

Education and Cultural Diversity

Book of Proceedings

International Scientific Conference on Multicultural Education

02 - 04 December 2020, Tetovo, North Macedonia



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Center for Balkan Cooperation LOJA in cooperation with five leading universities: South East European University, University of Tetovo, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University, Goce Delchev University, and St. Kliment Ohridski University in North Macedonia in the frames of the Civil Peace Service program and as part of the project “Anchoring Multi-ethnic Youth Work in University Curricula for Future Teachers” which is supported by K.Wustrow from Germany, organized an International Scientific Conference on Multicultural Education from 2nd to 4th of December, 2020 in Tetovo, North Macedonia.

The aim of the conference was to explore the ways in which multicultural education works in other contexts, to create a platform where recent developments among scholars can be discussed and to give a push to academics, researchers, practitioners, and students to share their best practices and lessons learned on the topic. The contributions by the authors of the following proceedings reflect their dedication in various settings and contexts.

We would like to thank the Editor-in-chief, Bashkim Shehu for his engagement and we would like to thank all the authors who presented their research at the conference and ultimately for publication in this edition of conference proceedings.

As we continue to grow as an organization, your participation will be increasingly important to carrying out the work we are charged with from our mission.

With many thanks,

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Bashkim Shehu

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FOREWORD

“Loja” means “game” in the Albanian language, and is derived from the corresponding verb, which means “to play”. However, LOJA Centre for Balkan Cooperation based in Tetovo, North Macedonia, is not an ethnic Albanian organization. The composition of staff of this NGO and of its many volunteers, mostly youngsters, reflects the plurality of the country. Most importantly, as it describes itself, this organization is “dedicated to the improvement of the cultural and social life as well as inter-ethnic relationships in North Macedonia and the Balkan region”. It is an outstanding example of intercultural dialogue, of building bridges between the *Others* in an especially sensitive context. It is significant that, besides local youth, volunteers are coming from different countries of the world: the reputation of its interesting experiences has reached beyond the scope of our region. It cooperates with several important organizations and institutions of European countries.

The activity of LOJA Centre is very intensive, and it lies mainly in the fields of education and culture, consisting in art festivals, exhibitions, dance, stage performance, cinema, film and video production, or computer courses, capacity building for staff members and partners, etc. Playing is an essential component of its *modus operandi*. John Dewey in the Balkans?

John Dewey, the great American philosopher of the first half of the twentieth century, conceived the revolutionary pedagogic doctrine according to which the combination of working and playing was crucial in the educational process. It was meant especially for schoolchildren. Now, in the case of the activity of LOJA centre, it needs the following two qualifications. In the first place, we are creative in as much as we preserve a certain heritage from childhood, which is creativity. Let us remind of something from a philosophical poet, the playwright Friedrich von Schiller: “the human being plays only when he is fully a human being, and he is fully a human being only when he plays”. Second, John Dewey conceived his theory in a quite different context. It did not address the problems of inter-ethnic relationships; the concept of multiculturalism had not even appeared. LOJA centre, instead, applies playfulness in its endeavour to overcome stereotypes and promote intercultural dialogue.

The International Scientific Conference on Multicultural Education, which took place in Tetovo on December 2nd – 4th 2020, organized by LOJA Centre for Balkan Cooperation in partnership with KURVE Wustrow Centre for Training and Networking in Nonviolent Action, was one of the most relevant achievements of LOJA last year. An additional merit is that it was successfully organized in these very difficult times of the pandemics. Scholars from different Balkan countries and from other European regions participated in it, either onsite or online. Being a scientific exchange of ideas, its *modus operandi* was not playfulness in action; however, while analysing problems of education, it was done by a scientific approach to that modality as well. John Dewey was implicitly present. A whole range of diversity of experiences were shared, from primary school education through higher education. In the presentations and in the subsequent debates, fundamental theoretical concepts were discussed: multiculturalism, interculturalism, culture as such, as a common treasure of the humanity, the relation between education and culture, etc. Besides, difficult questions were focused upon, as for example that of the necessity of multilingual education in ethnically plural landscapes such as that of North Macedonia and of other similar countries. This book comprises the papers that were submitted in relation to this Conference, addressing thoroughly the above-mentioned issues and questions.

Bashkim Shehu

I. Multiculturalism, interculturalism, dialogue with the Other

Multiculturalism as a Tool for Social Cohesion in Multiethnic Communities

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Abstract

Multiculturalism is closely associated with “identity politics,” “the politics of difference,” and “the politics of recognition,” all of which share a commitment to revaluing disrespected identities and changing dominant patterns of representation and communication that marginalize certain groups. Multiculturalism is also a matter of economic interests and political power; it demands remedies to economic and political disadvantages that people suffer because of their minority status.

Study of the development of democracy, the role of the State, the emergence of new nationalisms and new xenophobic and racist types of behavior, and of the role of "ethnic-national" or "linguistic-cultural" minorities is the core problem. The contribution of the social sciences in such a sensitive area should help in devising solutions for the promotion of democracy and the prevention of conflicts brought about by the confrontations inherent in the strengthening of the multicultural and multi-ethnic character of the Republic of North Macedonia.

The article will surely attract attention as in scientific circles and the general public because in itself incorporates an issue that has been and still is a core problem in functioning and developing democracy and the idea of universal human rights in general and in particular in the Republic of North Macedonia.

Keywords: *Multiculturalism, social cohesion, multiethnic, liberalism, democracy, human rights, Republic of North Macedonia etc.*

1. *Multiculturalism theoretical approach*

Multiculturalism is closely connected to the diversity of communities, which originates from racial, ethnical and linguistic differences, with the affirmation that differences are the pillars of the human unity. That is a philosophy of respecting the individual as a human being or God's creation, as H. Goodings says, in the freedom of the identification of the self, you are either a black or a white man, a man or a woman, an American or a French, a Muslim or a Christian, etc. One of the definitions of multiculturalism in the anthropological and sociological literature is the following: "Multiculturalism is a policy with which public relations among different cultures of a society are regulated, including the way of utilization of languages and symbols."¹

Multiculturalism is closely connected to the diversity of communities, which originates from racial, ethnical and linguistic differences, with the affirmation that differences are the pillars of the human unity. That is a philosophy of respecting the individual as a human being or God's creation, as H. Goodings says, in the freedom of the identification of the self, you are either a black or a white man, a man or a woman, an American or a French, a Muslim or a Christian, etc. The notion was first used in 1971 by Pierre Trudeau, ex-Canadian Prime Minister. Among other things, he mentioned that, "the notion of biculturalism does not fully reflect our society. That is why the concept of multiculturalism is more appropriate in this case." One of the definitions of multiculturalism in the anthropological and sociological literature is the following: "Multiculturalism is a policy with which public relations among different cultures of a society are regulated, including the way of utilization of languages and symbols."

The topic on multiculturalism represents an important part of political programs in countries throughout the world and has an impact in bolstering the revision of public policies with the aim of finding a modus that is the most appropriate in fulfilling the requirements of different communities. From a normative point of view, it means recognition of differences, of the right to respect different cultures and the benefit of the whole society from moral and cultural differences. The well-known thinker, Charles Taylor, says that multiculturalism is a policy of recognition, an antipode of non-recognition or wrong recognition, which can be very dangerous for the society, can include means of humiliation and lock the person in an unreal, deformed and reduced shape of existence. Having in mind the fact that most people tend to stay close to their culture, the thesis of multicultural countries implies the idea that the special cultural-ethnical communities need to enjoy their rights, whereas the institutionalization of those rights is the best way to achieve completeness of every society.

Multiculturalism accepts the importance of the religion, ethnicity, values of the lifestyles, and the feeling of being valued by both individuals and groups. Diversity and multi-layering are inseparable parts of every community in every phase of history. Human societies are multicoloured and multicultural says Martinello: "Only cloning people by a particular matrix will enable the formation of mono-cultural and mono-identity societies".²

¹ Andrew Heywood, *Politika*, translated by Jovan Jovanović, Clio, Beograd, 2004, pg. 231.

² Ali Pajaziti, *Fjalor i sociologjisë*, Logos-A, Shkup, 2009, pg. 431-432.

2. Multiculturalism as a tool for social cohesion in the Republic of North Macedonia

It is known that the Balkans is a soil that in the recent history, especially in recent decades is a synonym for turbulent conditions, for intolerance, conflicting, for aggressive nationalism and for cultural differences that cause excommunication of the other, where they still watch over mythological leviathan. It is no accident that the term *homo balkanicus* denotes the individual that is part of a group that has not succeeded to achieve empathy with the neighbour and is oriented toward extreme politicization and partiality of the society. Former Yugoslavia was a sui generis example of experimentation with diversity and with multiculturalism. From 1945, the system implemented a policy which enabled mixing of cultures, while in 1952 was promoted building of the Yugoslav culture based on the interaction of all Yugoslavian national cultures. Pavkovic called this policy interactive multiculturalism, which after the reaction of the Slovenian intellectuals was abandoned. At the beginning of the 1960's that policy is replaced by strict segregate multiculturalism which does not allow mixing and creation of "Creole" culture but seeks equality and cultural development of each nation and nationality. Later, from the early 90's, it follows aggressive nationalism that was a factor of fragmentation of the former Yugoslavia.³

The Republic of North Macedonia presents a historical, political, economic and cultural reality of the Balkans. It is a part of this geographical area known for its ethnic and cultural diversity. Some authors have characterized the Republic of North Macedonia as the epicentre or the heart of the Balkans.⁴ In all the periods of the history of humanity, the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia has been part of great empires and civilizations. Due to favourable geographical position, as a crossroad of civilizations and religions, in history it is known as "Catena Mundi".⁵ North Macedonia is a cultural mosaic, with a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional basis, *unitas multiplex*; it is a corridor where East and West, Islam and Christianity, are merged. This illustrates the symbolism of the cultural components of the Islamic and Orthodox provenience, mosques, churches that meet in the four sides of this country.

The cultural identity of North Macedonia is very complex, a multicultural society, where different ethnic (Macedonians, Albanians, Turks, Roma, Vlachs...) and religious groups (Orthodox Christians, Muslims, Catholics...) lived in harmony throughout centuries. However, in recent decades the ethnicization of the state created a gap between two dominant cultural elements: Macedonian and Albanian, respectively Orthodox and Muslim, which up to now are in a condition of latent and manifest contradiction and search for modalities for creation of an applicable and sustainable policy of cultural diversity or cultural pluralism. The perception of otherness, i.e. difference, has become one of the most important issues in the 21st-century. Some of the latest developments include issues such as the case of the Macedonian Encyclopedia treating Albanians as mountaineers and denizens, attempts to impose Macedonian language to the other ethnic groups from the first class of primary school, and finally the project "Skopje 2014", which is monocultural, reflecting only the Macedonian and Orthodox component of the society. These cases are meaningful in showing how cultural centralism and favoritism challenge the future of this country.

³ Aleksandar Pavković, "Multikulturalizam kao uvod u rasparčavanje države - slučaj Jugoslavije", *Sociološki pregled*, 1998, vol. 32, No. 2, pg. 155-170.

⁴ Ahmet Davutoglu, lecture held at Sts. Cyril and Methodius on the occasion of his proclamation of *Doctor Honoris Causa*, March 25, 2010.

⁵ Ferid Muhic, *Shkupi – kryeqendra e shtatë portave*, Skenpoint, Скопје, 2007, pg. 4.

They mean that state did not succeed to guard the equidistance and secular character and day to day is moving toward a totalitarian monoculture and illiberal democracy.

The best example in this regards is Skopje, the capital city, and its old Turkish bazaar, which is a kind of North Macedonia in miniature and where one can find elements of the above mentioned of cultural treasure. The church Sveti Spas, Mustafa Pasha Mosque, the specialized goldsmith for silver works, the bag maker, the shoe maker, next to the blacksmith, the voice of the bagpipe, tambura⁶ and çifteli,⁷ reflect the city of Skopje with all its authenticity. Skopje has another, very important symbol, the Stone Bridge, a monument with a great history, something important for the citizens of Skopje and for any other visitor. A local philosopher describes the metaphor of the bridge in a very good manner:

Every bridge is a metaphysical miracle, the one in Skopje in particular. By crossing it, you do not cross only from one to the other side of the river Vardar. This bridge merges the cultures, rooted and flourishing in one place, in the city of Skopje. Therefore, it can be seen as a corridor between civilizations. Its arches, even today, connect Europe and Asia, East and West, Christianity and Islam, uniting them in an unprecedented way. On the same bridge, we can see carved messages from the Koran and an orthodox Bishop throwing the cross in the waters of Vardar on Epiphany. Because of this bridge, Vardar in Skopje is also known as the Second Bosphorus. The knowledgeable say, the real Bosphorus.⁸

The cultural mosaic called Macedonia is special because of its deep diversity (Taylor, 1994) and this is a natural situation for the country. If we analyze the statistical data, we will notice the presence various ethnic and religious groups.⁹ This diversity exists in Macedonia even before multiculturalism as politics and theory has arised. It is older than the notion of multiculturalism, which entails the contemporary notions of human and cultural rights. The old empires dating from ancient times were entities in which different communities, religions, ethnicities and cultures coexisted and were intertwined.

The Ottoman Empire defines the cultural diversity by defining the cultural and religious rights of the non-Islamic (Christian and Jewish) communities. This system called the “millet” system (religious communities), enabled the regulation of the ethical, religious and language issues, promoting tolerance for everybody.

In the post-Ottoman period, the things started to change. Different nationalisms generated intolerance, because the process of forming a nation (nation building) was based on the premises of exclusivity, ethnocentrism and ethnic nationalism. During the socialistic period, the question of human rights and the attitude towards different cultures was neglected. With the 1974 constitution, Macedonia was defined as a pluralistic state and 1989 and 1991 are years when politics of a national state were designed. This trend was changed after the conflict in 2001, when the Ohrid Framework Agreement actually redefined the country according to a multicultural concept, which

⁶ The **tanpura**, **tambora**, or **tambura** is a long necked plucked lute, a [stringed instrument](#) found in different versions in different places, three-stringed guitar.

⁷ The **Çifteli** ([Definite Albanian form: Çiftelia](#)) is an [Albanian](#) wooden, largely acoustic [string instrument](#), with only two strings (in Albanian, *çifteli* means double-stringed).

⁸ Ферид Мухиќ, *Скопје: Градот на седумте порти*, Скенпоинт, Скопје, 2007, рг. 29.

⁹ Државен Завод за Статистика. Попис на населението, домаќинствата и становите во Република Македонија 2002, Скопје, 2005, рг. 34.

meant promoting a civil and non-ethnic society (Engstrom). But during the last couple of years, the new developments are starting to go in negative directions, especially between the two biggest ethnic communities. This phase revealed the fact that our democracy is a limited democracy (I. Aceski) and that the actual politics resembles the concept of F. Zakaria of illiberal democracy.¹⁰

Multiculturalism, which is a reflection of this society, resulted from several inconsiderate steps (e.g. Macedonian Encyclopedia, Skopje 2014) that create tense situations. According to the analysts, post-framework Macedonia, instead of advancing in the process of establishing internal peace and Europeanization, became an oasis of stagnation, tension, partocracy and an example of a divided society.

This confirms the thesis that certain circles want Macedonia, but they do not want to share it with anybody else, as the social project of current Macedonia is a monocentric, monocultural, a fragmenting and a contentious one. The empirical data are eloquent about the fact that the results of this social engineering are one-sided, and the inter-ethnic relations in the country are extremely deteriorated. The data of the Centre for Inter-ethnic Tolerance show that the inter-ethnic relations in Macedonia are approaching a conflict. According to this Centre, more than 70% of the citizens think that the inter-ethnic tensions have increased, whereas only 20% of them say that they are at a good level. According to the leaders of this Centre, similar data have appeared also in the conflict of 2001. The questionnaire shows that the Albanians are upset that a mosque is not built in the centre of Skopje; the Macedonian pupils refuse to learn Albanian, and the Roma reiterate that they feel as second-rate citizens. A considerable part of the interviewed people have claimed that they do not have good relations with their immediate neighbors who belong to other ethnic groups. According to another survey, 93% of the Albanians have expressed themselves as unsatisfied with Gruevski's policy and 33% of the Macedonian people as well. According to a survey performed in May of this year, 78% of the interviewed people have declared that the relations between Albanians and Macedonians relations have greatly deteriorated. This confirms the thesis that we live in a state of a pathological multiculturalism, which we can avoid only through a compromise and a just understanding of the cultural complexity of our country.

4. Conclusions

Multiculturalism, as a policy for building healthy coexistence with the otherness, has been present at the Balkans since the Ottoman ethos (Deliso). Universities should be places where the openness, transparency, tolerance and cosmopolitanism are cherished, which will further be shown in the other societal levels, from the demos to the elite. North Macedonia has a history of coexistence and a potential in this respect, and this experience should be used for developing constructive policies, especially in the fields of culture and education.

In North Macedonia, in many cases, two truths are being promoted, which are utterly different, and continue to live; each one in its own social reality, contributing so little in what we call a plural society. This concept is in contradiction with the multicultural democracy, which is an antithesis of the national state and which requires the citizens

¹⁰ See: Fareed Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad*, New York, 2003; <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/53577/fareed-zakaria/the-rise-of-illiberal-democracy>

of the Republic of Macedonia to denationalize their state and live in a cultural deconstructivism (N. Frazer) or cultural relativism.

