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(Review paper)

THE INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY OF THE PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA

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Abstract: The research aimed to determine the intercultural competence levels of primary school teachers. The research questions examined problems of intercultural competence of teachers working in a multicultural school and in a monocultural school such as the level of ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism and the level of intercultural competence in the dimension of global competence (substantive knowledge, perceptual understanding and intercultural communication). An online quantitative survey through the *Intercultural Sensitivity Index* (ISI) was used to collect data. The research was conducted on a purposive sample of 53 primary school teachers in multiethnic regions of North-West Macedonia. Data processing was performed using SPSS. Key findings reveal that the intercultural sensitivity of primary school teachers is middling (M=3.19). Teachers working in a multicultural school have developed a higher level of intercultural competence (M=3.22) compared to teachers working in a monocultural school (M=3.15). Teachers need professional development in the field of intercultural education. They also need international mobility.

Keywords: ethnocentrism, ethnorelativism, intercultural competence, intercultural communication

INTRODUCTION

A universal feature of the world in which we live in, is multiculturalism, which is thought to be the result of the development of humanity mainly in terms of religions, ethnicity and socio-economic status. Today in the world only 11% of states can be considered multicultural. Differences are often sources of problems in communication, especially when it is not possible to recognize "the others", the different ones.

In scientific and political discussions dedicated to the problems in education, the notions of humanization, democratization, cooperation, anti-discrimination, equality, individualization, differentiation, integration, and inclusion, are often encountered, in order to express the aspirations of creating an educational system in which everyone will have equal opportunities to meet educational needs and gain the place they deserve in society. During this, one of the medium-term educational goals is the social cohesion of the school staff, while the long-term goal is the social cohesion of the society.

Cultural differences have always found a place to meet in schools. Therefore, considering the multicultural context of Macedonia, there is a growing need for future

generations of young people to prepare for cultural interaction with individuals of different cultures. Education has an important place in promoting such a concept of cultural interaction which is based on the promotion of the principles of interculturality and intercultural values in various life's areas. The best implementers and promoters of these principles and values are teachers. In effective work with culturally diverse students, teachers are key actors in education (Leutviler et al., 2018).

The fact that schools are the place where the individual meets different cultures and languages during its life suggests the need for a better structuring of the education system, a system whose structure will precisely determine the development opportunities of the individual in joint intercultural activities. As James (2005) points out, in a situation in which individuals act together to create a functional entirety, the focus is now not only on the concrete procedures and skills they possess, on how they contribute to society, but this expands to interpersonal relationships, which must also be at a functional level. This functional level cannot be operationalized only through the static quantitative dimension of multicultural, but it can first of all be operationalized through dynamic and interactive connections as well as through the relationships between cultures which according to Martin & Nakayama (2017) know each other, accept one-other, respect each other and help each other. The application of intercultural principles at school and teaching level is possible exclusively through educational practice and through a well-structured school curriculum. This mainly includes articulating the teacher's programs, content, procedures, and working methods. Nevertheless, all this should be oriented not only towards the acquisition of knowledge but also towards direct contacts in order to develop a worldview which will be characterized by different perspectives. Through direct contact, prejudices, stereotypes and stigmas between children and young people are more likely to be reduced, and as a result, preconditions will be created for the construction of cohesive societies. Such an approach of observing the teacher's position in a multicultural working environment leads to the presentation of one of the most important problems in dealing with structural changes in societies and schools and their transformation from monocultural and national environments to pluralistic environments. This is the problem of the teacher's intercultural competencies. As Grant & Sleeter argue, "no matter where you teach one day, you will have a diversity of students in your classroom" (p. vii). The need for a successful functioning of the European educational space of competition and the ability to respond effectively to the challenges of globalization therefore suggests an approach based on the competencies needed to work with students with a culturally diverse background.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Prior to launching EU membership negotiations, Macedonia has committed itself to harmonizing its policies and legislation on education, culture and science with EU legislation. The challenges facing the Macedonian education system are extensive, such as whether Macedonian teachers are prepared and competent enough to teach children coming from other countries, such as educating Macedonian students to be active citizens, how to promote the idea of European identity through school content, how to motivate students to go on study trips, etc. The issue of teacher intercultural competencies becomes even more important for the very fact of reality in the field of education in Macedonia. Legislation allows schools to function as monocultural and monoethnic. Such a practice works particularly in environments with a multiethnic context. This means that the school model in Macedonia is the opposite of the European school model which is integrative, multicultural and inclusive. In such a reality, the teacher is the one on whom lays the hope for the implementation of new initiatives that are the product of the European goal of the state, despite the adaptation of local legislation to European standards in education. One of the demanding issues of educational policy is how to "produce" teachers who are sensitive to diversity and who possess intercultural competence - the ability

