

The possibilities of integrating ethnic culture into the process of education are related to the teacher's pedagogical skill and competence. Hence, the research also aimed to determine the art teachers' attitude to the teaching peculiarities of folk art as a constituent part of ethnic culture. The teachers' answers to the questions of standardized interview were analyzed using the method of qualitative content analysis: on the basis of the key words there were categories determined, the content of the categories was divided into subcategories, which were then interpreted. Figure 2 presents the art teachers' conception of folk art.

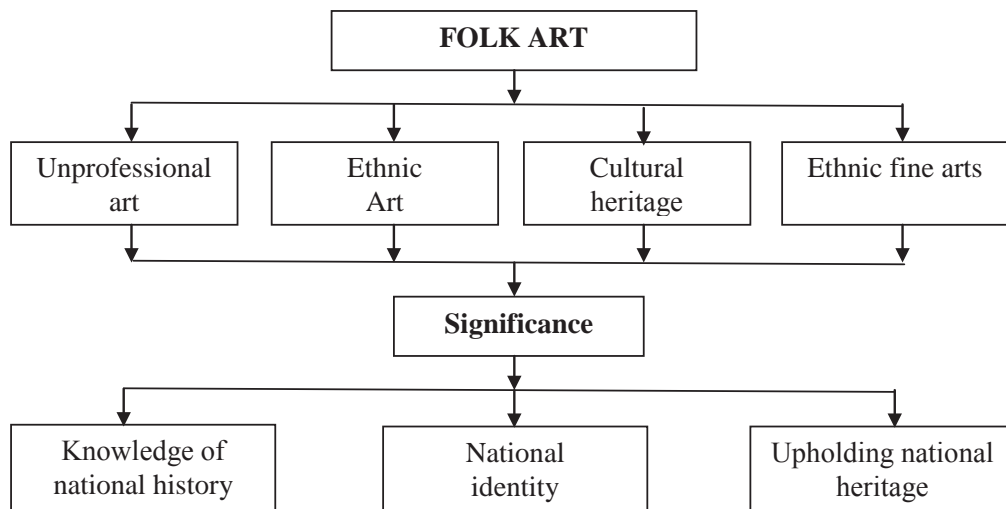


Fig. 2. Conception of Folk Art

Art teachers conceive folk art as unprofessional art, one of the three kinds of ethnic art alongside with ethnic architecture and folklore (*“Works of fine arts, created by amateur local artists, works of applied decorative arts”*; *“Created by non-professional, folk artists or amateurs and upholding the best Lithuanian traditions”*), which is closely related to the Lithuanian national world outlook, household, customs and traditions (*“Our cultural heritage which has to be preserved for the future generations”*; *“Articles of Lithuanian national artistic expression which reflect our national uniqueness”*; *“Ethnic art is the knowledge that uncovers the layers of history, the outlook (of those times) and introduces people to the national culture”*). The acquired data show that the art teachers distinguish the significance of folk art for cognizing the national roots, maturing the national identity, and familiarizing with the native land, its history, and culture.

The investigation of folk art as a precondition for the development of ethnic culture aimed to determine the forms and methods used by the teachers in art education, and their perception of the advantages and disadvantages of teaching folk art (Fig. 3).

¹ The language of the interviewees was not edited.