North Macedonia is a part of the “historical part” called the Balkans, where contradictions and complexities persist in the historical sense of the word. Amy Gutmann says that it is difficult to find a democratic society or a society in a process of democratization, which is not a focus of debates in relation with the identity and culture. In North Macedonia, there are tendencies of closing the ethnic and religious communities inside the political walls, the educational, informative, marital, demographic as well as economic ones, a fact that clearly speaks of ethnic exclusivity. Historically seen, both greater ethnic groups don't have a long history of ethnic animosity; their mutual living is possible and necessary.

There is a necessity of a bigger exchange of information in all life spheres, comprising here the culture as well. According to some analysts there are four instruments that can be used to reinforce the cultural exchange: 1) a greater frequency of inter-human contacts 2) an unconditional defense of human rights, 3) the implementation of basic political frames; 4) the help of round tables open for the audience to discuss inter-ethnic relations.

As far as multiethnicity and multiculturalism is concerned, there is a need to find feelings for building bridges in order to live with the neighbour in a mutual respect; there is a need to understand that one-colouredness has sense only in terms of multiple forms and colours. The languages and the difference between them should be sacred symbols and the fight against them is a fight against naturalness.

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The Impact of Multicultural Education Trainings on Participants Attitudes

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Abstract

Multicultural education is a discipline that is as important as it is necessary in societies with different cultural, ethnic, racial, religious, and other diversities, with its sole purpose to create equal opportunities in all spheres of society. The subject of our study is the attitude of students who are participants in the multicultural education project which, addresses topics on multicultural education through various trainings with students. The purpose of the research is for students to gain knowledge, attitudes, and skills, as well as the development of competencies in the field of multicultural education, as well as their application in their school practice, which are necessary for them to function effectively in pluralistic democratic societies. For this purpose, attention will be paid to communication during trainings by students of different groups as well as during free time after each activity.

The research will be conducted with 20 students who have attended theoretical lectures on multicultural education at the Faculty of Pedagogy, University of Tetova, divided into two focus groups, where the first focus group will include those students who have participated in these trainings, while the second focus group will include students who have not participated in the trainings. The instrument of this research will be semi-structured interviews with the aim of allowing students to be able to fully describe and interpret their experiences.

The findings of the research should bring us towards new discoveries about the communication among students of other ethnicities during the trainings. How do the trainings affect their thoughts on the ethnicities and cultures of other participants? What attitudes do they form, positive or negative? Do we encounter differences in communication with other ethnic groups during the activities and free time? What language do they communicate in during their free time as participants of the training?

Pedagogical implications have to do with the development of students' skills for achieving the highest level of professional cooperation between different ethnicities.

Keywords: multicultural education, communication, cultural diversity, attitude

Communication as a means of respecting cultural, ethnic and religious values

Undoubtedly, culture influences communication between people. Nevertheless, when communicating with other people, we often encounter obstacles or barriers of various types. Members of multicultural and multiethnic societies are required to know each other, to know each other's culture, norms, customs, traditions, in order to avoid prejudice and conflict, which can only be achieved through mutual communication and cooperation.

When communicating with members of other cultures and ethnicities, being careful while using different language and communication styles is crucial, because the use of messages in other languages can also have different meanings, which can lead to misunderstandings between groups. Moreover, the misinterpretation of intercultural information is also a bigger problem than the language itself, for instance, gestures have an important role in communication, and their importance may be different.

The important thing is that in multicultural communications we can encounter various obstacles and barriers which complicate the communication process. However, the first most important thing is that during communication difficulties and obstacles should always be treated as an opportunity to learn something.

Thus, misunderstandings and conflicts in multicultural-intercultural confrontations should not be treated as problems to be avoided, because in a way they impede the chances for further development of the individual.

Purpose of the research subject

In this research, our main goal was to ascertain the professional level of students with students of other ethnicities, cultures and religions while participating in trainings, following their level of cooperation, their communication during activities and leisure, and their individual and group attitudes.

Hence, we will have a clearer picture of the effect of these trainings, which engage our students, always in the interest of developing professional competencies in multicultural education.

Research tasks

- To verify the impact of trainings on multicultural education on students' attitudes on multicultural environments.
- To verify the impact of trainings on multicultural education in the advancement of communication between students of different ethnicities.
- To verify the readiness of students for further participation in such trainings.
- To compare the attitudes of students participating in the trainings and those who did not participate in the trainings on multicultural education.
- To compare the professional skills of students participating in the training and those who did not participate in the training on multicultural education.

Research hypotheses

- The organization of trainings on multicultural education affects the professional development of students in this field.
- Trainings on multicultural education enable the advancement of communication between participants of different ethnicities in the training.
- It is assumed that language presents difficulties in communication between students of different entities.
- Participation in trainings on multicultural education has a positive effect on students' attitudes towards other ethnic and cultural groups.
- Students are always ready to participate in trainings on multicultural education.

Technique and measurement instrument

As a technique, we have used surveys in this research, while as a measuring instrument we have used a questionnaire.

The sample of this research consists of students of the Faculty of Pedagogy-UT, where 10 out of 20 students participating in this research were students who participated in trainings on multicultural education, while 10 others were not part of the trainings.

The results from the analysis are qualitatively processed.

- Analysis and interpretation of research results
- In the following analysis, we will interpret some of the questions posed by us to the students, in the semi-structured questionnaire, which also confirm or deny the hypotheses set out above.

Question one: *Describe the impact and importance of the trainings on multicultural education to you.*

Students answered this question as follows: These trainings helped them to express their thoughts freely, to respect the opinions and attitudes of others, helped them develop communication skills as well as professional skills. The training also helped them to be acquainted with the students of the participating faculties, where students of other ethnicities in the country were also involved. The training also helped in avoiding possible prejudices between them.

Second question: *Describe the way of communication-cooperation during the trainings with other participants and leaders of the trainings.*

The way of communication was free and open. The trainers communicated and cooperated with everyone, which made us actively engaged in discussions. They valued our attitudes, ideas and thoughts. A range of current topics, adequate, with more contemporary methods and forms were discussed.

Third question: *What was the dominant language of communication between you and the other participants during the trainings, and was it difficult for you to communicate in any other language?*

Language was not a problem at all when conducting trainings on multicultural education. The languages used were Albanian and Macedonian, but we also used English, depending on the need or activity. However, there were translators provided, so we had no problem communicating. Therefore, language was not an obstacle to having a positive climate during the trainings.

Fourth question: *Did your participation in the trainings change your attitudes towards other ethnic groups?*

Participation in these trainings significantly affected the students in a positive way. Even before participating in such trainings, it was not that the participants had previously had prejudices against other ethnicities. Nevertheless, these trainings have strengthened the development professional competencies in students, for further advancement and growth. Moreover, a student had responded that these trainings gave her a chance to be acquainted with students of other faculties, especially students of other ethnicities, where, according to her, there was a lack of interest in cooperation.

Fifth question: *Are you willing to attend such trainings again, and WHY?*

All of the students showed readiness to participate in such trainings and events again, because it helped them in their professional development and in establishing relations with students from the participating faculties, which constituted an ethnic, cultural and religious diversity. They were also more open in expressing personal opinions, as well as in changing attitudes towards other ethnic groups participating in these trainings.

Concluding remarks:

From the results obtained of this research, we conclude that:

- Trainings that are organized on the topic of multicultural education are more than welcome for students.
- Having a different experience than the one attending a course on multicultural education as part of the curriculum.
- Such trainings shape and develop students professionally in gaining proficient competencies.
- Such trainings definitely help and prepare students to practice their profession in the future in environments with different cultural, ethnic, religious diversity, etc.

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Multicultural Education: Instrument for Fostering Student Resilience and Building Inclusive Society

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Abstract

The focus of this study is to explore how multicultural education facilitates the development of student resilience and thus reveal the individual and collective benefits of multicultural education and the ways they manifest in the society. The concept of “Resilience in education” essentially means the student’s ability to thrive by facing adversity. Multicultural education provides the environment in which students, due to cultural, linguistic and political reasons are inevitably exposed to greater challenges. This is how multicultural education can be a great benefactor for the individual growth of the students that ultimately affects the society as a whole. That is so because, by its very nature, the multicultural classroom provides both the challenges for growth and the necessary security for the students. It facilitates cooperation among the students that consequently removes cultural, ethnical, political, religious and linguistic barriers which serves as a stepping stone towards greater understanding between cultures that ultimately can result in greater inclusiveness in the society. In short, multicultural education provides the necessary environment that fosters student’s resilience, the outcome of which is deeper understanding between cultures that is naturally followed by greater social justice, inclusiveness and equality on a macro level. And this is the main hypothesis of this research, namely, that by developing resilience, multicultural education fosters the individual growth of the students by facilitating the removal of the cultural, social, political, ethnical, religious and linguistic barriers, the consequence of which is an increase of the level of social consciousness that serves as a stepping stone toward creating a greater degree of social justice, equality and inclusiveness in the society with the ultimate purpose to facilitate the process of globalization that acknowledges diversities under the umbrella of the same human species. Because of these reasons, one can certainly consider multicultural education as an instrument of raising the level of social consciousness in general, which is why it should be continuously encouraged and enhanced even more so in challenging times such as the present when xenophobia is globally on the rise. To prove this hypothesis, an ontological viewpoint was selected with objectivistic approach and deductive reasoning with which the secondary data gathered will be analysed.

Keywords – Multicultural, education, resilience, benefit, inclusiveness.

1. *Introduction*

Challenges are the steps on the stairway toward growth. This is a natural rule. It implies that one has to put effort and employ one's full capacity to overcome an obstacle that leads toward unlocking inner potentials and developing a particular set of skills that in themselves represents the growth of the individual. This is how human beings can develop to their maximum potential, that is, only by facing and overcoming challenges. The environment itself is what generates the challenges for human beings whether it is the jungle or the office. This situation is an everyday reality in all the aspects of life, including the classroom. What distinguishes the latter from all other are the circumstances that it provides. Namely, the classroom can be seen as the most constructive and the safest environment for growth that inevitably has positive impacts first on the individual and, through the individual, it influences the whole society. That is so because students, from the elementary and up to the highest levels of education, are pushed to interact with other individuals, all of which are different: that, by definition, is a challenge in itself. In the very least, one is exposed to and faces a complete stranger in a unknown environment where the student needs not just to accept and adapt in order to survive, to put it in evolutionary terms, but also to engage, interact, cooperate in order to thrive. This fosters learning and growth and the process of globalization facilitates it even more. Namely, globalization, which in the words of Marshall McLuhan made the world a global village, created what we now know as multiculturalism. Consequently, the need for multicultural classrooms arise and, with it, the concept of multicultural education. The process of globalization added quality to education and value to student growth by creating even more challenging environment in the form of the multicultural curricula and classroom. That is so because the multicultural classroom encompasses greater diversity that naturally is followed by greater challenges and therefore a greater potential for learning and growth. This is the main benefit of multicultural education, the overcoming of the cultural, religious, racial, ethnical and political barriers represented as challenges that the students are facing and overcoming in the multicultural classroom. Students develop student's resilience, which is defined as the ability to thrive in the face of challenges. This serves to increase the understanding between peoples of different cultures, which means an improvement of the level of social consciousness that leads to greater levels of social justice and equality that ultimately leads to inclusiveness in the society. Multicultural education serves to create resilient students, which results in greater social justice, equality and inclusiveness in the society that ultimately enhances the process of globalization with its end goal to create a peaceful world society. This is the main hypothesis of this research, which will be proven by an ontological standpoint, with an objectivist approach and deductive reasoning to analyse the secondary data that were gathered.

2. *Multicultural education: Instrument for fostering student resilience and building inclusive society*

2.1. *The role of Multicultural education in forming inclusive society*

Besides the knowledge about particular subjects as part of the multicultural curricula, which in itself is rich and consequently of great value, multicultural education provides students with the necessary experience of life from the perspective of learning about humanity as a whole. This is done by mixing students from different ethnic, racial, religious, cultural and political backgrounds into the same classroom. They are exposed to diversity and prompt to interact and cooperate among themselves, which is how the students develop resilience and learn to overcome their own personal and more often

than not, limiting worldviews that are conditioned by their background. Inevitably, there is an increase in the level of social consciousness, which implies less prejudice and hostility, and more understanding and equality. In short, “multicultural education compares and contrasts all people across racial and ethnic lines in an open atmosphere that is uncritical and free from value judgments. It studies diversity across cultures, examines the strengths and contributions of each, and promotes cultural pluralism as the ideal posture for society.”¹¹ Ultimately, this is how multicultural education increases the levels of social justice, equality and inclusiveness in the society. This is its greatest strength and its main role in the society. It is not a coincidence that “multicultural education grew out of the Civil Rights movement, and that it is grounded in the Western democratic ideals of freedom, justice, and equality.”¹² There are two theoretical perspectives that describe how multicultural education facilitates the improvement of the levels of social justice, equality and inclusiveness in the society through the classroom. Namely, those are the critical theory and the social reconstructionist model. The critical theory “aims to teach the students to critique and rearrange unjust social hierarchies. It is guided by the critical belief that if those in dominant power build ties of solidarity with those who have been oppressed by discriminatory social norms, lines of communication will be opened between groups that have been traditionally distanced from each other and marginalized voices will gain power.”¹³ In this way, the gap between the privileged and the downtrodden is being closed down, thus enabling the two groups to reproach each other. This is the first step towards an increase in the social consciousness, which leads to less prejudice and more equality, and it serves as a stepping-stone for building a more just system that will lead towards greater inclusiveness in the society. In a way, the critical theory states that multicultural education reforms the society in a top to bottom process. On the other hand, the social constructivist model represents a bottom-up process. Namely, “(...) within a social reconstructionist approach to multicultural education, students grapple with the roots of social inequity and create ways of effecting change, not simply learn to be friendly with people from different racial backgrounds. The material introduced in the curriculum allowed for this level of social critique and the students’ were consistently asked to be critical of events in history and current social trends as well as inclusive.”¹⁴ What both approaches have in common is the tendency to create incremental changes in the levels of social justice, equality and inclusiveness in the society instead of just improving the individual student’s tolerance of diversity. In this way, according to Epstein, students work towards “affirmation, solidarity, and critique, a laudable form of multicultural education that moves youth beyond tolerance and towards equity and justice.”¹⁵ Briefly, multicultural education serves the function of “school desegregation and inter-ethnic contact which does lead to improved race relations and decreased levels of prejudice and discrimination.”¹⁶ One can say that multicultural education does lead to greater levels of social justice, equality and inclusiveness in the society in a twofold way: by influencing first the individual and, through the individual, the collective. By providing the necessary challenges for growth in a safe and controlled environment, multicultural education is making a positive impact on the individual students: it develops resilience, which serves as a tool for

¹¹ Foerster, Leona. “Moving from ethnic studies to multicultural education”. USA: Agathon Press, Inc. 1982, pp. 124.

¹² Gatimu, Wangeci. “Undermining critical consciousness unconsciously: Restoring hope in the multicultural education idea”. USA: Springer, 2008, pp. 48.

¹³ Epstein, Shira. “‘Who are your Friends?’ Complexities in Multicultural Education”. USA: Springer, 2009, pp. 42.

¹⁴ Ibid., 43

¹⁵ Ibid., 43

¹⁶ Zirkel, Sabrina. “50 Years After Brown v. Board of Education: The Promise and Challenge of Multicultural Education”. USA: Journal of Social Issues, Vol. 60, No. 1, 2004, pp. 1-15.

breaking the ethnical, cultural, religious, racial and politically conditioned barriers. This is how bridges are being built in the multicultural classroom and ultimately in the society. According to Bamford, it is the greatest importance of multicultural education.

“The issue of culture and the higher education classroom has been highlighted as significant (Arkoudis et al., 2013; Caruana, 2014; Trahar, 2010), and this “global” dimension to the classroom is also a topical discourse in terms of employment outcome (Watkins and Cseh, 2009). It is played out in the classroom, where the diverse backgrounds of students create an environment for additional learning that is still not being accessed by teachers, institutions or students (Bamford, 2014; Caruana, 2014). The social interactions between students can be viewed as a key part of the learning process and have been recognised as significant by those such as Pelletier (2009). Socio-cultural theory views learning as the process of participating in social interactions which provides students with the tools for autonomous thinking and problem solving. Lave (1993) writes that learning that leads to autonomy and a fuller community life cannot be identified in terms of single identifiable tools such as assigned tasks but lies in the relations amongst individuals – where individuals build resilience.”¹⁷

2.2. Student resilience as a tool for building bridges

The concept of resilience can have several meanings but it can be viewed only from one perspective. It means both elasticity and resistance from the perspective of facing and overcoming challenges. By definition, “resilience is the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances.”¹⁸ Other authors define resilience as “ability to recover rapidly from difficult situations” and “capacity to endure ongoing hardship in every conceivable way. The action or act of rebounding or springing back; the quality or fact of being able to recover quickly or easily from, or resist being affected by, a misfortune, shock, illness or as a basic strength underpinning positive characteristics within a person’s emotional and psychological makeup”¹⁹ The concept of resilience is also applicable to the sphere of education and especially when it comes to the multicultural classroom. By its very nature, that is, by mixing greater amount of diversities, the multicultural classroom inevitably poses greater challenges for the participating students, who will need to develop resilience in order to overcome them and thrive. This is how the concept of “resilience in education” came into being. According to Bamford, resilience in education means the „ability to thrive in the face of adversity”.²⁰ The importance of the concept of resilience in education can be seen best in connection with the multicultural classroom. It generates the greatest amount and intensity of challenges for the students, since besides just mingling students from different background, what the multicultural classroom does is expanding the previously culturally, ethnically, religiously and politically conditioned and limited worldviews of the students by breaking those barriers. The purpose is to create something greater on individual and collective level as well. This can be a painful and challenging process, which means that the students must be equipped with inner fortitude and properly guided by their teachers in order to develop resilience: it will serve as a tool for overcoming those barriers and thrive in the face of the challenge both personally and academically. Educational resilience is also

¹⁷ Bamford, Jan. et al. “I’ll do this no matter if I have to fight the world!”. USA: Journal for Multicultural Education, 2005, Vol. 9 Iss 3 pp. 140 - 158

¹⁸ Johnson, Bruce. “Teacher–student relationships which promote resilience at school: a micro-level analysis of students’ views”. UK: British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, 2008, 36:4, pp, 385-398.