to identify and exploit cultural differences as one of its learning resources (Berthoin-Anatal & Friedman, 2003). Educational policy makers consider that changes in the development and restructuring of the education system, as well as current teaching practices, will fundamentally change the situation (Ball et al., 2011). But they tend to reject the fact that policy approval largely depends on the degree to which teachers respect such policies, as well as the different meanings these people give to those policies, based on ideology, knowledge and experience (Alfrey et al., 2016; Ball et al., 2012). An additional problem as Macura Milovanović et al. (2010) point out is the fact that Pre-Service Teachers in their initial education are instructed that students are a homogeneous category, and consequently, during their teacher careers they often consider the same the concept of “being equal” to the concept of “being the same”. It seems that as a result, the education system and curricula are not yet based on the intercultural approach to education, and the initiatives to provide conditions for its implementation are sporadic.

According to Banks (Banks, 1993; Banks & Banks, 2002) equality pedagogy as the creation of equal educational conditions for all, the curriculum reform as a new way of understanding truth and knowledge, the education on social justice as a struggle against discrimination, prejudice, racism - are also dimensions of intercultural education which enable an efficient response to the various demands of participants in education through changing approach and flexibility of content. In such a direction, intercultural curriculum represents one of the main premises of the implementation of intercultural education in direct educational practice. When constructing national and school curricula, a leading role must be played by pedagogues, psychologists, teachers, principals and even parents because they know better what (intercultural) competencies need children and young people, but also teachers.

In this regard, intercultural sensitivity as an element of intercultural competence is the ability to identify the existence of different worldviews which enable the recognition of not only our values but also the values of culturally diverse people (Hyder, 2015). There are various models of intercultural sensitivity development developed by several authors, the most cited of which is the Milton Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity - DMIS. It consists of three stages of ethnocentrism and three stages of ethnorelativism, in which case a key aspect of ethnorelativism is empathy. Emotion allows us to get into “someone else’s shoes” or for a moment become another person. Adler & Rodman (2006) similarly define empathy as “the ability to re-create another person’s perspective, to experience the world from the other’s point of view” (p. 43). The developmental model of intercultural sensitivity has been adapted by Hammer (2008) and clarifies the differences between five successive stages of intercultural sensitivity where the adaptation is the final stage. Cultural awareness and deep understanding of differences in values is crucial because it leads to effective changes in a person’s behavior and communication style.

Abdallah-Preteuille (2006) asserts that other people cannot be understood outside the communication process or interaction. If the intercultural attribute is added to communication, then intercultural education that starts from the perspective of developing participants’ relationships and involving culturally diverse students to live together (Batelaan, 2000) must become part of a broader education process. Thus, intercultural communication supposes a reality which supports the simultaneous existence of unity and diversity, cooperation and competition but also intercultural sensitivity.

Regarding intercultural communication competence (ICC), Hammer et al., (2003) claim that there is a difference between intercultural sensitivity and intercultural competence. From their perspective, intercultural sensitivity is “the ability to discriminate and experience relevant cultural differences” and intercultural competence is “the ability to think and act ininterculturally appropriate ways” (p. 422). They argue that “greater intercultural sensitivity is associated with greater potential for exercising intercultural competence” (ibid. p. 422).

Based on Milton Bennett's theoretical framework of the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) and multidimensional models of intercultural competence, Olson & Kroeger (2001) developed the Global Competency and Intercultural Sensitivity model. This model presents not only the six phases of DMIS (denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, and integration) but also the three dimensions of global competence (substantive knowledge, perceptual understanding, intercultural communication) and is used as an indicator of intercultural competence.

