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# Implementation of the programmes for learning Macedonian as a foreign language at the Faculty of Philology, Stip – a step towards successful multicultural education

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## Abstract

As a participant in the project in which there are seven partner universities from England, Poland, Slovenia and Macedonia and which is supported by the European Union, with this study I will try to gain an insight into the way of accepting new principles, culture and living environment by the foreign students who attend the Course for learning Macedonian as a foreign language, most of which are Turkish students who study at Goce Delcev University in Stip, Macedonia. More precisely, the study will help us obtain information about their familiarization with and adjustment to the education system in Macedonia as well as acceptance of the new practices through their participation in the course, and familiarization with the administrative obligations to the university which apply to both home and foreign students. The multicultural environment makes all students equal, so that everyone is motivated to learn the Macedonian language with the help of teachers of different nationalities. The importance of learning the new language helps in creating a relaxed atmosphere in which students can get to know each other and respect the culture of the other participants, which leads to successful multicultural education.

*Keywords:* multicultural, foreign, Macedonian, education, language

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## 1. Introduction

Macedonia is widely known as a multicultural community. The educational system in Macedonia has been changed several times in order to satisfy the needs and the interests of the pupils/students of different nationalities. The town of Stip benefitted greatly from the new state Goce Delcev University. One of the faculties is the Faculty of Philology with six study programmes: English Language and Literature, German Language and Literature, Macedonian Language and Literature, French Language and Literature, Turkish Language and Literature, and History and Archeology. This year was founded the Institute for languages as part of the Faculty of Philology. Its first project was the Course for Macedonian as a foreign language, a programme whose implementation was supported by the European project - Tempus in which there are seven partner universities from Slovenia, Poland, Great Britain and Macedonia, among which is Goce Delcev University from Stip.

Goce Delcev University consists of 13 faculties which attract students not only from Macedonia, but from abroad as well, so that in 2010 there were more than a hundred students from Bulgaria, Serbia and Turkey, among whom the most numerous were the students from Turkey with about 70 students. In order to start studying at Goce Delcev University, these students have an obligation to attend the Course for Macedonian as a foreign language. This course

consists of two beginner levels: A1 (10+10) and A2 (10+10), each with 5 credits, which enable the students to acquire the basic vocabulary which will help them to use the language in everyday communication, read and understand simple texts, fill out forms, write short notes and letters.

#### 1. Multicultural understanding – successful presentation of the regulations for foreign students

The unexpected large number of Turkish students who enrolled at Goce Delcev University caught the management of the University and the Faculty of Philology unprepared to answer all their questions. The students needed help in preparing their documents, completing the contracts for enrolling in the language course, getting acquainted with the new language and culture, so that the teaching staff from the Department of Turkish Language and Literature had to make this process easier for them. At the same time, it became evident that there was a need for familiarization with the Turkish culture, language and traditions that these students brought with them. As I was directly involved with the students from the first moment, as the beginning I could feel some kind of reservation on both sides, we perceived each other as strangers who cannot communicate easily. However, when the course started, and at the same time I started learning more about the Balkan cultures and languages, our encounters became more pleasant and more relaxed. The mutual trust that started to develop made the process of adaptation to the educational system easier and more understandable for these students.

#### 2. Exchange of personal experiences among the foreign and domestic students in Macedonia (intercultural atmosphere)

It is very important for students from different cultures to know that their language and cultural values are accepted and respected in the society in which they intend to live. It has a positive influence on their socialization and even their success in their studies. Any attempt to make these students accept the attitudes and beliefs of the majority of the student population may create a hostile atmosphere. Thus, it is very important for them to integrate into the new culture (the culture of the majority), but at the same time to keep their own culture. This leads to enrichment of cultures and broadening of the repertoire of human behaviour. Intercultural higher education aims at protecting the foreign students from the hostile attitude of the majority, reducing the lack of self-confidence and the inability to defend their beliefs and attitudes because of the lack of the knowledge of the other culture, which can produce only fear and intolerance among the students of different cultures. Intercultural education should not be “education for foreigners” and “education of empathy”, but to install an understanding and respect of cultural differences in all educational institutions and families.