¹⁹ Ploner, Josef. “Promoting student resilient thinking in diverse higher education learning environments”. UK: Research Gate, 2011, pp, 3.

²⁰ Bamford, Jan. et al. 2005, pp, 140-158.

defined as “the heightened likelihood of success in school and other life accomplishments despite environmental adversities brought about by early traits, conditions, and experiences. Categories of individual resilience or protective factors identified by researchers include social and academic competence, problem-solving skills, autonomy, and sense of purpose.”²¹ Besides the challenges presented by the multicultural classroom, other factors for building up student resilience are the supporting elements of the family, the teachers and the community itself. As a concept, it is structured on three levels. Those are “(...) individual attributes, family influences and cultural influences. Meanwhile, some authors extend this to include supporting family, supportive teachers, provision of opportunity to learn and participation in community activities. There are different ‘communities’ that students operate that support and enhance their learning experience.”²² This shows that the multicultural classroom and all that it provides by itself might not be sufficient to help students build resilience to the fullest. The teachers’ approach as well as the family and the community itself play important roles in this sense. Essentially, this is how the process of globalization influences the breaking of barriers and building of bridges in a top to bottom perspective, by the effects of the family, teachers and the community on the students themselves, and later, through the effects that the students of the multicultural will have on the society. Multicultural education is the tool by which the process of globalization breaks down barriers and builds bridges amongst students of different background and students’ resilience is the instrument that the multicultural education uses to influence the society as a whole. Ultimately, the gap between different cultures, ethnicities, religious and political groups can be narrowed down and, consequently, people are enabled to work for building greater levels of social justice, equality and inclusiveness in the society. Students’ resilience fundamentally comes as a response to the natural tendency of human beings to stick to what they identify themselves with. It’s a natural characteristic that *per se* cannot be considered as something negative. This is also the challenge in the multicultural classroom. According to Bamford, “(...) students have a tendency towards self-segregation and restricting their communications to those who are familiar with their own norms and rules of behaviour and that traversing different communities of practice needs to be encouraged in a much deeper way, as it aids in students developing as learners. The development of resilience or resilience traits was the key to “staying” the course or the “fight” to achieve success in the urban, culturally plural and diverse student communities.”²³ Separation or segregation noticed in the students’ behaviour essentially can be considered as the cradle of what we can define as tribalism and its supreme form nationalism, which brings up divisions between people that sometimes can take a problematic trajectory in the society. As long as there are divisions of this kind, humanity is bound to enter into conflict. Nowadays, it is less frequent than in the past, but still the enmity that can arise from difference is always present as long as there is difference without understanding. The process of globalization mitigated the animosity between different peoples largely and multicultural education might be one of its most powerful tools for increasing the levels of social consciousness. It can serve to build a global inclusive society. Student’s resilience plays a crucial part in this respect. “As we can see from Caruana’s (2014) analysis of the importance of developing resilience in relation to the development of cosmopolitanism, those from different cultures draw on resilience traits or resilient thinking to establish contact points with the host culture. Caruana also identifies that some cultural values can be positively linked to the development of resilience.”²⁴ The corollary of creating resilient students is the development of resilient thinking, which

²¹ Morrison, Gale & Megan Redding Allen. “Promoting Student Resilience in School Contexts, Theory Into Practice”, USA: 2009, 46:2, pp, 162-169.

²² Bamford Jan. et al. 2005, pp, 140-158.

²³ Ibid., 140-158.

²⁴ Ibid., 140-158

is essentially the mental instrument that breaks down the culturally, ethnically, religiously and politically conditioned personal barriers and foster the building of bridges among students and in the society in general. Namely, it is defined as “a form of ‘creative problem solving’, the capacity to be at once ‘flexible’ and ‘accurate’, the ability to see and consider different points of view and to continue with daily life despite obstacles. (...) resilient thinking encourages thinking in ways consistent with more sophisticated views of knowledge and knowing; it promotes the emerging formation and deconstruction of identities and the development of multiple perspectives (epistemic pluralism) that influence beliefs about the “dimensions of certainty and simplicity. Most importantly, resilient thinking implies that knowledge and knowing is always tentative and evolving, and requires thinking in terms of the non-continuities and uncertainties that messy real-world situations always entail.”²⁵

2.3. The ultimate goal: Culturally enriched globalization

Division in the human world is an inevitable consequence of our animal nature. This is how we identify each other; one cannot define oneself as a separate individual without the existence of another human being. In other words, one can be an individual only vis a vis other individuals, thus the division between myself and the other is based on identification with the body. Further, this becomes the case with families, tribes, ethnic groups and ultimately nations. However, our higher nature that is the human consciousness drives us towards unity since it recognizes itself in the other and considers both as part of the same species. The process of globalization is the grandest manifestation of this aspect of the human nature. It simultaneously recognizes diversity of cultures, ethnicities, nations and the unity of the same human species. In other words, “globalization strikes away the traditional nation concepts, spinning in local and national cultures of all peoples and accommodating them together in one single world. The development of human civilization from now on switches onto the track of mutual understanding, mutual acceptances and mutual confirmation.”²⁶ The process of globalization is closely related to multiculturalism. One can even say that they represent the two sides of the same coin. Globalization acknowledges the diversity in the world within the comprehensiveness of the human species by promoting multiculturalism that essentially advocates mutual understanding, respect, equality and social justice in the attempt to create a global inclusive society. According to Chen, “the essence of multiculturalism is cultural diversity and equality. It recognizes the fact of cultural differences and insists on the basic rights for all racial groups or communities. As a result, peoples of all races and places enjoy equal rights in social acceptance and understanding.”²⁷ The process of globalization alongside its offspring, multiculturalism, reshapes education as well. The concept of multicultural education comes into play, with the characteristics, qualities and aims of both globalization and multiculturalism. Again according to Chen, “multiculturalism advocates equality and fairness to school students of all races, different social classes, genders, and religions, and sees to it that every student enjoys equal opportunity in education, that their talents are brought to full play, and that tolerance and appreciation among them are encouraged and practiced. Hence, cultural differences are recognized and respected.”²⁸ In this way, the multicultural classroom is born where diversities meet. There, we learn how to understand, respect, live with one another and ultimately prosper together. Globalization and multiculturalism are reshaping the education system, whose result is the formation of scholars that facilitate the process of globalization by having sharper

²⁵ Ploner, Josef. 2005, pp, 5.

²⁶ Jian, S. Chen. “The epochal mission of multicultural education in a perspective of globalization”. China: Higher Education Press and Springer – Verlag, 2006, pp, 341-342.

²⁷ Ibid., pp, 345

²⁸ Ibid., pp, 345.

multicultural awareness, which drives them to encourage multiculturalism on any level and in any society. Multicultural education achieves this by „eliminating cultural bias and racial discrimination institutionally, and includes in the curriculum histories and cultures of all groups of different racial and ethical origins. It recognizes different learning patterns and communicating behaviours, and prepares the students to possess social critical awareness, reflection, and abilities in genuine practices.”²⁹ In other words, the crucial benefit of multicultural education is the formation of students’ resilience and resilient thinking. The students can use this competence in the society, each one in one’s own capacity and sphere of professional activities, and contribute to increase the general level of social consciousness in the nation and even in the world. It leads to a greater understanding between cultures, ethnicities and nations. Thereby, the multicultural students will be the stepping-stone towards building a global inclusive society where human beings will experience greater levels of social justice and equality. It requires the development of a human consciousness implying a change of the way we perceive and think about each other, which influences the way we behave toward those that are different from us in a narrow sense, and yet with us constitute the whole of humanity. The role of multicultural education is crucial in the sphere of politics because all the divisions in the society have political connotation, the extreme one being, according to Carl Schmitt, the distinction between friends and enemies, which is the main source of wars. This is precisely what the multicultural education is ultimately attempting to solve. Therefore, one can argue that multicultural education aims at teaching students to „show fair cross-cultural judgment and sensitive insights in time of cultural conflicts and collisions, and be able to take right actions and present right positions. (...) it helps people to learn to prevent conflicts, inhibit the breakout of wars, maintain peace, and make every endeavour for a better future. It relieves the tensions between nations, maintains stable social orders by means of mutual understanding of the people throughout the world, helps the national culture cope with global cultural conflicts, and enhances national culture progression by means of national culture transmission.”³⁰

3. *Conclusion*

The process of globalization is the outcome of our higher nature, human consciousness, which uses multiculturalism as an instrument to facilitate its own development. Multiculturalism essentially advocates mutual understanding and respect of diversity. Its most powerful tool in this sense is multicultural education. The multicultural classroom provides the necessary environment that generates the healthy challenges that the students need to face and overcome by developing resilience and resilient thinking that later will equip the new generations with the inner fortitude and a new mental instrument, each in its own capacity and sphere of professional activity to contribute to creating new social consciousness. This implies greater understanding of diversities that will enable the future generations to build a society where people can experience greater social justice, equality and inclusiveness, based on mutual understanding and respect of different cultures, ethnicities, religions and political affiliations as part of the same species. This is the main role of multicultural education. Its ultimate goal, than, is the “development of cultural diversity, mutual respect, and world peace in the current globalizing century”³¹. It is achieved by creating students’ resilience, which is the main instrument that will enable an inclusive and just global

²⁹ Ibid., pp, 347.

³⁰ Ibid., pp, 348.

³¹ Ibid., pp, 349.

human society where diversity is acknowledged, respected, cherished as part of the cultural richness of the human species as a whole.

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Multicultural Interaction and Communication: Modern Learning-Teaching Approaches for Developing the Social – Humanistic Content in Primary Education

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Abstract

The starting point for this paper is that the acquisition and mediation of effective multicultural communication skills as a new objective in modern language learning and teaching requires new methodological approaches. These methodological approaches need to offer a guide to curriculum development and structure, a means for students to progress through the material, and a way of checking to see if both the students and the content are achieving what is intended.

Multicultural education is becoming a necessary in the process of mutual understanding and mixing of different cultures. Due to this, there is a need for implementation in modern classroom. Therefore, the contents of the socio-humanistic area is an ideal basis for achieving this objective. Implementation of multicultural education implies openness to other cultures and perception of diversity as an opportunity for learning and contemporary classroom in the school as a place of everyday contacts between members of different ethnicities, cultures, religions and languages.

Multicultural communication implies acquisition of effective multicultural communication skills as a new target in modern learning and teaching. Also very important are the new didactic-methodological approaches in developing the content of the socio-humanistic area in primary education that could be offered a new guide for curriculum development.

The aim of this paper is to consider a range of complementary approaches that could be combined to bring about a concept of learning which is:

- up-to-date;
- compatible with current approaches to language learning methodology;
- tailored to the development of effective intercultural communication skills.

To address the above needs, it was necessary to make a research in the literature for methodological approaches that could inform practice from within the fields of multicultural educational practice, cross-cultural and multicultural research methodology, multicultural communication studies and educational pedagogy and psychology. As a result of that research, four diverse but complimentary approaches were selected and integrated into a teaching and learning framework.

Keywords: multicultural interaction, communication, social humanistic content

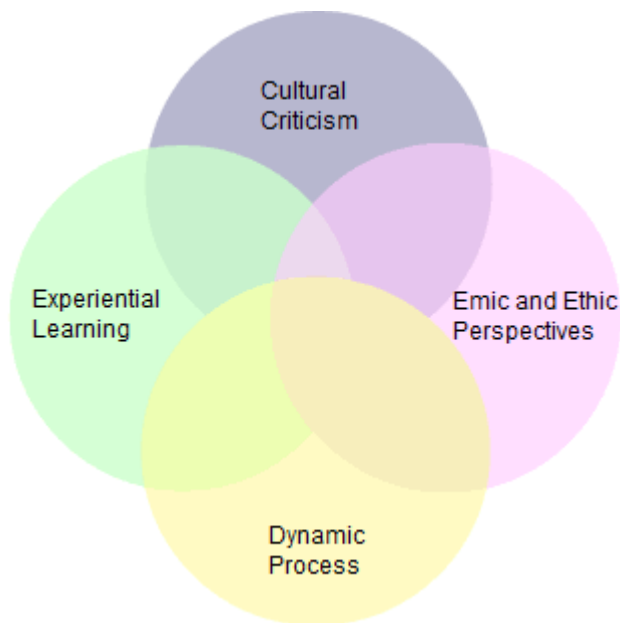
This paper deals with many questions that concern our education system: How to overcome the parallel education systems in the multicultural context of living? How to overcome the opposition of the two paradigms - individualism and globalism? How to train the young generations for a culturally plural perspective? Do the teachers have multicultural competencies? Etc.

Multiculturalism as an idea has become a necessity in our education system. The multicultural education needs to be implemented in the modern classroom in the process of learning about each other and the mixing of different cultures. The implementation of multicultural education includes openness to the culture of others and perception of the differences as a learning opportunity. The modern classroom in the school is a place of everyday interaction of the members of different ethnicities, cultures, religions and people who speak different languages. The syllabi in the social-humanistic area are rich with content of cultural context, thus making them a good basis for multicultural instruction. The following guidelines and beliefs are important for the implementation of the multicultural interaction:

- Multicultural instruction should be understood as a dynamic, changeable, developing and very complex process;
- The educational approaches for the development of the interpersonal, interactive and communication skills should include the personal and social development;
- The educational approaches should provide the students with different ways to deal with and analyze the wide range of cultural practices and knowledge, regardless of their status;
- The educational approaches should help the students to improve and better understand the processes in which people of different cultural backgrounds communicate and create a communication event;
- The educational approaches should create conditions for the students to analyze and scrutinize their challenges, identify any potential conflict areas, describe them according to their experience, recognize the potentials for developing relations, taking further actions, and the respective behavior.

Based on the experiences from the multicultural education theories and practices in the world, we detected and modeled the following four, diverse, yet complementary approaches, which can be integrated in the process of instruction, learning and teaching and can be successfully used in our education system:

- Cultural criticism;
- “Emic” and “ethic”;
- Dynamic process;
- Learning from experience.



Analysis: What can these approaches offer pedagogically wise?

The approach of cultural criticism

There are two basic viewpoints regarding the multicultural communication theory, research and practice. The advocates of these two viewpoints are called: cultural critics and cultural dialogists. This dichotomy represents two approaches related to the multicultural interaction and communication and the choice of methods for attaining the educational goals.

The advocates of the viewpoint of cultural criticism consider the cultural differences to be potential barriers: they support the understanding of these barriers and respect the differences. They promote the training for crossing the inevitable cultural gap. The term “critic” refers to the stressing of the critical or vital differences that can be the reason for a halt in the act of communication. The adequate methods for this approach explain, illustrate or exemplify cultural differences. Cultural criticism tries to locate the areas of conflict and identify the research matter in the transcultural interaction.

The activities of the teachers in the social-humanistic area should be focused on training the students to sense the differences. This approach is culturally specific and focused on a particular group. Some authors from this area stress the importance for internalizing the cultural similarities. For example, Brislin states that:

“The recognition of the similarities creates a base for interaction; the recognition of the differences creates a base for rejection from the group”.Brislin (1981: 60)

Also: Our similarity helps us understand each other and build harmony.

(Samovar, Porter, and Jain (1981))

I notice that in most of the classrooms and workshops, the difficulties in acquiring concepts and skills of intercultural communication are a result of the rejection of the cultural differences. They are not a result of lack of respect of similarity.

(Bennett 1993: 25)

In this context, the approach of similarities needs to be discussed for the following reasons:

1. Research on the cultural similarities can provide the teachers with another useful tool for exploring the culture at different levels.
2. Recognizing the cultural similarities can also help some students, especially the ones belonging to cultures in which the concept of cultural exclusivity is being taught to realize that individuals from different cultures can preserve the personal and individual values and perceptions that are similar to their own.
3. The common can overcome the national, group and individual cultural borders.

Another approach is offered by the cultural dialogists. The cultural dialogists explore the cross-cultural communication. They are focused on improving multicultural communication skills, on encouraging higher levels of self-awareness and cross-cultural awareness, as well as personal characteristics that would improve cross-cultural communication. The cultural dialogists promote internationalism, communication throughout the world and humanism. The activity of the dialogists is primarily focused on overcoming the differences and the approach is generally focused on culture.

Today in the area of multicultural education, it is impossible to use solely one approach. The views of the cultural critics, cultural dialogists and other multicultural educators is that no approach should be exclusively favored, but that many opportunities for methodological choices, each of which is adequate and productive for particular circumstances, contexts and the students, should be provided.