Deardorff (2009) describes intercultural competence as a teaching spiral. She emphasizes that concrete interactions, mastery of communication strategies, development of attitudes and positions, as well as self-reflection and mastery of knowledge, go closely with each other. The content of intercultural competencies includes attitudes and skills that refer to cultural empathy, adaptation, cross-curricular differences, flexibility in new cultural situations, communicative effectiveness, and language competence. She operationalizes this content through four types of components of intercultural competencies: attitudes and orientations such as attitudes towards other cultures; personality traits such as cultural empathy and emotional intelligence; relevant intercultural skills such as negotiation skills and language; and real behavior in intercultural meetings (Deardorff, 2009).

When it comes to the specific intercultural competence of the teacher, Shratz (2004) defines this competence as orientation and readiness for the execution of the teaching profession which means acceptance of the context in which he works as well as adequate skills, abilities and attitudes for such a context. These skills, abilities and attitudes compose the teacher's intercultural construct. This actually supposes the ability to identify a wide range of cultural differences and know how to deal with them (Bennett, 1998, 2009).

The acquisition of teacher competencies for work in a multicultural environment should begin in university education. It is understood that this is possible if intercultural culture is developed and promoted in those institutions. For example, the University of Michigan has built a truly intercultural university emphasizing the employment and retention of teachers and students who belong to different cultures and developing programs that encourage an inclusive university community (Chou, 2007).

A pilot study by Olson & Kroeger (2001) conducted on a sample of professors and staff at New Jersey University found that 69% of them self-assessed with 4 or 5 in the acceptance stage. Further, 44% self-assessed with 4 or 5 at the integration stage. No respondents rated themselves as high in the denial or defense stage, and only 10% rated themselves highly in the minimization stage. The authors provided two explanations for these positive results. First, professors and University staff live in a culturally diverse city area. Second, only 10% of the 500 University members responded to the survey, and it is possible that respondents who would be highly rated on the denial and defense stage would not have wanted to complete the questionnaire, which has reduced the frequency of these responses.

In order to determine the level of intercultural competence of pre-service teachers, Polat & Oğay Barka (2014) conducted a survey on a sample of 185 pre-service teachers from Switzerland and Turkey. The results showed that the levels of intercultural competence of pre-service teachers from Switzerland and Turkey are middling. Future teachers perceive themselves as more competent in the dimension of "cultural empathy" followed by "open-mindedness", "social initiative", "flexibility" and "emotional stability". According to the state, the results showed that pre-service teachers from Switzerland had higher intercultural competence than those from Turkey. Despite this, no significant differences were found according to gender and study program.

Several studies (Anderson, Hubbard, Lawton and Rexeisen, 2006; Penbek, Şahin & Cerit, 2012) have attempted to find out whether student mobility or their participation in

international education programs affect intercultural competence. It has been proven that these activities contribute to the development of intercultural competence.

The literature review showed a significant presence of empirical research on intercultural competence, particularly after 2000 (Olson & Kroeger, 2001; Hammer, Bennett & Wiseman, 2003; Penbek, Şahin & Cerit, 2012; Yuen, 2010; Rissanen, Kuusisto & Kuusisto, 2016; Wang & Zhou, 2016). In general they can be divided into three groups. The first group consists of research that investigates the relevance of a phenomenon (experience of education abroad) with the level of intercultural competence in students and teachers (Anderson, Hubbard, Lawton & Rexeisen, 2006; Penbek, Şahin & Cerit, 2012; Rissanen, Kuusisto & Kuusisto, 2016). The second group consists of research that investigates whether students and teachers are interculturally competent (Chen & Starosta, 2000; Olson & Kroeger, 2001; Yuen, 2010; Polat & Ogay Barka, 2014) and the third group consists of research examining the attitudes of students and teachers regarding the desired competencies of teachers in intercultural education (Fantini, 2009; DeJaeghere & Cao, 2009; Cushner, 2007; Bedeković, 2015).