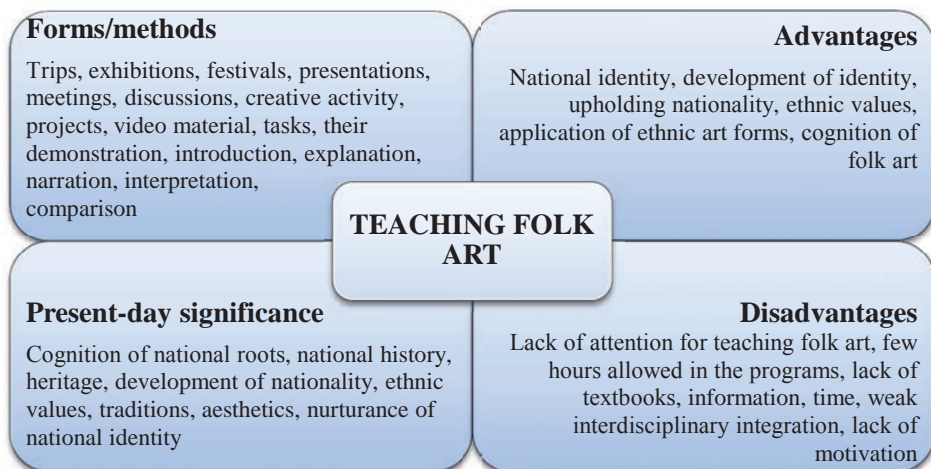


Fig. 3. Peculiarities of Teaching Folk Art Distinguished by Art Teachers

The content of the category “Forms / Methods of Folk Art” shows that art teachers emphasize the significance of informal education in teaching folk art (“We are encouraged to visit The Regional Museum, there are meetings with folk artists organized”; “Pupils visit the annual exhibitions of folk art organized by the Art Gallery. There they observe, discuss, analyze the chosen technique or a specific work of art. Pupils are encouraged to apply elements of folk art in their own work”; “There are exhibitions of folk art organized, the authors are invited, excursions to the folk artists are organized”; “Explanation of how the spheres of folk art manifest themselves in everyday environment. Discussions, reading examples and interpretation”). This fact is also confirmed by the reasons for the lack of attention to teaching folk art indicated by the art teachers (“Lack of time. The program requirements are too big. It is impossible to focus on folk art in two hours per week”; “Little information is given in the textbooks for 11th–12th forms, there are not many lessons per week for these forms”; “Pupils are less inclined to take interest in their roots and culture”), however, all the informants recognized the significance of folk art for a citizen’s ethno identity (“Every mature person has to cognize the artistic roots of his nation”; “Folk art development enables one to cognize his native culture”; “It develops the positive value-related attitudes in the family, encourages to cognize the cultural heritage of the country”; “It develops the conception of nation cognition, preservation for the future generation”).

The research also revealed the art teachers’ suggestions about the improvement of ethnic culture: on the national level it is important to change the programmes of general education; to publish textbooks which would include more visual information related to cognizing folk art; to organize seminars, projects related to the development of ethnic culture; to integrate folk art cognition into other school subjects; to promote visits to exhibitions and museums as a form of folk art cognition. In such a way it would be

possible to preserve the cultural heritage without losing our uniqueness, integrate it into modern lifestyle and find possibilities and ways to integrate the ethnic culture heritage into the curriculum.

Conclusions

The data of the survey revealed the 11th and 12th formers' positive attitude to folk art: folk art is viewed as ethnic art which reflects the national history; folk art is significant for the preservation of national identity, it helps to match the old with the new; folk art can be used in modern life as decorative elements of interior and exterior in designing the home environment.

Teaching folk art in art lessons and classes of other subjects takes place only when it is related to the topic of the lesson; hence, the integration of ethnic culture into separate school subjects is fragmentary. The natural and cultural environment of the school, museum exhibitions and galleries, local heritage objects and their surroundings are ways of teaching / learning folk art which create the preconditions for perception of folk art as a lasting value.

The interview with the art teachers revealed their conception of folk art, their insights about the lack of attention for this issue, their suggestions about the forms and methods for teaching folk art not only in art lessons, but also when organizing various events and projects, promoting creative activity since they are important for people's knowledge of *national history*, their national identity and upholding of the national heritage.

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Tautodailė – etninės kultūros ugdymo prielaida

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Santrauka

Etninė kultūra yra socialinio ugdymo dalis, kuria savaimingai ugdomos bendrosios ir etnokultūrinės kompetencijos, grindžiamos tautos kultūrinės patirties, tradicinių dorovės normų perėmimu, tautine ir pilietine savimone, pagarba gimtajai aplinkai, šeimos, bendruomenės ir tautos paveldėtoms tradicijoms. Tautodailė yra etninės kultūros dalis, susidedanti iš kultūros paveldo ir gyvosios tradicijos, atspindinti daugumos tautos žmonių nuo seniausių laikų ilgus amžius kauptą patyrimą. Šiuolaikinis tradicijų etnoso vertybių perdavimas iš kartos į kartą priklauso nuo ugdymo, papročių, tradicijų tęstinumo, todėl etnokultūros ugdymo svarba tautinio tapatumo išsaugojimui akcentuojama ir Vidurinio ugdymo bendrosiose programose. Tarp jaunimo vyraujantis neigiamas požiūris į etnokultūros puoselėjimą, tautodailės vertinimas kaip „atgyvenos“, suponavo tyrimo tikslą – atskleisti XI–XII klasių mokinių tautodailės pažinimą kaip etninės kultūros ugdymo prielaidą. Straipsnyje pristatomi keturiolikos Lietuvos bendrojo ugdymo mokyklų XI–XII klasių mokinių (N = 534) apklausos duomenys, atskleidžiantys jų požiūrį į tautodailę. Interviu su dailės mokytojais (N = 25) atskleidė, kad tautodailės pažinimą jie tapatina su liaudies menu, išvelgia išsamesnio šiai temai skiriamo dėmesio dailės ugdymo programose trūkumą.

Esminiai žodžiai: *etninė kultūra, tautodailė, dailės ugdymas.*

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