“Emic” and “ethic” approaches

Another angle of cultural study is offered by the “emic” and “ethic” approaches. Explained briefly, ‘the emic’ approach is focused on studying cultures from the inside. It tries to understand the cultures in the same way as the members of these cultures understand them. Contrary to this, ‘the ethic’ approach is focused on understanding the cultures from the outside, by comparing them while using previously defined characteristics. Both approaches are based on anthropological, sociolinguistic and ethnographic models of research. Brislin (1983) claims that the difference is currently used primarily as a metaphor of the differences between the culturally specific (emic, single culture) approach and the general-cultural (ethic, universal) approach of research. The table below determines the emic and the ethic approaches.

Emic and ethic approaches

Emic approach	Ethic approach
Studies behavior in the frames of the system.	Studies behavior outside of the system.
Studies a single culture	Studies many cultures by making comparisons.
Structure discovered by an analyst	Structure created by an analyst
Criteria referring to the internal characteristics	Criteria considered to be absolute or universal

Source: Berry, J.: (1980). "Introduction to the methodology". In H.K. Triandis and Berry, J. (editor). (1980) *Manual for Cross-cultural psychology* (T. 2: 1-28). Boston: Alin and Bacon.

To summarize, the "ethic" approach is general-cultural and it presumes that the cross-cultural comparisons may generate observational categories, which are useful for comparing a wide range of culture, whereas the "emic" approach explains how reality is organized in the frames of a cultural perspective.

Although the "emic" and "ethic" approaches are considered to be opposed, there are arguments that support their integration (Traindis 1972). Both approaches are sustainable in the study and influence of culture on the multicultural communication. Both the "emic" and the "ethic" approach are needed in order to develop a good understanding of the communication in the multicultural interaction in the social-humanistic area.

Dynamic process approach

The third approach refers to a process in which the students examine and characterize culture and communication as dynamic, complex constantly changeable, and consisting of several layers. The implication of this viewpoint regarding culture and communication is that in the realization of the content with cultural context in the social-humanitarian area the teachers need to provide the students with a way by which to access and analyze the wide spectrum of the cultural practices and knowledge, regardless of their status. This would be completely opposite to the approaches used thus far, which are focused on giving information about the society and its history, supported by a selection of notions referring to "everyday life". In order to replace this approach, the teachers will need to provide the students with tools for criticism, which will allow them to analyze the social processes and their results by developing their critical understanding on their own and other societies at three levels: national, group, and individual (Humphrey 1993). In this approach, culture is not considered a monolithic entity that determines the behavior of the individual or the group. Instead, it is considered a mix of personal, social, educational, ethical, national and international experiences from the communicative events of the individuals. Brookes emphasizes that in terms of the multicultural communication the teachers should:

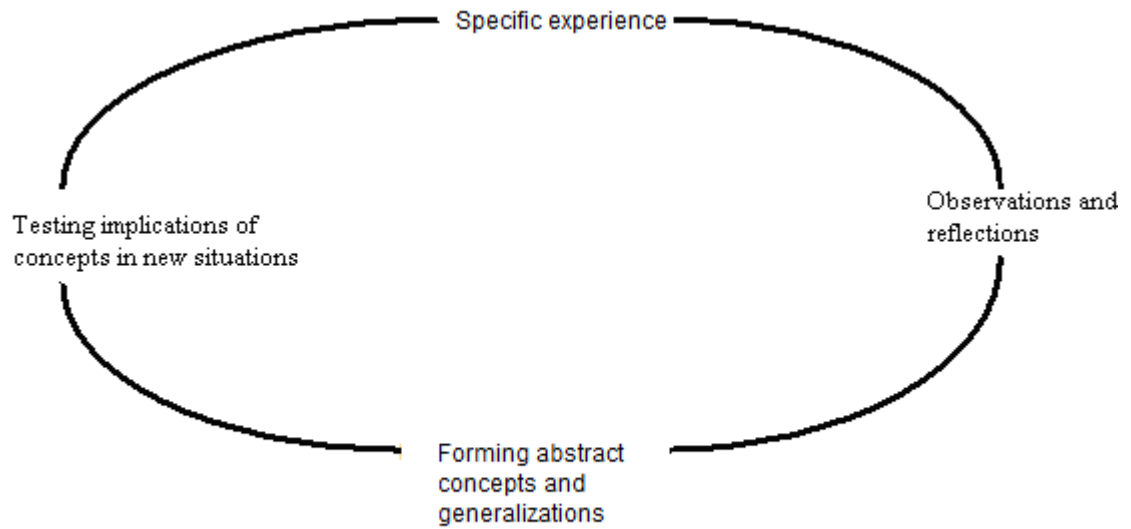
Never forget the importance of the individuals. If this happens, there will be danger of eliminating the expression of the individuals in the challenges they face. (Brookes 1968: 11).

This approach towards culture is completely different from the one towards great cultures. In this approach, the cultures are dynamic, complex, constantly changing and with multiple layers. By using this approach for resolving multicultural matters and studying multicultural communication, we can avoid simplistic ethnic, national and international cultural explanations that offer only one possible layer in an exceptionally complex multi-layer scenario.

Experiential learning approach

Multicultural learning includes experiential learning. It is not sufficient to only read books about culture, to listen to lectures about cultures, or to deal with the subject exceptionally at a cognitive and intellectual level. It is necessary for the individual to experience and face new unknown situations, feel insecurity, fear, rejection, as well as safety, trust, and empathy. It is also necessary to learn from people belonging to other cultures. This concept is based on Kolb's cycle of experiential learning (1984). It is a

circular movement starting from a specific experience, followed by an observation and reflections about the experience. These observations and reflections are assimilated in a theory from which new implications for taking action are formulated. Such implications or hypotheses are subsequently used to indicate new experiences.



Kolb's description of the learning cycle (Kolb and Fry 1975)

Kolb (1984) claims that if we want the cycle to be efficient, the learning activities need to cover the cognitive, affective and behavioral dimensions of the learning process. In this process, cognitive learning stimulates understanding of the experience through reflection. The reflection covers all affective dimensions of the learning process (for example, perception, assessment, re-evaluation) and can create the conditions that for the acquired experience to be implemented in future activities and behavior (behavioral dimension).

The experiential learning is primarily based on a specific group of values, such as focusing on the student, the teacher being just a mediator, and learning through activity, verbalization, interaction, self-discovery and work in small groups.

Conclusion

We suggest that the four approaches are combined and integrated in the processes of learning and teaching. This would be a frame that could provide a basis for planning an efficient study syllabus. The frame is important because it can be a guideline for the teacher in the maze of information, material and activities. It can help in the development of a coherent syllabus that is consistent and complementary and where the desired results of the learning reflect the teaching objectives. The frame also provides the teachers with a wide range of choice of methods that can be used in the classroom. It also provides balance in the viewpoints referring to the syllabus, for example: the "emic" and the "ethic", the national, group and individual. In this way the recognition of the different viewpoints is emphasized, "the insecurity" of knowledge and the different interpretations of the existing information. Finally, it provides something that can be the most efficient educational tool for an unhindered flow of the learning process.

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Higher Education in Emergencies: The Case of Consociational North Macedonia

Francesco Bigagli

Abstract

Eighteen years after the end of 2001 conflict between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians, North Macedonia remains a country deeply polarized along ethno-national lines with implications for the maintenance of peace. The peace-building policies introduced by the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA) based on a consociational model of power-sharing have accommodated the demands of ethnic Albanians, including the right of access to higher education (HE) in the mother-tongue which represented one of the root-causes in the escalation of the 2001 conflict. The OFA's exclusive focus on access and availability through state funding for higher education in the Albanian language has however favored a process of ethnicization of the tertiary sector. This paper seeks to investigate the unintended consequences of the OFA-induced ethnic self-ghettoisation within the public higher education system and, by the same token, it critiques the OFA's lack of mechanisms to reach across the ethnic divide through the lenses of a rights-based approach to education. It ultimately argues that without a strong governmental commitment to deethnicize education by transcending the OFA's intrinsic limits, power-sharing remains permeable to political manipulation which critically hampers social transformation and increases the probability of inter-ethnic tension, further weakening the peace process.

Keywords: *Higher education; education and peace-building; education and international development; North Macedonia.*

Introduction

For many decades a low priority sector in the context of post-conflict humanitarian relief and development, higher education is gradually drawing attention from policy-makers, practitioners and researchers as a catalyst for economic and social recovery (World Bank, 2000; Milton & Barakat, 2016; Millican 2018; Milton 2018). As a positional good providing “unparalleled access to the best paid and most rewarding forms of employment” (McCowan, 2012, p. 117), quality higher education can play a pivotal role in increasing economic returns, strengthening social mobility and status, and can potentially contribute to peacebuilding and social transformation by tackling horizontal inequalities that are often at the heart of inter-ethnic conflicts due to significant disparities in access to the tertiary level; often resulting in elite stratification within distinct communities and exclusion of vulnerable groups from social and public life (Buckland, 2005; Millican 2018). Yet in war-affected and ethnically-divided societies, the role of universities for peacebuilding and conflict transformation largely depends on the appropriateness and long-term strategic vision of policies and programmes to ensure a positive impact on the dynamics of conflict (Milton, 2018). As Milton (2018) contends, “without a strategic approach to recovery” support to higher education can bring about “more harm than good” (p. 179).

Through the lenses of a rights-based approach to education, this paper seeks to investigate the unintended consequences of the peace-building policies introduced by the ratification of the Ohrid Framework Agreement in North Macedonia almost two decades on from the end of the inter-community conflict between ethnic Albanians and ethnic Macedonians. Based on a consociational model of power-sharing, the OFA accommodated the demands of ethnic Albanians, including the right of access to higher education (HE) in the mother-tongue which represented one of the root-causes in the escalation of the 2001 conflict (Czapliński, 2008). While it prevented an escalation of the conflict into a full scale civil war, it has been argued that the OFA had not only failed to introduce mechanisms geared towards building social cohesion but it had rather contributed to reinforcing ethno-cultural divisions along territorial and linguistic lines, resulting in the deepening of stereotypes, intolerance and lack of trust between the two dominant nations (Fontana, 2017; OFA Review on Social Cohesion, 2015; European Commission, 2018).

In recent years, research has mostly focused on the consequences of educational decentralization at school level in North Macedonia. Both Lyon (2011, 2013) and Fontana (2017) have argued that the school system largely reflects the consociational structures and narratives of power along “mutually exclusive communities” reproducing pre-conflict cleavages and tensions (Fontana, 2017, p. 280). However, a comprehensive study on the unintended effects of higher education in the mother-tongue in North Macedonia has yet to appear. This is particularly pertinent given the prominent role of higher education in conflict causation and the strong focus on equality of access established by the OFA. The main research question seeks to explore whether access to higher education in the mother-tongue has effectively functioned as a conduit for peace-building and/or whether a univocal focus on access and availability has perhaps served as a (political) tool to cement divisions and reproduce ethnic nationalism along the Yugoslav “separate but equal” policies.

Current State of an Ethnically Divided Nation

On February 13, 2019, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia officially became North Macedonia (NM) putting an end to a decades-long dispute with neighboring Greece over the name row (The Economist, 2019, January 17). While observers contend that the deal will bring stability to a “region that still has pockets of uncertainty” (Erlanger, 2019, February 6), its ratification continues to trigger social unrest led by the Macedonian nationalist party, VMRO; which was removed from power in 2017 after a sustained political crisis resulting from revelations of corruption by the former Prime Minister (Marusic, 2017, May 22). A coalition Government comprised of the ethnic Albanian DUI and the left-wing Macedonian party, SDSM, took office in May 2017 (Marusic, 2017, May 31). This was in the aftermath of what analysts consider the most severe democratic setback since the 2001 conflict between Macedonian forces and the ethnic-Albanian National Liberation Army (NLA): On April 27, 2017, 200 nationalists broke into the Parliament as a reaction to the election of the first Albanian speaker of the Assembly and the formation of the new ruling majority, perceived as a threat to the interests of ethnic Macedonians (European Commission, 2018, p. 7; The New York Times, 2017, April 27); that is, the Macedonian-speaking Orthodox majority in the country that accounts to 64% of its 2.6 million population versus 25% represented by the Albanian-speaking Muslim community (State Statistical Office [SSO], 2002 Census).¹ Most recently, ethnic tensions flared up during the course of a retrial against 33 ethnic Albanians accused to have been involved in a two-day shootout in June 2016 against Macedonian security forces. The defendants contend to have been the victims of a political set-up by the VMRO (Balkan Insight, 2019, May 16).

After almost two decades from the finalization of the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA), which ended the 2001 conflict by introducing a consociational democracy through territorial decentralization and extended rights for the Albanian-speaking minority, amid a deteriorating economy and high unemployment, especially amongst youth at 46% (EC, 2018), the political climate continues to be fraught with tensions between ethnic-based parties that find their *raison d'être* in the politicization of ethnonational cleavages (Terry, 2017; Fontana, 2017) with implications for the country's fragile inter-ethnic environment (EC, 2018). A 2008 UNDP report indicates that 60% of Macedonians and 50% of Albanians respectively attribute the responsibility for fuelling ethnic tension to parties belonging to the opposing communit

1. Turks, Roma and Serbs represent smaller minorities.

(p. 63). The report also highlights that the two largest communities have different visions and sense of belonging to their country (p. 64).² Civil society representatives have repeatedly warned against deepening polarization. As Kosturanova, Head of the Youth Educational Forum, maintains: “Macedonia is a deeply polarized society, where citizens are being divided based on their ethnicity, language, religion, gender, political views” (The New York Times, 2017, June 1). The ethnic polarization encompasses all aspects of life: For instance, just 37% of Macedonians have professional relations with people from a different ethnic background. The percentage is slightly higher amongst Albanians. Social life is also polarized and media outlets are rigidly divided by languages (UNDP, 2008, pp. 60-61). The degree of ethnic separation is particularly striking amongst youth and, more specifically, in the education sector, including HE (EC, 2018; OFA Review, 2015). A 2009 UNICEF study highlights that in consociational North Macedonia a “model of parallelism and separation has been followed rather than a model of integration” (2009). The next section gives an overview

of the language and education reforms as stipulated in the OFA as these continue to shape the inter-ethnic landscape with implications for the maintenance of peace.

Education and Language Reforms in Consociational North Macedonia

From 2005, the responsibility for a number of public services, *imprimis* basic education, had been entirely assigned to municipalities (Lyon, 2013) in accordance with the OFA which stipulated, *inter alia*, extended linguistic/cultural rights to persons belonging to non-majority communities, with an emphasis on access to education in the mother-tongue given the importance of education for conveying aspects of a group cultural identity (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000). The OFA not only reiterated the right of access to primary and secondary education in the mother tongue, a provision of the Yugoslav “separate but equal” policies which “fixed and crystallized ethno-cultural nations and were deliberately constructed as belonging to particular ethno-cultural nations” (Brubaker, 1996, p. 4) but introduced a principle of positive discrimination in the enrolments of minorities in State universities and prescribed publicly funded access to higher education in the Albanian language, considered as key conflict drivers (Czapliński, 2008; Bacevic, 2014). The OFA also established Albanian as an official language in addition to Macedonian in areas where ethnic Albanians make up at least 20% of the population. In January 2019, a new law that extends the use of the Albanian language across the country has come into force despite the refusal by the President to sign it and the fierce opposition of the VMRO claiming its unconstitutionality (Marusic, 2019, January 18). Ethnic Albanians see this as the last remaining stipulation of the OFA although strong disagreements with the VMRO over the interpretation of the normative provision remains (OFA Review, 2015). As Fontana (2017) argues, the education and language reforms have come to epitomize the new power relationship between ethnic Macedonians and the ethnic Albanian minority,

2. The status of Kosovo is seen by ethnic Albanians in North Macedonia as their political priority.

Who had been mobilizing for greater collective and political rights since the country gained independence from Belgrade in 1991 and embarked in a predominantly mono-ethnic project of state nation-building, essentially through the preeminence of the Macedonian language (Bacevic, 2014).

While the introduction of a single official language is traditionally used as a nation-building (and nation-maintenance) tool to guarantee national cohesion, reinforce participation in public life and, ultimately, as a precondition to the integration of diverse groups (Deen & Romans, in Ulasiuk, 2018), there is always a risk that language can be employed as a means of domination to preserve the privileges of the majority group in society (Horowitz, 1985); resulting into a “nation-destroying process” (Walker, 1972) with the formation of antagonistic and profoundly resilient “minority nation-building” stances (Kymlicka, 2001, p. 233) that could work counter the exclusive state policies and lead to conflict and/or enduring tensions. This is because language constitutes one of the key “markers” of ethno-national identities and, by extension, not only any perceived threat to a particular language, both within and outside the education system, is construed as a threat to the survival of a group identity (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000) but language symbolizes the “worth and status of the community that speaks it” (Horowitz, p. 219). As Horowitz explains, if “the demand for a single official language reflects the desire for a tangible demonstration of preeminence, so linguistic parity is transparent code for equality” (p. 220). And yet, the question is whether improved language access and (educational) decentralization correlate with improved integration and cohesion.