Our research paradigm belongs to the second group of research - to those who research it if teachers are interculturally competent with an approach to interculture as a school model of education and school as “a socio-moral organizational system” (Petrovska, 2010, p. 38) where “educational activity in its essence is a human process that develops and supports all human values (individual development, democracy, respect and acceptance of the other, tolerance, fairness, honesty, cooperation, solidarity, etc.)” (ibid. p. 39).

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research was to determine the level of intercultural competence of teachers in primary school. The research questions were oriented towards the investigation of differences in the level of ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism of teachers working in multicultural schools and those working in monocultural schools. The standardized *Intercultural Sensitivity Index* (ISI) developed by Olson & Kroeger (2001) was used to research the levels of intercultural competence. The research was conducted on a purposive sample of 53 primary school teachers in Macedonia's multiethnic regions such as Tetovo, Skopje, Kicevo, Gostivar and Struga. In collaboration with the school principals, the teachers were asked to complete the 20-minute electronic questionnaire by entering their e-mail address. Respondents rated themselves on the Likert scale (1 to 5) according to gradation 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. When interpreting the arithmetic means, the interval 1.00–1.79 was evaluated to be “very low”, 1.80–2.59 to be “low”, 2.60–3.39 to be “middling”, 3.40–4.19 to be “high”, and 4.20– 5.00 to be “very high” (Polat, & Ogay Barka, 2014, p. 28). The arithmetic mean was calculated to identify the level of intercultural competence of teachers. To determine whether intercultural competence varies according to school structure t test was performed. The results were processed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences, v. 25.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The research was conducted on a sample of 53 primary school teachers, 19 of whom work in a multicultural school and 34 in a monocultural school. 40 teachers are female and 13 are male, 23 elementary school teachers and 30 subject teachers. The following results are part of the pilot research on “Intercultural competencies of the teacher in the multicultural school”. This article will analyze the results according to the multicultural and monocultural structure of the school in the stage of ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism.

The stage of ethnocentrism

The ethnocentrism scale of the Intercultural Sensitivity Index (ISI) consists of 13 items (4 items for denial, 5 items for defense and 4 items for minimization). The Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient scale for teachers' ethnocentrism self-assessment was found to be 0.786. *Independent-samples t-test* was performed to determine the level of ethnocentrism in the self-assessment scale. It should be noted that in the degree of self-assessment of ethnocentrism we expect the lowest possible arithmetic mean in all questions. The lower the arithmetic mean, the higher the intercultural sensitivity, specifically the intercultural competence of teachers.

Table 1. Level of ethnocentrism and the school structure

To what extent do you agree with the following:							
Question	Monocultural school (N=34)		Multicultural school (N=19)		t	p	
	M	SD	M	SD			
	1. I do not really notice cultural differences.	2.65	1.346	3.05			1.508
2. I think that cultural diversity really only exists in other places.	3.15	1.234	3.21	1.084	-.187	.852	
3. I feel most comfortable living and working in a community where people look and act like me.	3.38	1.415	3.32	1.293	.169	.866	
4. I have intentionally sought to live in a racially or culturally distinct community.	2.53	1.187	2.58	1.261	-.143	.887	
5. I am surrounded by culturally diverse people, and feel like my cultural values are threatened.	2.15	1.048	1.68	.820	1.659	.103	
6. I sometimes find myself thinking derogatory things about people who look or act differently from me.	2.00	1.155	1.68	.946	1.016	.315	
7. I believe that aid to developing countries should be targeted to those efforts that help these countries evolve toward the types of social, economic, and political systems that exist in my country.	2.79	1.298	2.42	1.387	.979	.332	
8. I believe that certain groups of people are very troublesome and do not deserve to be treated well.	2.76	1.350	2.00	1.247	2.031	.047*	
9. I have lived for at least 2 years in another country and believe that Macedonian society should embrace the values of this culture in order to address the problems of contemporary Macedonian society.	2.65	1.535	2.16	1.463	1.131	.263	
10. I understand that difference exist but believe that we should focus on similarities. We are all human.	3.59	1.328	4.05	1.353	-1.213	.231	
11. I think that most human behavior can be understood as manifestations of instinctual behavior like territoriality and sex.	3.41	1.048	3.47	1.020	-.208	.836	
12. I think that all human beings are subject to the same historical forces, economic and	3.18	1.167	3.42	1.121	-.742	.462	

political laws, or psychological principles.