Investigations of the trend of multicultural education all over the world discover diversity of practices in schools and development of cultural pluralism as a social ideology (Ramsey, 2003: 34).

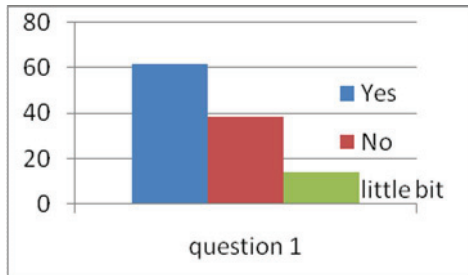
The trend of globalization and the introduction of steps in promoting peaceful coexistence have made it clear that cooperation and understanding between people of different nations are among the most important problems, as well as the socio-pedagogical support and protection of all people, especially students who study abroad. In relation to the multicultural education there are two important questions: keeping the cultural identity and adjustment to the new multicultural environment. Multicultural education is a process of development of younger generations, learning the ethnical, national and world culture for spiritual enrichment, development of global conscience, acquiring capacity to live in a multiethnic and multicultural environment.

The ideals of the multicultural education are to help younger generations to develop sense of tolerance, openness, kindness, humanity, to understand their inner world, to develop capacities of introspection, self-correction, personal identification in a multicultural environment. The humanitarian character of the educational system provides support and protection of the individual. In this way, there will be better cooperation and better understanding between Macedonian students and the foreign students who study at Goce Delcev University in Stip.

The results of the questionnaire show the reality of the situation seen with the eyes of the students. The participants were the foreign students who attend the Course for Macedonian as a foreign language (for undergraduate studies at

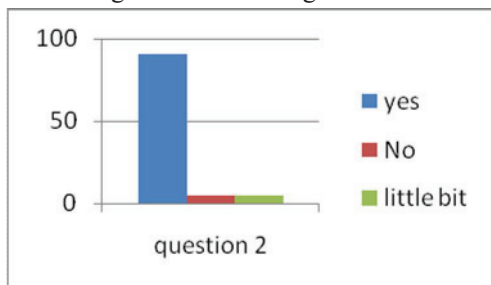
Goce Delcev University). Their opinions show the real values and achievements through multicultural understanding and learning the language which remove all barriers.

1. Did you have any previous knowledge of the educational system of the Republic of Macedonia?



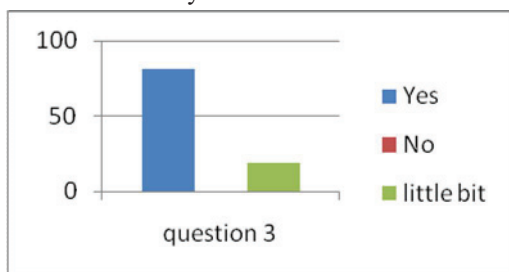
Their answers show that most of the students had some previous knowledge – information about the educational system.

1. Did the administration staff at the Faculty of Philology help you in understanding the educational system and the regulations for foreign students?



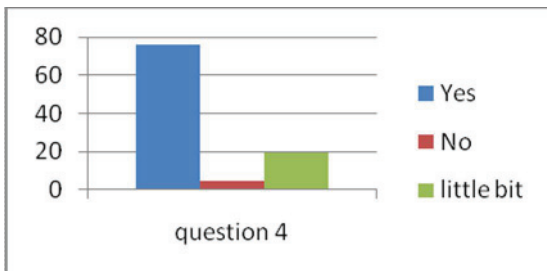
The participants expressed complete satisfaction.

2. Do you find the Course for learning Macedonian as a foreign language beneficial for your studies at Goce Delcev University?



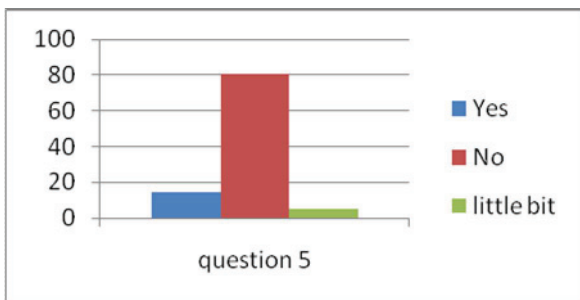
Most of the participants feel that the course is the first step in their adjustment as students in a foreign country, and that it is essential for them to learn the language in order to be able to study at the University.