This is because a focus on access alone as a quantitative indicator in the measurement of progress does not necessarily translate into a more cohesive society. Access to education alone, for instance, does not, per se, fulfill the right to education. The conditions in which education takes place, the quality of education as well as the capacity of educational institutions to prepare graduates for political, economic and social life are equally important categories (Tomaševski, 2001; McCowan, 2011). As a result of educational decentralization, UNICEF (2009) reports a decline by more than 10% of “mixed schools” (under whose roof children are still ethnically split by language or taught in different shifts/buildings) in the 2001-2009 period and an increase in the number of monolingual ones (p. 7). UNDP (2008) indicates a reluctance to send children to a mixed school amongst 69% of ethnic Macedonians and 42% of Albanians (p. 61). Higher education has also expanded dramatically in consociational North Macedonia: In 1994-1995, only 1.95% of graduates were ethnic Albanians against 19% in the 2014-2015 period (Muhic & Memeti, 2016). The expansion, however, has occurred only along ethno- cultural and territorial lines with newly founded Universities delivering instruction exclusively in Albanian or Macedonian. Arguably, if increased access to mother tongue-based education can help preserve cultural identities and settle ethnic grievances, it can also contribute to cementing boundaries between groups along ethno-national identities in the absence of inter- communal points of contact and shared values (Preece, 2005); ultimately leaving little to no margin for “other ways of being and other forms of politics” (Finlay, in Fontana, 2017, p. 33) other than identity politics. An OSCE study (2010) indicates a high level of adversity between Albanian and Macedonian students with nearly half of their school teachers appearing to have made derogatory remarks against the other community in their classroom. A review report on the implementation of the OFA (OFAR, 2015) takes stock of the increasing lack of cohesion, spreading of negative stereotypes, intolerance and mistrust between the two dominant nations.

As Fontana (2017) contends, the emergence of a “parallel” education system can result in the development of a sense of belonging of one group against another (and even against the State) and education is often used in deeply divided societies as a “gatekeeping” tool by manipulative ethnic mobilisers to nurture exclusive identities and challenge the legitimacy of other groups’ discourses (p. 42). Higher education is not free from attacks and manipulations due to its relevant political role. As Milton (2018) claims, higher education is not only often perceived as a hotbed of political radicalism (i.e., through student activism, production of critiques against the status quo) but can become a “focal point” of ethnic mobilization (p. 90). The next section provides an account of the role played by HE in the escalation of the 2001 conflict and how the HE landscape has changed since. The historical context vis-à-vis the current situation is deemed relevant to the scope of this paper.

The Role of Higher Education in Conflict Causation

Analysts argue that the problem of access to HE in the mother-tongue represented one of the main drivers in the process of ethnic mobilization during the ‘90s by ethnic Albanians (Czapliński, 2008; Bacevic, 2014). As Czapliński (2008) claims, citing the then OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), Max van der Stoel, “He believed that the solution to the problem of Albanian language HE was a prerequisite for achieving progress in other aspects of minority rights and, after it had been addressed, it would be much easier to move on other issues” (p. 218). While mother tongue-based schooling was guaranteed by the Constitution, higher education was exclusively delivered in Macedonian (Bacevic, 2014). According to Czapliński (2008), the widespread inability to speak the state language and discriminatory practices on the grounds of ethnicity, resulted in great disparities in access to HE among

ethnic Albanians in the '90s. This, in turn, hindered access to employment opportunities, representation in decision-making institutions and was perceived as a threat to Albanians' longing to become a constituent nation.

As Silva (1978) declares, in the context of multicultural societies, ethnic communities tend to measure the level of discrimination and equality on the number of university enrollments (in Milton, 2018). While some ethnic Albanians would pursue HE in Kosovo (Czapliński, 2008), the banning of Albanian at the University of Prishtina in the '90s, as part of Milošević's strategy to restrain Kosovo-Albanians' mobilization for independence, put a stop to this trend (Kostovicova, 2005). This paved the way for the creation, in 1994, of the (illegal) Albanian-language University of Tetovo (UT), on the north Macedonian border with Kosovo and epicenter of the 2001 conflict, perceived by the Government of Macedonia as a hotbed of ethnic Albanian separatism with links to the NLA (Czapliński, 2008). On the 17th of February, 1995, to prevent the start of classes, Macedonian forces opened fire on students killing one (Ackerman, 1999). This ignited a spiral of inter-ethnic violence and prompted the direct involvement of the HCNM who sought to resolve the problem of access to HE in the Albanian language by proposing the establishment of a trilingual (Albanian, Macedonian and English) higher education provider in the town of Tetovo: South East European University (Czapliński, p. 88). Often referred to as a "peacekeeping university" (EUA, 2018, p. 4), South East European University (SEEU) was conceived as a key social agent in supporting peace-building and rapprochement efforts (Czapliński, 2008; Bacevic, 2014). In line with the newly adopted Law on HE (2000), which consented teaching in minority languages by private providers (Czapliński, 2008), the SEEU project was accepted by all political camps in June 2000.³ However, the Kosovo crisis (1999) acted as a catalyst for renewed violence across Macedonia delaying the opening of SEEU until September 2001 in the aftermath of the OFA. As a 2004 OECD report indicates, 2303 ethnic Albanians enrolled in the first two years at SEEU, "thus, virtually at a stroke, the total current participation rate of Albanian students in higher education rose to 9%" (p. 20). Ironically, while the SEEU proposal purported to guarantee access to HE in Albanian, the OFA "had created the conditions to pursue the old agenda of Albanian political parties" (Bacevic, 2014, p. 192) precisely by prescribing publicly funded access to higher education in the Albanian language. As a result, the University of Tetovo, located within a short walk from SEEU, was legalized in 2004. A decade later, another public Albanian-language institution, Mother Theresa University (MTU), was established.

In recent years, research has mostly focused on the consequences of educational decentralization at school level in NM. Both Lyon (2011, 2013) and Fontana (2017) have argued that the school system largely reflects the consociational structures and narratives of power along "mutually exclusive communities" reproducing pre-conflict cleavages and tensions (Fontana, 2017, p. 280). However, a comprehensive study on the unintended effects of HE in the mother-tongue in NM has yet to appear. While often "neglected" (Milton) as a sector in development, recent research shows that HE can not only contribute to economic recovery after conflict but could play a role in peace-building and conflict transformation (Millican, 2018; Milton, 2018; Milton & Barakat, 2016). This is particularly the case for NM given the prominent role of HE in conflict causation and the strong focus on equality of access established by the OFA. However, the question is whether access to HE in the mother-tongue is per se conducive to sustain peace and/or whether a univocal focus on access has perhaps served as a (political) tool to cement divisions and reproduce ethnic nationalism along the Yugoslav "separate but equal" policies.

³In line with the HE Law (2000), SEEU was conceived as a private not-for-profit provider. Its status changed to private-public in 2008 and currently receives 20% of its funding through the State.

The Ethnicization of Higher Education

In line with the OFA, non-majority students have the right to study in their mother-tongue at all levels of education with the State language (Macedonian) being introduced at fourth grade. Data shows that 64,51% of pupils at primary level study in Macedonian, 32,17% in Albanian, and the rest in Turkish (3,05%) and Serbian (OFAR, 2015). For a total of 346 primary schools, 247 are mono-lingual and the rest bilingual or trilingual (p. 171). Similarly, at secondary level, 66, 89% of children learn in Macedonian, 29,26% in Albanian, 2,01% in Turkish and 0,26% in Serbian for a total of 103 schools. Although a quarter of schools (primary and secondary) are bilingual or trilingual, only 13% of these have students de facto studying under the same roof (Bakiu & Dimitrova, 2016). This is because in the so-called ‘mixed schools’ pupils attend classes in detached buildings or different shifts with little to no interaction among different ethnic groups (ibid.). This is particularly relevant in the case of ethnic Macedonian and Albanian children who study in an ethnically mixed environment but rarely have contact with each other. According to the OSCE (2010), “one third of children (i.e., 30% Macedonian and 35% Albanian) claim that they have mutual contact outside of the classroom environment and if they do is mostly not out of personal initiative” (p. 20). In a nutshell Macedonian and Albanian students study in their mother tongue and almost all Roma and Serbian students attend classes in Macedonian. While the majority of Turkish students study in Turkish, a large percentage of them follow instruction in Macedonian (UNICEF, 2009). Albanian students are therefore the most isolated with respect to other ethnic communities. However, the degree of ethnic separation is mostly pronounced at higher education level. This section addresses the peace-building implications of ethnic self-ghettoisation exclusively within the public HE system and challenges the OFA’s exclusive access-oriented policy in this regard.

The country has five fully publicly funded universities that provide teaching predominantly in Macedonian, except for teacher training faculties where instruction in minority languages is consented (Law on HE, 2008, art. 103), or Albanian; as the law requires taking Macedonian as a separate subject in addition to two other courses delivered in the state language within Albanian-language institutions (art. 103). A look at graduate rates, disaggregated by ethnicity, from public HE institutions, provides an idea of the level of “voluntary self-segregation” (Lijphart, in Fontana, 2018, p. 33): In 2017, the number of ethnic Albanians that graduated from the three largest public Macedonian-language institutions, that is, the University of Skopje (UKIM), Bitola and Shtip, represented respectively 7,4% (of which 60% studied at the Faculties of Philology/Pedagogy which deliver instruction in Albanian), 1,6% and 0,58% compared to 85,19%, 91,7% and 94% of ethnic Macedonians against the total number of graduates which includes other smaller minorities (SSO, 2019). Although there is no data available for the newly established Mother Theresa University, ethnic Macedonians that completed their studies at the University of Tetovo in 2017 represented 4,3% of its total graduates against 82,66% comprised of ethnic Albanians. Considering the predominantly Albanian-inhabited region of Tetovo, SEEU, a private-public provider, represents a significant exception in terms of ethnic heterogeneity: In 2017, 67,84% of its graduates were ethnic Albanians vis-à-vis 14,50% of ethnic Macedonians with a remaining 17,66% comprised of Turks, Roma, Serbs and Albanian-language students from neighboring countries, mainly Albania and Kosovo (SSO, 2019). Clearly, while HE for ethnic Albanians is both publicly available and accessible, the question is whether graduates from ethnic universities are being

prepared for social, political and economic participation and, most importantly, if this leads to improved social cohesion. As noted, despite an exponential increase in the number of enrollments amongst ethnic Albanians, signaling a consistent demand for HE and political commitment to fulfill it (Fontana, 2017), the institutional “ethnicization” of higher education risks reinforcing ethnic identities and further divisions between groups. Besides, while evidence shows that an increase in HE enrollments amongst minorities can lower the chances of a relapse into conflict, the creation of a “youth bulge” with no employment prospects and/or perceived employment/income inequalities can generate new grievances and lead to inter-ethnic tension (Milton, 2018, pp. 94-95). In this regard, the OFAR (2015) indicates that ethnic Albanians are still under-represented within both “budgetary institutions” and the public sector (pp. 19-20). Terry (2017) contends that the “Macedonia’s ethnic-political system has resulted in many jobs being restricted to ruling party elites and loyalists, who have predominantly been ethnic Macedonians” (p. 73). Terry further maintains that the lack of connections with the parties in power constitute a barrier for minorities. Albanians also continue to earn less than Macedonians with a monthly average of 165 versus 350 Euros (pp. 73-74). The necessity to bridge the ethnic divide should therefore be regarded as a national priority.

While “structural diversity” does not necessarily translate into the development of meaningful contact with the other (Allport, 1979, p. 276; Gurin, Dey & Hurtado, 2002), it is a prerequisite to create opportunities for interaction that could, if well administered by relevant institutions, foster mutual understanding and acceptance (Allport, 1979, Feuer, Hornidge & Schetter, 2013). In short, “contact is good, and the more of it the better” (Hughes, in Fontana, 2018, p. 230). Kymlicka (1995) argues that multination states must ensure that its citizens respect diversity as much as the “particular ethnic groups and national cultures with whom they currently share the country” in order to guarantee stability (p. 191). The North Macedonian education system, however, seems to support existing segmental cleavages by defying the “practices of recognition of difference” (Jenson, 1998, p. 16) which educational institutions, including HE, should implement through the promotion of a sense of belonging.

4This 4% could be represented by Muslim Macedonians or Torbeši, a community in the Tetovo region fluent in Macedonian, Albanian and Turkish (Dikici, 2008).based on inclusion and shared beliefs. A commitment to the values of diversity as part of identity formation processes in deeply divided societies is especially relevant at HE level, in the years between adolescence and adulthood, that is, when youngsters’ “sense of personal and social identity is formed” on the basis of similarities with and differences from their peers (Gurin et al, 2002, pp. 334-335). As Gurin et al (2002) maintain, the experience of diversity is particularly influential and thus conducive to the formation of inclusive identities when the social background of higher education substantially differs from students’ community and house environments. In addition, as McCowan (2012) contends, besides its “positional and instrumental benefits” (p. 117), HE has the potential to play a role in “developing criticality” (p. 118). That is, in building the capacity for independent thinking which feeds into a better understanding of oneself and the Other by challenging “established truths and decode and resist the messages of power-holders and violent ideologues” (Schendel, in Millican, 2018, p. 50).

In this sense, universities could be uniquely positioned to support peace-building processes as traditionally heterogeneous spaces of civic socialization and through their intrinsic role in fostering independent thinking since the subject-specific curriculum would represent, with the exception of specific courses (e.g., peace education), a less viable avenue to promote tolerance (Feuer et al, 2013). As Milton and Barakat (2016) put it, while primary education is essentially formative, “higher education has the

possibility to be transformative” (p. 414). However, higher education can also operate counter conflict transformation by strengthening the social roots of conflict through, for instance, the presence of negative ethnic stereotypes in textbooks or the attitude of faculty members geared towards the exclusion or belittlement of minorities. The employment of teacher-centered pedagogies and rote-learning methodologies that stifle students’ initiative and creativity can also undermine peace-building efforts by making students more vulnerable to political manipulation (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000; Milton, 2018). The lack of opportunities to engage with diversity on campus also affects the quality of the educational experience while inhibiting the chances to “mediate the identity bases of conflict” (Milton & Barakat, 2017, p. 415). In the context of Macedonia, as Muhic (2017) contends, “universities can be an important channel through which to promote social cohesion (. . .) Thus, if education policy is not sensitive to the issue of social cohesion and does not incorporate the perspectives of a variety of communities, it can divide and alienate non- majority communities” (p. 21). In this regard, recent reports by the European University Association address the need to enhance student-centered learning across all Macedonian public monolingual institutions and strengthen higher order thinking and life skills to promote students’ critical and communicative abilities (EUA: 2017a, p. 17; 2017b, p. 21; 2017c, pp. 20-21; 2017d, pp. 17-18). The ethnicization of higher education represents, nevertheless, a dangerous element of the “hidden curriculum” (Apple, 2004) by undermining students’ ability to develop a critical perspective on society while strengthening prejudices and encouraging identity politics. As Allport (1979) claims, “segregation markedly enhances the visibility of a group; it makes it seem larger and more menacing that it is” (p. 269).⁵

Although diversity could be experienced through specific curricular content, evidence suggests that without a direct exchange of ideas with the Other, this could even have negative effects on students’ development (Gurin et al, 2002). Muhic and Memeti (2016) claim that while North Macedonia's public higher education providers offer courses in multiculturalism, delivered as electives mainly across pedagogical faculties, the lack of cultural competence among faculty is worrisome. As Muhic (2017) maintains, whenever faculty incorporate topics about diversity in their subjects, they do so in an “unstructured and non-critical way” which could result in reinforcing existing stereotypes by “trivializing” ethnic cultures (p. 22). Significantly, ethnic prejudice seems most prominent amongst students from ethnically homogeneous campuses (Muhic & Memeti, 2016). The lack of heterogeneity among staff within ethnic universities (Muhic, 2007) and the absence of any kind of cooperation with providers from the ‘opposing’ community (OFAR, 2015) ultimately characterize North Macedonia's public higher education institutions as ethnic cloisters and incubators of “national identity-based projects” (Bacevic, p. 192) that could hamper conflict transformation by acting as “perpetrators of conflictual identities” (Milton & Barakat, 2016, p. 414) rather than promoters of mutual ones based on shared fundamental values (i.e., respect for the rule of law, tolerance, common vision/sense of belonging).

The OFA’s “just” vision of multicultural North Macedonia: A path to national dis-integration?

The issue with the OFA’s “just” vision of the North Macedonian society”, to use Kymlicka’s terminology (2002, p. 16), based on consociational power-sharing, is simply that it does not encourage integration (Bacevic, 2014). With regard to education, for instance, to recall Tomaševski, an exclusive focus on availability/access does not fulfill the right of education which must take into account the importance of quality, including the conditions in which education is delivered, and the ability of institutions to adapt to changing social circumstances. Critics of the OFA and, by extension,

consociationalism, argue that while it contributed to prevent a worsening of the conflict and secure peace, at least in the short term, it has achieved that at the expenses of inter-ethnic cohesion (Lyon, 2015) as it basically relies on the “division it is supposed to solve” (McGarry & O’Leary, in Fontana, 2018, p. 37). As Fontana (2016) contends, if (educational) decentralization can contribute to “conferring legitimacy to a peace process by eroding inequalities and promote social mobility” while ensuring the protection of distinctive identity markers, mother-tongue education can also weaken conflict transformation by “isolating communities” (p. 859) and limit their “access to equal participation in society” (Freedland & Patrick, 2004, p. 1); especially in the absence of mechanisms to bridge the inter-ethnic gap - which the OFA had essentially failed to establish while substantiating and thus strengthening the Yugoslav “separate but equal” policies,- and ethnic divisions have had a profound impact on the collapse of Yugoslavia and regional conflicts (Hammel, 2010).