These principles are invariable across cultures.

13. I believe that physical displays of human emotions are universally recognizable: A smile is a smile wherever you go.	3.7	1.149	4.1	1.100	-.960	.34
	9		1			2

*p<.05

The *t* test showed significant statistical differences between teachers in question 8: "I believe that certain groups of people are very troublesome and will not deserve to be treated well" where teachers working in multicultural schools have shown a lower level of agreement (M=2.00, SD=1.247, p<.05) compared to teachers working in monocultural school (M=2.76, SD=1.350, p<.05). The calculation of arithmetic means showed that multicultural school teachers showed higher levels of ethnocentrism (M=3.04) at the denial stage (Q 1, 2, 3, 4) compared to monocultural school teachers (M=2.93). On the other hand, they showed a lower level of ethnocentrism (M=1.99) at the defense stage (Q 5, 6, 7, 8, 9) compared to monocultural school teachers (M=2.47). In the minimization stage, multicultural school teachers have shown higher levels of ethnocentrism (M=3.76) compared to monocultural school teachers (M=3.49). Overall, teachers have shown middling levels of ethnocentrism in the denial stage (M=2.23), low level of ethnocentrism in defense stage (M=2.23) and high level of ethnocentrism in the minimization stage (M=3.63) which suggests that they have reached middling level of intercultural competence in the dimension of ethnocentrism. This means that in the first stage of ethnocentrism (denial) teachers show a middling level of intercultural sensitivity, in the second stage (defense) they show a high level of intercultural sensitivity and in the third stage (minimization) they show a low level of intercultural sensitivity. In general, in the dimension of ethnocentrism, teachers self-assess at the middling level of ethnocentrism (M=2.89) in which case multicultural school teachers show a lower level of ethnocentrism (M=2.86) than monocultural school teachers (M=2.93).

The stage of ethnorelativism

The scale of ethnorelativism in the Intercultural Sensitivity Index (ISI) consists of 11 items (4 items for acceptance, 4 items for adaptation and 3 items for integration). The Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient scale for teacher self-assessment of ethnorelativism was found to be 0.866.

Table 2. Level of ethnorelativism and the school structure

To what extent do you agree with the following:						
Question	Monocultural school (N=34)		Multicultural school (N=19)		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
14. I acknowledge and respect cultural difference. Cultural diversity is a preferable human condition.	3.91	1.21	4.2	.806	-	.26
		5	6		1.127	5
15. I believe that verbal and nonverbal behavior varies across cultures and that all forms of such behavior are worthy of respect.	3.65	1.15	4.2	.631	-	.05
		2	1		1.969	4
16. I think that cultural variations in behavior spring from different worldview assumptions.	3.41	1.07	4.0	.816	-	.04
		6	0		2.069	4*
17. I believe that my worldview is one of many equally valid worldviews.	3.56	1.13	4.2	.713	-	.02
		3	1		2.263	8*

18. I have added to my own cultural skills new verbal and nonverbal communication skills that are appropriate in another culture.	3.56	1.21	3.8	.958	-.877	.38
		1	4			5
19. I believe that culture is a process. One does not have culture: one engages in culture.	3.68	1.17	3.9	.621	-.933	.35
		3	5			5
20. I am able to temporarily give up my own worldview to participate in another worldview.	2.68	1.43	2.5	1.172	.390	.69
		0	3			8
21. I have two or more cultural frames of reference, and I feel positive about cultural differences.	3.21	1.20	2.8	1.197	.906	.36
		0	9			9
22. I feel culturally marginal or on the periphery of two or more cultures.	2.68	1.17	2.3	1.165	.919	.36
		3	7			2
23. I am able to analyze and evaluate situations from one or more chosen cultural perspectives.	3.59	1.13	3.6	1.204	-.289	.77
		1	8			3
24. When faced with a choice about how I am going to respond to a given situation, I am able to shift between two or more cultural perspectives and consciously make a choice to act from one of these cultural contexts.	3.29	1.21	3.3	1.212	-.213	.83
		9	7			2