3. Are you satisfied with the course programme?



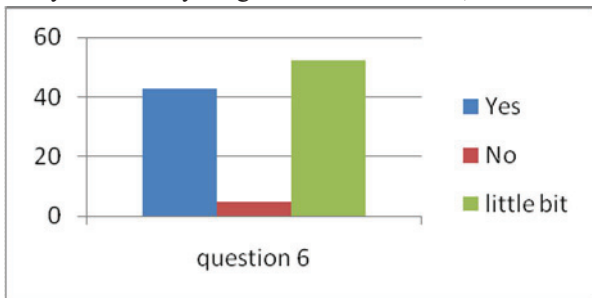
The answers of the participants show that the programme for learning Macedonian as a foreign language within the TEMPUS project fulfills the criteria for easier acquisition of the language. Only a small number of the participants feel that the programme is relatively well-structured.

4. Do the course lecturers treat the students of different nationalities in a different way?



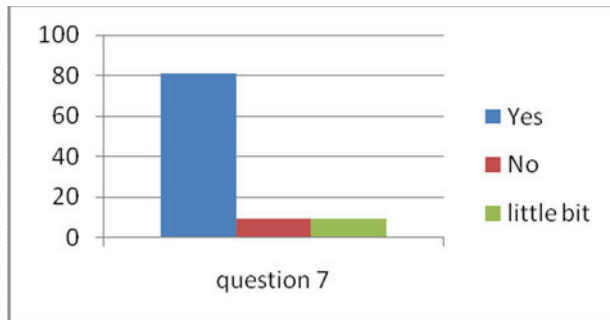
The answers of the participants lead to the conclusion that there is no discrimination of the foreign students, which is the most important question for an educational institution. Only a small percent of the participants gave a negative answer.

5. Did you learn anything about the traditions, culture and the way of life in this country during the course?



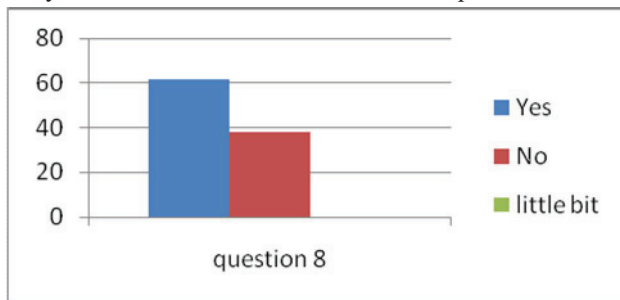
The number of positive and abstained answers is almost equal, which shows that there is a need for additional information about the culture and traditions of the country where these students are going to study.

6. Does the course programme allow you to talk about your culture and traditions?



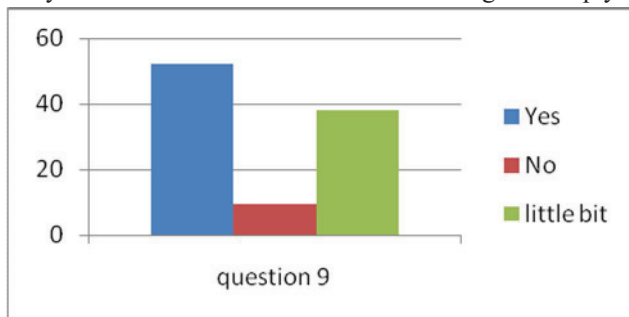
The participants answered that they spend a lot of time talking about their cultures and traditions, which helps them to get to know each other better and creates a mix of multicultural understanding.

7. Do you think that the course is the first step towards removing the intercultural barriers between students?



Most of the students answered positively.

8. Do you think that multicultural understanding will help you in your studies?



The participants answered positively.

### Conclusion

Language brings students together and helps them to accept new cultures, traditions and way of life. The course for learning the Macedonian language will help them not only learn the language but get to know each other better. It will also promote multicultural exchange of experiences and ways of life which leads

to successful communication with their fellow students, teachers and the administration staff at the University.

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