Where there is a perceived opposition to the state language. In 2007, the ethnic Albanian Minister of Education, introduced English from first grade while deferring the study of Macedonian, in which Albanians still struggle to express themselves, from first to fourth grade (in Fontana, 2017, p. 211). This controversial shift is symptomatic of the degree of political instrumentalization with repercussions on education which remains at risk of political influence (EU, 2018). It could also be argued that since North Macedonia's accession into the EU is evaluated on the basis of the implementation of the OFA, there is fertile ground for political manipulation.⁶ This is because lawmakers may be “contented when they have strictly followed the rules that a limited interpretation of the rights impose on them” (Robeyns, 2006, p. 78) fulfilling, perhaps, a hidden political objective aiming at separation rather than integration. Robeyns maintains that governments are, in some cases, “part of the problem, rather than part of the solution” (p. 77). In this regard, Lyon (2015) warns of the influence of North Macedonian municipal officials who contribute to mobilize local ethnic identities around the idea that mixing in educational institutions is not safe in order to secure electoral consensus (p. 107). According to Fontana (2017), the failure of the MoE’s Strategy for Integrated Education (2010), formulated to address the fragmentation of the education system, was essentially due to a lack of political will on both sides.

Arguably, if the right of access to HE in Albanian contributed to ending the 2001 conflict, the presence of ghettoized campuses and lack of instruments to promote rapprochement, undermines the significance of what Robeyns (2006) terms “the personal and collective instrumental social roles of education” (p. 74) and, in turn, the possibility of engineering a social change. As Tomaševski (2003) explains, “education should prepare learners for parenthood and political participation, it should enhance social cohesion and, more than anything, it should teach the young that all human beings - themselves included - have rights” (p. 33). This is because a right cannot be fulfilled without the “active, meaningful and critical participation” (Coysh, 2014, p. 109) of rights-holders. A “rights-based approach to development” (RBAD) relies on mutual responsibilities between those accountable to protect and promote people’s rights (duty-bearers) and rights-holders as key agents in the process of social change. However, if the fulfillment of a right arguably constitutes the goal of a RBAD, “the quality, legitimacy and sustainability of the outcome depends on the process used to achieve it” (Gready and Ensor, 2005, pp. 9-10). A ‘myopic’ interpretation of the OFA’s rights- based educational policies, exclusively based on access/availability, which has essentially failed in creating an intercultural environment based on shared civic values and intellectual autonomy, could therefore hinder the setting in motion of the process itself precisely as it does not only confines communities to an “imposed locality” (Roter & Busch, in Ulasiuk, 2018, p. 175) but constrains individuals within fixed group

identities which limit and/or influence their right to freely express their views or make decisions for themselves with serious.

See Art. 8e of the EU Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (1992).

Implications for the future of democracy. A failure to fully comprehend educational rights, “in conjunction with other rights” (i.e., civil, political, economic; McCowan, 2011, pp. 290-291; Tomaševski, 2001), therefore makes education no longer a “key empowerment right” (Coomans, 2007, p. 184) or “a good thing” (Robeyns, 2006, p. 75).

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to analyze the unintended consequences of higher education in the mother-tongue in consociational North Macedonia given the prominent role of the tertiary sector in conflict causation and the strong focus on equality of access established by the OFA. Arguably, while the 2001 conflict has certainly served as a catalyst for pre-existing ethnic and cultural divisions which, as Baumann (2009) argues, “continue to shape the post-war society” (p.110), the peace-building policies introduced by the OFA clearly fall short in providing any recommendations on how to foster ethnic rapprochement and ensure social cohesion. One might even contend that the OFA has failed in securing a permanent state of ‘peace’ for as long as the presence of “negative, endogenous structures are left over as virulent factors, the danger of society’s return to violence is eminent” (Baumann, p.112). In conclusion, without a strong governmental commitment to deethnicizes education by transcending the OFA’s exclusive access-oriented policies, the persistence of a situation of “voluntary apartheid” (Baumann, p. 112) makes consociational power-sharing permeable to political manipulation which critically hampers social transformation and increases the probability of inter-ethnic tension, ultimately weakening the peace process.

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Mentoring Students from Different Ethnic Groups: Challenges and Recommendations

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Abstract

Young individuals benefit from consistent relationships with experienced adults who care for them. Researches are showing that quality-mentoring programs have positive outcomes for young people in their social, emotional and academic development. While there is a broad consensus on the overall benefits of positive and supportive mentoring relationships, we know less about the effects of ethnicity and diversity in mentoring relationships with young people.

In a multicultural society, such as the Republic of Northern Macedonia, it can be noted that a good part of the formal mentoring connections often cross the ethnic and cultural communities.

The paper examines the challenges and opportunities of mentoring relationships established between a mentor and a mentee from different ethnic backgrounds and emphasizes the importance of establishing a structure and opportunities that support successful outcomes.

Keywords: mentoring, ethnicity, diversity

Introduction

In the past two decades, educational institutions in our country have placed significant emphasis on increasing the number of students from all ethnic backgrounds and solving performance and graduation problems that usually tended to be lower for these students than for students from majority ethnic background. At the same time, educational institutions, especially higher education, have made significant efforts to demonstrate that diversity brings benefits to all students preparing for the life and jobs that are becoming more diverse. As institutions seek ways to address these frequently complex challenges, educational institutions need to consider their assumptions and roles in a multicultural setting and the modalities of interaction with students from different ethnic groups, as well as to talk with their students about the importance of diversity.

Mentoring as a valuable strategy to provide mentees with emotional and instrumental support in achieving their goals can be especially important for students from different ethnic backgrounds, where lack of adequate mentoring and support can prevent students from achieving greater success at school and lead to increased dissatisfaction. By providing information, guidance, and encouragement, mentors can play an important role in nurturing students' aspirations, helping them adjust and prepare for college or a new job and build a sense of connection to the wider environment.

Numerous papers, professional and research, offer wide interpretations of the importance of the relationship between educational institutions and students coming from different ethnic groups. Most of them conclude that students benefit from mentoring which brings about higher rates of their performance in educational institutions and graduation, as well as increased satisfaction with their experiences in educational institutions, but in order to achieve this, mentoring relationships must be comprehensive and by all means specific for meeting students' social, academic and personal developmental needs.

The paper begins with defining mentoring - what constitutes mentoring and its importance for achieving higher educational outcomes. Then, it goes on with a discussion on the impact of different ethnicity of the mentor and the mentee on the mentoring relationship. Besides, the paper offers measures and suggestions that will help to promote effective mentoring relationships and professional and career development for the mentor and the mentee from different ethnic groups.

1. Defining mentoring - what constitutes it?

Due to the prevalence of mentoring in various fields and a wide range of issues, there are a huge number of definitions in the literature. In fact, there are more than 50 different definitions in the social literature (Crisp and Cruz, 2009). Some describe mentoring as a concept or process, while others use the term to describe a set of specific activities. However, the most powerful mentoring relationships tend to include four characteristics. These features consist in: a) focus on achievement and development of potential; b) reciprocal and personal relationship; c) a relationship where the mentor is an individual with greater experience, influence and achievement; d) a relationship where the mentor provides emotional and psychological support and directly assists in career aspirations and planning through role modelling (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Jacobi, 1991). These four characteristics shift the interaction between students and teachers at the mentoring level.

Mentoring serves different purposes, especially based on the age and needs of the individual. For example, most mentoring in secondary and higher education focuses on

developing the knowledge, competencies and self-confidence necessary to successfully take on one's own responsibilities. Mentoring relationships actually involve providing career, social, and emotional support in a safe environment for self-exploration that should result in positive academic and personal outcomes for students. Effective mentoring - a sustainable, quality relationship with young people should serve as an important, and perhaps even necessary, developmental trump card in the lives of young people.

2. Functional mentoring

Healthy mentoring relationships, what we call functional mentoring, have been identified as crucial in preparing students for careers. Research suggests that functional mentoring is strongly correlated with success and satisfaction in education. There are some common features for all mentors that promote functional mentoring relationships regardless of the identity of the mentee. These characteristics include knowledge, experience, visibility and power. It is often assumed that educators are credible mentors. Many teachers are professionally wise and successful enough to offer inexperienced students key information about professional and personal development. Mentors should be visible within their profession and accessible to mentees. It is imperative that the mentor be visible so that the mentee can follow role modelling.

3. Does ethnicity affect the way the mentor and the mentee relate?

Although there is little research focusing on the ethnicity of the mentor and the mentee in formal mentoring programs, some research on natural and formal mentoring relationships suggests that cultural differences seem to play a role in mentoring expectations, achievements, and experience. (Liang, Tracy, Kauh, Taylor & West, 2006). In one of these researches, students of Latin descent who were associated with mentors of the same background found that they were more helpful in their personal and career development and that they were more satisfied with mentoring programs than students with mentors of other descent. (Santos & Reigadas, 2002).

However, research on natural mentoring relationships shows that when young people choose their own mentors, they tend to choose mentors of the same ethnicity (Cavell, Meehan, Heffer, & Holiaday, 2002) and of the same sex. This suggests that connections from the same ethnic group are significant to many mentees and have a potential impact on the initial attractiveness and expectations of the relationship.

Ethnicity can play a role in the ways in which mentors and mentees relate to each other. More precisely, the quality of mentoring relationships can be shaped by the way some issues are discussed by the mentoring couple. For example, such a mentoring relationship may be affected by the mentor's cultural sensitivities, the mentee's cultural distrust, and the feedback given to the mentee.

Cultural values can affect the level of initiative of the mentees and result in miscommunication or misinterpretation of social signs by culturally unconscious mentors. For example, a study of people from Asia suggests that, despite a strong interest in mentoring relationships, they are less likely to initiate and express interest than non-Asians because of cultural differences in emotional expression and communication attempts. (Liang, et al 2006). Thus, mentors who are insensitive to these cultural characteristics may be less inclined to recognize Asians' interest in mentoring and reciprocal interest.

However, the fact that young people naturally gravitate towards mentors of the same ethnicity does not necessarily mean that mentoring connections of the same ethnicity are more useful than connections of different ethnicities. In these relationships, the mentees from the same ethnicity compared to those from different ethnicities reported that they received more professional support, though the connections by ethnicity were not related to higher emotional support and satisfaction from their mentors. (Liang, 2007).

4. How to strengthen cultural sensitivity in mentoring?

Ethnicity can affect many aspects of the mentoring relationship; for example, when a mentor is chosen by mentees, it can affect the benefits and ways of connecting between mentees and their mentors. Consequently, a number of questions arise regarding the ethnicity of the mentor and the mentee, such as: Is it important that the mentor and the mentees match their ethnicity? Are connections from the same ethnic group more useful than connections from different ethnic groups? Does the ethnic group influence the way the mentor and the mentees relate? Are there other ways to enhance cultural sensitivity in mentoring relationships?

In order to discover the possible answers to these questions, in this section we will try to suggest different ways for overcoming these questions in practice, through several key considerations arising from ethnicity in formal mentoring.

Observation 1: Ethnicity can affect many aspects of a mentoring relationship. However, while connections from the same ethnic group may be desirable, this does not mean that they will achieve satisfactory and useful mentoring connections. For example, some research shows that having similar interests and attitudes is a better predictor of mentors' satisfaction and support from mentors than their demographic similarity (Ensher & Murphy, 1997; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002).

Solution 1: During the introduction phase, it would be good that the mentor and mentee assess whether ethnic group-based connectivity is important to the mentee and his or her family. If having a mentor from the same ethnic group is less important to the mentee or is not available at that moment, similar interests and views should carefully link the mentor and the mentee. The connection between the mentor and the mentee based on similarities is important in all mentoring relationships, but it is especially crucial in the connections of different ethnic backgrounds.

Observation 2: Research findings on the benefits of connections from the same ethnic group with those from different ethnic groups are combined. However, the benefit of mentoring reflects much more and is more significant than the ethnicity of the mentor and the mentee. Relationships of different ethnicities show that mentors respond to the different characteristics of the mentee including the mentee's identity and cultural values. Moreover, research reveals that mentors need to be culturally competent in order to develop a successful mentoring relationship of different ethnicities (Sanchez & Colon, 2005). Without training in specific competencies, even the most deliberate mentors can make critical mistakes that negatively affect these relationships.

Solution 2: Mentor training is crucial especially in the absence of mentors from the same ethnic group. Continuous training and support can help mentors to better understand and relate to mentees from different backgrounds and give positive results. Such training and support of mentors should be characterized by special attention to cultural topics. Ways of identifying and addressing specific cultural issues, such as the consequences and failure to do so, are just some of the contents that should be covered.

Observation 3: Differences in ethnicity can affect the way in which mentors and mentees relate to each other. Therefore, a culturally sensitive mentor with an understanding of the values and worldview of young people is a key factor for successful communication and connection. However, there seem to be such commonalities that promote positive connections between all mentoring couples regardless of ethnicity. These consist in the attention to developmental and relational processes, in constant mentoring commitment, and in finding similarities between the mentor and the mentee. Relational aspects of mentoring include authenticity, empowerment, and learning to deal with conflict. In order to strengthen such relationships, mentors need to recognize and carefully engage their capacities, as well as to struggle in a way that would promote growth and development. The mentoring relationship can benefit from a developmental rather than a normative approach - one that allows the mentee to explore, set goals and develop together, rather than an approach that imposes goals on the mentoring relationship. In particular, the discovery of commonalities can serve as an early and central step in relating to the mentee and can be the basis for developing a lasting relationship. (Ensher & Murphy, 1997; Rhodes et al., 2002).

Solution 3: It is necessary to strengthen close and satisfactory mentoring relationships, regardless of the different background of the mentor and the mentee. The choice of a mentor should be aimed at individuals who possess these relational qualities, appreciate the developmental aspects of the mentor-mentee relationship and are willing to invest time and energy in the mentoring process. Mentor training should also include the development of such "relational skills" (e.g. fostering commitment, authenticity, strengthening and dealing with differences and conflicts) in the context of a mentoring relationship.

Observation 4: Research shows that the approach "one-size for all" is not always effective in mentoring programs and relationships. Although certain qualities of mentoring relationships (e.g., emphasis on authenticity, commitment, empowerment, and empathy in a relationship) can also be generalized to ethnicity, other ways in which mentors and mentoring programs can foster cultural sensitivity need to be considered. More specifically, students from different backgrounds may have special needs and opportunities for mentoring. For example, young people may approach mentoring relationships with certain expectations of connections through hierarchical relationships influenced by their cultural values. In addition, they may face stereotypes as well as other culturally specific challenges that may adversely affect their school achievement and psychological well-being, which are often the targeted goals in mentoring programs. (Linnehan, 2001). Thus, only mentoring that takes cultural issues into account can support students in vitally relevant ways.

Solution 4: Mentoring programs should be designed in a way that demonstrates the sensitivity of theoretical and empirical knowledge of the cultural characteristics of the students being mentored. Combining the universal beneficial aspects of mentoring relationships with responsiveness to the different backgrounds and needs of mentored students can increase the applicability and effectiveness of mentoring relationships.

Observation 5: This paper suggests that mentoring should increase attention to ethnic issues when designing and evaluating a mentoring relationship. More research is needed to examine the impact of mentoring programs that prioritize cultural competencies and culturally specific practices. Currently, culturally sensitive approaches to mentoring are insufficiently studied. For example, relationship mentoring in which the mentor is from a minority group may differ from mentoring in which the mentor is from a majority group.

Solution 5: Further research is needed to examine how different combinations of demographic variables can affect the quality of communication between students and their mentors.

Conclusion:

The paper attempted to reconcile and review perspectives on mentoring and the different ethnic backgrounds of the mentor and the mentee. In a society that emphasizes differences and uniqueness, all students regardless of ethnicity are remarkably similar in their goals, aspirations and desire to be successful. However, students often see the world differently, based on the experiences they bring into their school environments.

The paper suggests that matching based on the same ethnicity may have some advantages, including the fact that mentees tend to gravitate naturally towards mentors of the same ethnic group and gender. However, in mentoring, whether from the same ethnic group or from a different one, other factors may play a greater role in determining the success of the relationship, including the questions [1] whether the mentee perceives his/her mentor as similar (e.g. common interests, personal characteristics, etc.); and [2] whether the mentor and mentoring programs are culturally sensitive. These findings suggest the need for mentors and mentoring programs that will work toward development of culturally sensitive mentoring programs.

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II. Sharing Educational Experiences

Multicultural Education for Future Teachers and Their Competencies for Work in a Multicultural Environment in Republic of North Macedonia.

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Abstract

Multicultural education is an approach to teaching and learning that is based on democratic values affirming cultural pluralism. The need for the future teachers to be educated for multicultural education at universities in our multicultural context is of essential value, considering that these teachers will be the future to our education. Concentrating on a productive discussion, how our multicultural reality looks like and according to that normative discussion to create the university education that will serve the multicultural school challenges in the specific context of our education is very important. The multicultural policies are an important step to ensure the institutional implementation in the school setting. The foreign concepts of multicultural education could not be just copy-pasted; they simply need to answer the needs of the real context and situation.

The subject of research in this paper is the concept of multicultural education within the university courses for future teachers in the Republic of North Macedonia and the definition of the competencies and skills for the multicultural teacher. Its purpose is to define the skills and competencies of future teachers in terms of multiculturalism, as well as how they should work to improve them. The development of individual skills for knowledge, communication and critical thinking are of great importance for successfully dealing with the challenges in a multicultural society. In terms of realizing the purpose of this research, certain procedures, instruments and techniques were used. This is a thorough research in which individual interviews were conducted with university professors, who are directly involved in teaching the subject Multicultural Education, as well as people with civic society background that share experience in the specific field.

Keywords: multicultural education, competencies, skills, multicultural teacher

What do current theories say about the concept of Multicultural Education?

Multiculturalism as a concept is a topic of discussion in both the scientific and public sphere. It emerges as a need to manage cultural diversity at the state level and it develops in the form of national policies that address this challenge. Multiculturalism has historically been established as a need for nation-states to deal with immigrants and integration policies.