*p<.05

The *t* test showed significant statistical differences between teachers at the acceptance stage in question 16: “I think that cultural variations in behavior spring from different worldview assumptions” where multicultural school teachers showed a higher level of agreement (M=4.00, SD=.816, p<.05) than the teachers of the monocultural school (M=3.41, SD=1.076, p<.05) and in question 17: “I believe that my worldview is one of the many equally valid worldviews” where the teachers of the multicultural school also showed a higher level of agreement (M=4.21, SD=.713, p<.05) compared to monocultural school teachers (M=3.56, SD=1.133, p<.05). The calculation of arithmetic means showed that multicultural school teachers achieved a higher level of ethnorelativism (M=4.17) at the acceptance stage (Q 14, 15, 16, 17) than monocultural school teachers (M=3.63). Even in the adaptation stage (Q 18, 19, 20, 21) the teachers of the multicultural school have shown a higher level of ethnorelativism (M=3.30) than the teachers of the monocultural school. Only at the stage of integration (Q 22, 23, 24) did the teachers of the multicultural school show a lower level of relativism (M=3.14) than the teachers of the monocultural school (M=3.19). Interpreted according to Polat & Ogay Barka (2014) intervals, the level of ethnorelativism of teachers in the acceptance stage is high (M = 3.90), while in the adaptation stage (M=3.29) and the integration stage (M=3.16) the level of ethnorelativism is middling. This suggests that in the first stage of ethnorelativism teachers show a high level of intercultural sensitivity while in the second and third stage they show a middling level of intercultural sensitivity. In general, in the dimension of ethnorelativism, teachers have self-assessed at the level of middling ethnorelativism (M=3.48) where multicultural school teachers have reached a higher level of ethnorelativism (M=3.57) compared to monocultural school teachers (M=3.38).

CONCLUSION

The results of the research showed that the intercultural sensitivity, specifically the intercultural competence of teachers in primary school is at a middling level (M=3.19). Teachers working in multicultural schools have a higher level of intercultural competence (M=3.22) compared to teachers working in monocultural schools (M=3.15). In terms of the dimension of ethnocentrism, multicultural school teachers show a higher level of ethnocentrism

in the stage of denial and minimization and a lower level of ethnocentrism in the stage of defense. In general, teachers show a middling ethnocentrism level at the denial stage, low ethnocentrism level at the defense stage, and high ethnocentrism level at the minimization stage suggesting that they have attained the middling intercultural sensitivity level in the ethnocentrism dimension. This means that in the first stage of ethnocentrism (denial) teachers show a middling level of intercultural sensitivity, in the second stage (defense) they show a high level of intercultural sensitivity and in the third stage (minimization) they show a low level of intercultural sensitivity. In the dimension of ethnorelativism, teachers working in multicultural schools show a higher level of intercultural sensitivity in the stage of acceptance and adaptation compared to teachers working in monocultural schools. Monocultural school teachers show a higher level of intercultural sensitivity at the integration stage. Both groups of teachers have shown a middling level of intercultural sensitivity in the stage of adaptation and integration. In general, teachers show a middling level of ethnorelativism, in which case the teachers of the multicultural school show a higher level of ethnorelativism compared to the teachers of the monocultural school. Interpreted according to Polat & Ogay Barka (2014) intervals, in the Intercultural Sensitivity Index (ISI) multicultural school teachers show high level of intercultural competence (M=3.48) while monocultural school teachers show middling level of intercultural competence (M=3.33). Such conclusions suggest the need for professional development of teachers in the field of intercultural education and their international mobility.

Limitations

It is possible that the results will not be representative for the whole country, given that we do not have respondents from central and eastern Macedonia. The voluntary nature of the survey itself constitutes a limitation in the fact that the research was not able to guarantee an equal participation of respondents according to the structure of the school. This survey was conducted only once and surveys should be conducted more than twice (Medina-Lopez-Portillo, 2004).

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