In modern countries today, as a result of globalization processes can be observed a steady increase in cultural diversity, due to which attention is turned to the promotion or recognition of the rights of different cultural groups within the country. The discussion about the recognition of the rights of particular cultural groups seems to conflict with the recognition of the universal rights of the individual. The liberal form of recognition of universal individual rights, and the neo-liberal forms of pluralism and multiculturalism that support the right to have one's own culture (or as it is also called, the right to recognition, where individuals will be recognized as members of a particular cultural group), create an intertwining set of challenges posed by cultural diversity and the right to recognition.

Defining what Multicultural Education means, has its root back in 1960's. It includes many aspects in the definition that will be examined here.

Multicultural Education is the possibility for all students, no matter their cultural background, to have equal opportunity to education (Banks, 2001, Banks, 2007; Gibson, 1976). The idea of equal opportunities to be included in the process of education is very important, but also it is important that the students would have equal opportunities for school success. This in basic terms means that we need culturally sensitive criteria to grade the school success, which makes standardized testing very questionable. (Young, 1990); or we speak about the Pedagogy of Equity that could be found in the techniques and the methods that the teachers use and which are responsible for the academic and educational achievements of different ethnic, racial and social groups (Banks, 1993).

Multicultural Education includes the aspect of the self-reflection of the teachers to reexamine their own attitudes towards different cultural groups, and the reexamination of the culture and the structure of the classroom. When we talk about this aspect, we talk about multicultural awareness (Baptiste, 1986).

The creation of multicultural curricula is the other aspect. This is the most discussed topic in our context. There are many researches that show how the contents of the official schoolbooks are sensitive to these issues and what are actually the positive and negative examples. It is about the integration of a content that will use information from different cultures and groups with an aim to illustrate the key concepts, principles, generalizations and theories in the frames of the subject that they teach or the discipline that they work on. (Banks, 1993).

Multicultural Education is education about the cultural differences and cultural understanding. The aim is to teach the students to value the cultural differences, to understand the concept of culture and to accept the others as different. The school programs should be directed towards a cultural enrichment of the students, accepting the cultural differences, decreasing the prejudices and promoting the social justice. Multicultural education is cultural pluralism and describes the plural education. (Jay & Jones, 2005)

It should represent the fight against racial and ethnic prejudices through development of certain understandings. Part of the authors on multicultural education view it as process of transformation in the education. It is a reform movement, aiming to change the structure of the educational institutions (Banks, 1995). The empowerment of the school culture and the social structure is a concept that is used to describe the process of restructuring the culture and organization of the school, aiming that that students who belong to different racial, ethnic and social groups feel that they are in an environment of educational justice and of culture empowerment.

Multicultural Education is perceived as a societal system constructed by many interconnected components. Therefore, to transform the school and to manage educational equality, all the main components of the school should go through basic changes. If only one component is focused, as for example the formalized curricula, that does not enable implementation of the multicultural education, which means process of continuity.

Problem Statement

The discussion about the meaning of multicultural education is developing very fast, together with the discussion about what multiculturalism represents in general, and what it means in the context of the globalization. Many theoreticians of multiculturalism forget the importance of the multicultural education as a particular issue, and a tiny part of their intellectual effort is dedicated to the question of multicultural education and of how it should be organized in the frames in a multicultural society. Because of the fact that education is a powerful factor and a force of societal integration for the new generations, their views could have changed in a positive direction and could have provided wider knowledge about different cultures: with that basis they would be prepared to accept the differences.

If we try to define the processes of multiculturalism in Republic of North Macedonia, we will see that there is a lack of any kind of discussion on the topic, as well as the fact that we do not have a well-defined ideological model or concept about how the state should or could deal in this situation. (Janev, 2005). Multiculturalism in our country is part of the big problem of external theories for internal practices (Sarkanjac 2005: page 15). What we really lack is normative discussions for this particular topic, as well as an exploration of the problems that arise from the fact that we copy some theory that is not connected to our particular political context.

Methodology

This is a qualitative research in which, through grounded theory, it should contribute to the understanding of the concept of multicultural education in the context of the Republic of North Macedonia, as well as to the understanding of the multicultural competencies of the teachers. Given that in the context of the RNM there is no conceptual clarity about multiculturalism in general, there is no conceptual clarity about multicultural education either. There is a tendency to import concepts from abroad without considering the context in which these concepts were created. In a lack of definitions and theories that would be specific for this context, through this research I shall define the understanding of the above-mentioned concepts.

This method of grounded theory includes progressive identification and integration of the categories of meanings for the collected data. Through the process, I shall identify the categories, connect them and create synergies and relations. The result would be a

theory that offers a frame in which we could understand the phenomena of multicultural education in our very specific context.

Subject of the research

The school as an institution for planned, systematic education and upbringing should be a place where young people, starting from an early age will acquire knowledge and skills to practice dialogue with "otherness" as a prerequisite for fostering mutual recognition and respect for diversity, embedded in the principles of the educational work. The education system is the basis for future generations of teachers, and therefore it is important to provide skills and competencies to cope successfully in multicultural environments.

The term multicultural education encompasses a variety of programs and practices related to educational equality and equity, and it is often understood in a limited context of curriculum change or reform.

As in the context of RNM there is no common functionally defined multiculturalism, due to the lack of discussion on the topic, we need to define the term multicultural education, which is already offered in university programs of all universities, while there is no common position on a commonly accepted definition. The subject of this research is the review of the ideas of experts in this field and an attempt to define not only multicultural education, but also the skills and competencies that a teacher needs to fit into a multicultural environment.

The specific objectives of the research are set up to offer a unified picture for the understanding of the concept of Multicultural Education in RNM, considering the discourses on multiculturalism. It also consists in defining the aims of the Multicultural Education as university course in one unified frame.

This research tries to identify the understanding of the experts in Multicultural Education for the subject Multicultural Education that is already offered at the university level for future teachers, and to identify the needed competencies of the teachers in a multicultural environment.

In this research, university professors from four universities of RNM that teach the subject multicultural education were included, and they are considered as experts in the field of interest. Representatives from civic organizations that are directly connected to this working field were also included. Intentional sample also included two focus groups with students that have been part of the course multicultural/intercultural education. Fourteen individual interviews were and two focus groups were studied.

The data are collected through semi-structured individual interviews, through fluid interaction and non-formal conversation. They are recorded by audio and transcripts. Additionally, two focus groups were included through flexible brainstorming and interactive methods and they had the possibility to express their own thoughts and opinions.

All the interviews were anonymous with given number, and the interviews are only assigned as "professor", "civic sector" or "student". After the transcriptions were coded, codes were created out of the wordings that reflected the meaning of the comments (Strauss/Corbin 1996: page 44). The transcripts were in electronic form and were added to the adequate program for qualitative analyses of the data (QDA software). The analyses were done on three levels of abstractness with axial coding.

What represents multicultural environment in our context?

Multicultural Environment is place where different cultures live in. In our context, it usually means different ethnic communities living together. The ethnicity represents the basis for defining the multicultural environment, but with an accent given to Macedonian and Albanian community living together and sharing the same space. If these ethnic communities live together, it is understood as multicultural environment, and multicultural environment is not where any other combination of ethnic communities live (for example Roma and Macedonian community). The results show that other ethnic communities or any other cultural categories as gender, or socio-economic categories are not entering in the category of multicultural. One of the definitions is that of multiculturalism as coexistence of people with different cultural, ethnic, social and sexual orientations in one society (Interview 2, civic sector 23.03.17). Multicultural Education would mean basic level of interconnectivity of the basic concepts and self-reflection in the process:

First, to accept that we live in a multicultural region, to accept the reality, and then to learn how to live together, which is a process (Interview 2, civic sector: 23.03.17). “Cohabitation of different ethnic communities” (Interviews 14, 15, students) with and aim fulfillment of common interest (Interview 2, CS, 23.03.2017). Positive attitude towards cultural diversity, which corresponds to the opinion of Murdock, who considers that the multiculturalism consists in accepting the differences with inclusion of the practices and the behavior (Murdock 2016). Open space for learning and teaching the history, ways of life and traditions of other cultures in the same society (Interview 2, civic sector, 23.03.17). The understanding that our own culture is the same as our own ethnicity (Interview 7, professor, 16.03.2017).

Multiculturalism vs interculturalism

In our context, multiculturalism usually is defined as distinctive from interculturalism. To live “one next to each other”, meaning more ethnic communities in the same geographical space, would represent multicultural environment. It is related to the perception that we are living in a segregated society and multiculturalism is understood as a way in the process towards interculturalism. The meaning of the latter concept is “living together”, so the difference between multiculturalism and interculturalism is understood as a process, and the two concepts are understood as belonging to the same continuum of development.

“I think that multiculturalism is one level lower. Our society tends towards interculturalism... We need to build up common values” (Interview 4, professor, 17.03.17)

“We are a multicultural country, but not intercultural. We live next to each other, but we do not communicate on the supposed level...” (Interview 1, professor. 29.03.17) “Interculturalism means one step towards deeper understanding “(Interview 5, professor, 17.03.17). This would mean getting over the bi-national perspective (Interview 1, 7). These two concepts in reality have many things in common and their interpretation depends very much on the theoretical discussion in a particular region or context. Meer and Modood argue that interculturalism offers originality as political discourse, but it cannot decrease the meaning of multiculturalism intellectually (Meer & Modood, 2011). The specific perspective is formed, one the one hand, from the existing theoretical debates existing in our country and, on the other hand, from the influence by the international programs that are implemented after the Ohrid Framework Agreement. Historically, this country has been implementing different

models of multiculturalism, and this makes people think that, with the constitutionalization of multiculturalism, it would mean something more than what existed previously. In this sense, the interviewees try to describe interaction between ethnic communities as a higher developmental process, which is defined as interculturalism.

Multiculturalism or bi-nationalism

The pre-existing perception is that there are two ethnic communities, Macedonians and Albanians, and more efforts are needed to realize the effective contact between them (Interview 2, 3, 6). According to all the opinions, we have dominant bi-ethnic discourse. In spite of multiculturalism, we can see that the society moves on the line of segregation. This could be seen in all the segments of the educational system. These parallels are hard to be stopped. According to some theoreticians, multiculturalism opens up a space for social division (Malik 2007).

The open question of use of languages

In the context of RNM, especially in the educational system, we managed to incorporate the high standards of human rights, more specifically the linguistic rights of the minority groups on a national level and in the Constitution. However, the effectivity of implementation of the use of the languages should be seen from two perspectives: first, the perspective of the linguistic rights; and, second, the perspective of these high standards of linguistic rights in a consensual type of democracy and political system, which support a stable democracy.

Knowing the languages of other ethnic communities is seen as sign of good will to accept other ethnic communities (Interview 5, 6, 7, 9, 12, 13, 14, and 15).

“In order to have a good and stable multicultural environment we need to be aware of the linguistic part. If someone has the will to work in a multicultural environment, they should at least know the basics of communication of all the languages” (Interview 9, civic sector, 01.04.2017)

“... It would be good if we stop stigmatizing the languages and to start learning some words, small will, understanding...” (Interview 6, civic sector, 28.03.2017)

This question in our context is a very sensitive issue and strongly political, and it represents the condition to show good will and to perform cooperation, but speaking in other languages other than Macedonian and Albanian is not even mentioned. Not knowing the languages is a separation factor between the ethnic communities and this creates more barriers for adequate communication.

Multiculturalism, a way towards respect or an empty idea?

After the Ohrid Framework Agreement, multiculturalism becomes a political term that is often used. The interviewees are put in a position to think whether this concept is helpful or it lacks a proper meaning. “I don’t use multicultural or intercultural, for me they are empty shelf without a particular meaning – they just sound good” (Interview 6, civic sector, 28.03.2017)

“This is an exotic approach... it was brought without particular direction to bring understanding and respect. We are all multicultural in different aspects and that’s why I don’t use it” (Interview 6, civic sector, 28.03.2017).

An additional problem or challenge in the misuse of the concepts “multicultural” and “multicultural education” is that there are many projects implemented in this direction, but they are not sustainable in reality. They are becoming useless, empty and filled with negative connotation (Interview 3, 5, 6).

What Multicultural Education means

There is no clear distinction between the understanding of multiculturalism and multicultural education as separate terms in the interviews (Interview 1, 3, 8, 9, 12,). In many cases, they are defined through a distinction with the concept of interculturalism (Interview 1, 3).

Two levels of Multicultural Education

An important step towards multicultural education is the individual level of development. In the very beginning the students should get to know the real image of their surroundings, to accept the reality and then to be professional in the process of teaching. When they become aware of the surrounding, they know how to work, which basically means to gain skills, competencies and knowledge that would enable them to accept the cultural differences. They should learn about culture, traditions, and beliefs of the other cultures. If they understand the culture of the “other”, they will be able to communicate, and they will know the differences and accept them, but they will also find similarities.

One of the challenges of Multicultural Education and of its understanding is the popularization and the wrong interoperations that comes with it. First, the understanding is that multiculturalism means learning about clothing, cuisine, and music of the other cultures; it reduces this concept to very superficial attributes of the culture itself. One of the criticisms of multiculturalism is that multicultural policies actually reduce the diversity to clothing, food, kitchen and music (Kymlicka 2012). The discussion should be directed towards reflection of the existing stereotypes and prejudices, while the above approach is actually supporting stereotype and prejudices.

“... Most of the schools here say that they are very multicultural just because once per year, they have an annual event, in which an Albanian boy sings a song and Macedonians perform their traditional dances. This is very superficial, and creates exotification of culture. They just accentuate the differences. Some simple differences. I would not define this as multicultural” (Interview 7, professor, 16.03.17)

“Multicultural education means not just to learn about the differences, but to become aware of the other in this process. This education means not just to speak about the customs of the others... The aim is to have a common space for understanding” (Interview 5, professor, 17.03.2017). Presenting the topic in this way gives the students possibilities to think that culture cannot be changed and, in this way, we come to a trivialization of the cultures (Muhic, 2017).

The students should be able to learn how to live multiculturalism and how to transfer it to others (Interview 2, civic sector, 23.03.2017). They should have possibilities for wider perspectives, to know how to communicate, and to earn skills for non-violent communication, developing empathy towards the others. (Interview 2, civic sector, 23.03.2017). They should have the tools for dealing with the differences, for working with different cultures (Interview 3, civic sector, 14.03.2017); they should have the possibility for self-reflection in the process of learning and of getting free from their own stereotypes and prejudices (Interview 5, professor, 17.03.2017). All of these

interventions are related to self-reflection, perceptions, accepting the reality, which are the things that happen on an individual level, as a way for changing attitudes and the system of values. When a teacher will have the opportunity to work with mixed groups and will be culturally responsive, he/she would have the opportunity to use this knowledge in practice.

Multicultural Education means not learning about specific topics; it rather application on any subject, in any activity (Interview 7, professor, 16.03.2017).

Skills and competencies of multicultural teachers

What has been identified during the research in terms of skills and competencies is organized according to the Dublin descriptors (Ministry of science, technology and innovation, Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks., 2005) that represents “descriptor of the level”. They represent generic statements of the typical expectations for the achievements and the abilities of the students. These descriptors are defined as level of competencies, not as products of learning, and include knowledge and understanding; application of the knowledge and understanding; creation of attitudes; communication; and lifelong learning skills.

Table 1. Overview of the skills and competencies of a multicultural teacher organized to the Dublin descriptors in five levels.

Level	Description of acquired knowledge
Knowledge and understanding	<p>The students should get knowledge about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understanding of the concept of culture, elements of culture, self-reflection of our own culture, getting to know other cultures, nationalism, ethnicity, ethnocentrism, discrimination, multiculturalism/interculturalism - The philosophical thought of the theories of multiculturalism; - Conflict management skills; <p>They should have the possibility to reflect on the societal problems, to identify the tools that will be useful for their solution.</p>
Application of knowledge and understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Developing the skills for practical use of the acquired knowledge; - Didactical skills for the application of the knowledge in the process of teaching; -“Soft skills” through non-formal methodologies of learning.
Creation of attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Working on personal attitudes, prejudices and stereotypes; - Increasing the respect towards the members of other

	cultural groups; - Developing the ability for empathy towards the others.
Communication	- Communication skills; - Skills for non-violent communication; - Skills for active listening; - Creating space for open discussion; -Creation space for direct contact
Lifelong learning skills	- Development of critical thinking.

Theoretical knowledge

The basic level is that of gaining knowledge and understanding, which is very important for the multicultural education (Interview, professors 1, 7, 10), (Interview, civic sector, 6, 9), (Interview 14, 15, focus groups). The concepts of culture, nationalism, ethnicity and ethnocentrism, discrimination, theories of multiculturalism are dominating the courses offered at the faculties. Planned discussions on the topic about multiculturalism/ interculturalism and possibilities for open discussion could offer students deeper understanding. (Interview 10, professor, 20.03.2017). In this regard, we should be aware of the choice of examples from other countries, because in different countries there is a completely different understanding of the concept of multiculturalism. Additionally, the students need to know about the theories of multiculturalism in order to be able to understand the policies of recognition (Interview 7, professor, 16.03.2017).

Giving the students the possibility to learn about the elements of culture and to discuss about the cultural identity is very important. The complexity of the cultural identity should be understood, because in our context, if we mention someone's culture, it is taken for granted that we understand someone's national or ethnic belonging. It is crucially important to know our own culture and then to understand the dynamics and differences, learning about other cultures and feeling comfortable in cross-cultural settings (Interview 14, student, 21.03.2017).

An additional value is learning about the skills for solving conflicts, which represent general strategies to manage conflict situations in a peaceful and cooperative manner. The development of skills and values for cooperation, communication, tolerance and positive emotional expression is also important.

Practical use

The second level is application of the skills and its practical use. In reality in our educational system is very theoretical, and there is no mechanism to check whether knowledge can be used. Practical work means direct use of the acquired knowledge. The important question that arises from this position are the didactical ways about how to bring theory into practice.

Creation of attitudes – work on own attitudes, stereotypes and prejudices

The prejudices and stereotypes that are internalized influence the person's ability to work on the topic of multicultural education, because the teachers also belong to certain cultural groups and share the identities of these groups. The interviewees agree that a teacher should work on his/her own attitudes, prejudices and stereotypes, prior to the realization of topics that include multicultural education (Interview 1, 7, 11).

“Work on the personal attitudes and personal perspective. We need to say that the identities are created out of different parts of one's personality, and the ethnicity and culture are part of it (...) we should work on the relative importance of the ethnic belonging and culture of the teachers” (Interview 11, civic sector, 20.03.2017).

One of the benefits of building cultural/intercultural competencies is increasing the respect towards other cultural groups. It means learning about other cultures, self-reflection about own culture, direct contact with possibilities for direct learning. The openness to diversity is an important component. It is not something that destroys the society; it brings enrichment of the society. Teachers should understand that the differences are not a negative characteristic and to accept them as a reality. This would mean decrease of the unknown, because the fear of the unknown brings conflict situations and misunderstandings.

An additional quality that the teachers should have is the empathy towards the students, which means individual perspective towards the others, authentic efforts go get to know the others and to accept that they have the same rights; this implies emotional and cognitive openness. (Halpern & Weinstein, 2004).

Communication skills

One of the skills for a good “multicultural teacher” that were identified in this research were communication skills (Interview 2, 8, 9). Actually, different ethnic communities in our context do not have possibilities to communicate and get to know each other. They live in the same neighborhoods, but they do not know each other. What we need to create is open spaces for discussion of societal problems (Interview 9, 14); when there are discussions, positive changes can occur and there is freedom of expression. The skills for active listening are another component that is important for a multicultural teacher according to those interviewed as part of the research (Interview 6, 14). They could be used for developing empathy and understanding of the students, but also they could be helpful for the teachers to manage any kind of conflict in the classroom. That would create respect between the teachers and the students, and this communication should not be one-dimensional as it is the case in our educational system. Another important aspect is non-violent communication (Interview 2, 6, 9); it is a powerful method, with a potential for the transformation of existing conflicts into peaceful dialogue.

Critical thinking

Many individual and group differences of the students should be considered. However, if we consider the multiplicity of the differences it seems that it is not possible to address all of them at the same time. A solution to this dilemma would be to develop skills for critical thinking. If the students are able to become good evaluators of their own thinking, it means that they can lead their own learning. Skills for critical thinking are not mentioned at all in the document of the Ministry of education and science

(Македонска рамка на квалификации-појдовна рамка, 2013). The students should be able to analyze the situations from different perspectives and to start thinking about the needs and the problems of other people. It is important to have an insight into different perspectives as a key precondition for intercultural competencies (Deardorff, 2009).

Conclusions

The aim of the research was the understanding of the problems of multicultural education in RNM, considering the discourses on multiculturalism in this particular context and trying to identify how the university professors and experts in multicultural education in civic sector define multicultural education and the skill and competencies that a multicultural teacher should have.

All of the attempts to identify and define the above-mentioned concepts were directed towards the understanding of the concept of multicultural education, in a context where there is a lack of normative discussion about how to define this concept or what multicultural education means for us. The understanding and definition of multicultural education mostly depends in the understanding of multiculturalism in general.

Multiculturalism means the existence of different cultures in the same space. In our context it means the understanding of the differences only through the prism of the ethnicities (Macedonian and Albanian), therefore the understanding of a bi-national structure. Multiculturalism is usually seen as distinct from interculturalism, defining it in the following way: multiculturalism means life “next to each other”, whereas “life with one another” refers to interculturalism. The differences between these concepts are defined as different developmental levels of the same continuum. The existing perception is that we live in a segregational multicultural society, in which there is no contact and cooperation between the ethnic communities and that our society is very far away from interculturalism. Bi-nationalism is perceived as segregation with clear boundaries, which can be especially seen in the process of the use of the languages. Because of the constant use of this terminology, multiculturalism becomes a term people that do not want to use, and it has a negative connotation.

Multicultural Education is defined on two levels:

The individual level, on which the students have to accept the multicultural reality, generate certain theoretical knowledge on the topic, have the required competencies and skills, and work towards the acceptance of the differences and the knowledge the other cultures. Multicultural education does not only mean learning about topics, but rather application of the knowledge and the skills in any school subject. It should represent a way of thinking and acceptance of other cultures.

The institutional level would mean application of multicultural practices at school and how the school is positioned in this regard: the subjects that are offered, the school’s space and atmosphere and whether the employees of the schools are representative in reflecting different cultures.

In order to answer the question about the skills and competencies that are required for a good multicultural teacher, I organized them in five different categories according to the logic of the Dublin descriptors. 1) Knowledge and understanding of certain topics about culture, ethnicity, ethnocentrism, nationalism, discrimination and philosophical theories of multiculturalism, knowledge on conflict management, reflection on the existing societal problems. 2) Application of knowledge and understanding, which

means possibilities for the practical use of the theoretical knowledge, obtaining didactical skills and soft skills as formal methodologies of teaching. 3) Creating attitudes – working on the personal attitudes, stereotypes and prejudices and increase of the respect towards the members of other cultures, and development of empathy. 4) Communication – acquiring communication skills, skills for non-violent communication, for active listening and for creating spaces for open discussion and possibilities of contacts between the cultures. 5) Lifelong learning skills – ability for critical thinking.

Parallel to the individual skills of the future teachers we need policies on an institutional level – on the school level, which would represent the real ethnical structure of the school. At the same time, we need to be aware of the risk implied in simply coping certain concepts from abroad (concept that are already in use in other countries), which do not correspond to the reality of our society. We need productive discussion about how the multicultural reality looks like and then we need to create certain policies on a national level, schools' policies, and of adequate university education for future teachers.

This research did not include the topics of multicultural education and its goals. This additional exploration could provide different connotations of the problem and understanding of the concept, and a wider understanding in order to define the program of Multicultural Education on a university level, which would be connected to the understanding of the concept in our context.

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Multicultural Education in the Modern Schools

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Abstract

Participants in the teaching process are characterized by differences that affect the educational process. The modern school should get to know and respect different cultures and lifestyles in society. Because then the school system should take into account the multicultural character of society and develop skills for students that will enable their integration into social life. A new intercultural identity is being created in the interculturally sensitive schools in which they accept and understand culturally different, respect the contributions of different cultures and provide interactions between culturally different persons. Integration into the community of European nations is an aspiration for respecting numerous differences and through mutual tolerance providing better and more equal treatment. In most European countries, an intercultural approach exists among the general curriculum objectives, or is reflected in other official education documents. Intercultural curriculum reform and empowering school culture (ethos) in Serbia contribute to empowerment of multicultural education.

The aims of the research in this paper are:

1. Analysis of international instruments, principles and guidelines for multicultural education,
2. Review of national regulations and achievements regarding the promotion of multiculturalist education,
3. The role of the integration process in the harmonization of educational policies in the multiculturalism field and
4. Presentation of extracurricular activities of high school students that contribute to integration content, social equality and justice.

The paper points out the need for intercultural sensitivity of teachers in modern times educational process, that also refers to equity pedagogy through the introduction of different teaching methods and stimulating their school achievement. Therefore, the paper presents that the activities of schools and students organised within the extracurricular activities which contributes to the promotion of multicultural education.

Keywords: multicultural education, integration process, modern school

Introduction

The promotion of multicultural education and multilingualism is achieved through educational systems and contributes to tolerance and respect for diversity in societies. There is a strong interrelationship between social integration and inclusive education. Social integration presupposes respect for diversity and its active promotion through various public policies, including those related to the use of language, and in education, and to giving everyone access to information about minority communities through curricula. Multicultural education is based on the belief in the passive coexistence of different cultures in one space, and through learning about them, it aims only at accepting or at least tolerating them.

Intercultural education seeks to develop a sustainable way of life in a multicultural society through: building understanding, mutual respect, dialogue and non-discrimination between members of different cultures. The term multicultural in addition to the elements of ethnic and national culture includes linguistic, religious and socio-cultural diversity. According to Ouellet (1991), multicultural education seeks to promote and develop a better understanding of cultures, the ability to communicate between them, a more flexible attitude towards cultural differences and active social interaction in order to recognize the basic features of human nature as something in common.

Multicultural education has its roots in the 1960s, when the civil rights movement, which advocated the assimilation of minority groups into the dominant American culture, became increasingly important (Sobol, 1990). These movements opposed discriminatory practices in public institutions, and especially in educational institutions. James Banks appears as one of the pioneers of multicultural education. Multicultural education is also a reform movement that seeks to reform schools and other educational institutions so that students have equal opportunities to learn, regardless of gender, social class, language, culture, and race (Banks, 2010).

The development and integration of multicultural education into the educational and social system is regulated by numerous international documents. In addition to documents and regulations, the initiative of countries is also important, as are the professional efforts of all those involved in the education system. The Republic of Serbia has numerous opportunities for the development of multicultural education, encouraged both nationally and internationally. The process of European integration enables the process of exchange and accessibility of education for different categories of the population, and in the following period in the process of work.

1. International instruments, principles and guidelines for multicultural education

From the aspect of multiculturalism policy, international instruments on which multicultural/intercultural education is based are important, such as: declarations, international conventions, international agreements and other instruments. The international instruments on which intercultural/multicultural education is based are: UN Charter of Civil and Political Rights (1946), Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), Convention and Recommendations against Discrimination in Education, UNESCO (1960), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965), Declaration on the elimination of all forms of intolerance and discrimination on the basis of religious affiliation (1981), Dakar Framework for Action (2000), UNESCO

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The three basic principles of intercultural education are (UNESCO, 2006):

1. Intercultural education respects the cultural identity of students by providing culturally appropriate and responsive quality education for all,
2. Intercultural education provides all students with the cultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes they need to be active and responsible citizens of society and
3. Intercultural education provides all students with cultural knowledge, skills and attitudes that enable them to contribute to respect, understanding and solidarity among individuals, ethnic groups, social and cultural groups and nations.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights prohibits discrimination against individuals on the basis of belonging to certain racial, religious, national, ethnic, linguistic and other social groups (United Nations, 1948). In addition to this declaration, it is important to mention the UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (1981), the UN Resolution on the Elimination of All Forms of Religious Intolerance (1988). The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted in 1966, introduces the principle of non-discrimination and the group's right to survival and undisturbed physical existence, and the right to secure and preserve the group's identity.

The universal instrument dedicated to the rights of minorities is the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, which was adopted by the General Assembly in 1992. The obligations of states, among others, are to take the necessary measures that will enable members of minorities to learn their mother tongue and to have instruction in that language. States are obliged to encourage the acquisition of knowledge about the culture, tradition and history of minorities, as well as, to enable full and equal participation of members of minorities in the economic and overall social life of the country. Adapting the curricula and harmonizing the content of the subject curriculum in the teaching process with the prescribed goals is one of the ways to fulfill this obligation. States also oblige to cooperate, understand information and experience and strengthen mutual trust in order to implement the rights contained in the declaration (United Nations, 1992).

The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities was adopted by the Council of Europe in 1995. The Convention prohibits discrimination and guarantees equality. States should create conditions for respecting and preserving the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of every member of a national minority (Council of Europe, 1995).

Within the OSCE activities, the Copenhagen Document was adopted which is the basic instrument of the OSCE in the protection of the rights of minorities related to the right to public use and learning of the mother tongue and education in the same, the right to

form, where possible, the right to establish and maintain educational, cultural and religious institutions, as well as other rights (OSCE, 1990).

The guidelines of the Council of Europe in the field of intercultural education are integrated into the first projects started in the 70s, after which they were further developed. Council of Europe projects were initially aimed at integrating minorities and trying to ensure equality in education. Subsequent research and case studies highlighted the importance of religion in education and then focused on differences in the context of language, history, geography and religion, thus laying the foundations for integrating intercultural education with the projects "civic education" and "education for democratic citizenship".

1.1. Integration of multicultural education in the education system

Multicultural education is based on the belief in the passive coexistence of different cultures in one space, and through learning about them, it aims only at accepting or at least tolerating them. Intercultural education seeks to develop a sustainable way of life in a multicultural society through: building understanding, mutual respect, dialogue and non-discrimination between members of different cultures. The term multicultural in addition to the elements of ethnic and national culture includes linguistic, religious and socio-cultural diversity.

Multicultural education has its roots in the 1960s, when the civil rights movement, which advocated the assimilation of minority groups into the dominant American culture, became increasingly important (Sobol, 1990). Multicultural education is also a reform movement that seeks to reform schools and other educational institutions so that students have equal opportunities to learn, regardless of gender, social class, language, culture, and race (Banks, 2010). Bennett believes that intercultural sensitivity can be traced in a six-stage development model. According to this model, the first three stages take place within the ethnocentric worldview, and stages four, five and six within the ethno relativistic worldview. Ethnocentric orientation can be manifested as avoiding cultural differences, either by denying their existence (denial stage), or by labeling them as negative, threatening and undesirable (defense stage) or by denying their significance (minimization stage). On the other hand, the ethno-relativistic view of the world is directed towards differences, whether it represents their acceptance (acceptance stage), or adjusting the perspective to take into account differences (adaptation stage), or integrating all cultural differences into experience and determining one's own identity (integration stage).). Underlying this model is the assumption that the more complex and refined a person's relationship to cultural differences is, the greater his or her potential for manifesting intercultural competence (Bennett, 2004). Achieving the goals of multicultural education necessarily requires the transformation of the school, as well as, critical reflection on all aspects of schooling. According to Banks (1995, 2010), there are five dimensions to multicultural education:

- Content integration which refers to the integration of content, materials and examples from different cultures into a regular system of teaching and learning.
- The construction of knowledge is based on the fact that knowledge is socially constructed. Teachers should help students understand their own culture and their position in society.
- Reduction of prejudices. Multicultural education strives to reduce negative prejudices and form positive attitudes towards racial, ethnic, cultural and other groups. Research shows that students come to school with many prejudices, but

that teaching units and teaching materials, which incorporate content related to different groups, can reduce prejudices.

- Pedagogy of equality exists when teachers modify their way of working in a direction that encourages the learning of members of different groups. It involves different ways of working, lecturing and approaches to students who respect their cultural backgrounds.
- Empowering school culture which means that school culture and school organization should promote gender, racial, ethnic and social justice.

The key question that must be asked when considering the concept of multicultural education is how teachers are prepared to work with students from different social contexts, because it is teachers who have the most important role in implementing the idea of multicultural education in practice. Banks (2006) lists four types of teacher competencies for multicultural education: knowledge of student characteristics and adaptation to student learning styles; high level of knowledge of the teaching content of the subject they teaches; classroom management skills by encouraging cooperation, student responsibility, as well as managing cultural patterns of behavior in a group of students and awareness of ethical issues related to the profession, which includes reviewing existing practices and introducing innovations in teaching and school organization.

The Council of Europe supports the promotion of human rights and democracy through education, as a means of building peaceful societies where the human dignity of all people is respected. With the adoption of the Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (Recommendation CM/Rec, 2010) the member states committed themselves to the aim of providing every person within their territory with the opportunity of education for democratic citizenship and human rights education . It provides a unique common European framework of reference and is a focus and catalyst for action in the member states (Council of Europe, 2010).

1.2. Indicators of multicultural policy development

The beginnings of formal intercultural education in Europe are related to the Council of Europe project Democracy, Human Rights, Minorities: Educational and Cultural Aspects which officially presents the principles of intercultural education at the European level. Given the importance of multiculturalism policy, several indicators are being developed on the basis of which progress in this area can be monitored: Multiculturalism Policy Index, Civic Integration Index Scores and other indicators. The Multiculturalism Policy Index is calculated based on the following indicators: 1. Constitutional, legislative, or parliamentary affirmation of multiculturalism at the central and/or regional and municipal levels and the existence of a government ministry, secretariat, or advisory board to implement this policy in consultation with ethnic communities. 2. The adoption of multiculturalism in school curriculum. 3. The inclusion of ethnic representation/sensitivity in the mandate of public media or media licensing. 4. Exemptions from dress codes. 5. Allowing of dual citizenship. 6. The funding of ethnic group organizations or activities. 7. The funding of bilingual education or mother-tongue instruction. 8. Affirmative action for disadvantaged immigrant groups. The maximum score that can be obtained based on this index is 8 (Table 1).

Table 1: Multiculturalism Policy Index

Country	1980	2000	2010
Sweden	3	5	7
Belgium	1	3	5.5
Ireland	1	1.5	3
Italy	0	1.5	1
Finland	0	1.5	6
Portugal	1	2	3.5
Spain	0	1.0	3.5
France	1	2	2
Austria	0	1	1.5
Netherlands	2.5	5.5	2
United Kingdom	2.5	5.5	5.5
Denmark	0	0.5	0
Germany	0	2	2.5
Canada	5	7.5	7.5
Australia	4	8	8
United States	3	3	3
Switzerland	0	1	1
Norway	0	0	3.5
New Zealand	2.5	5	5.5
Greece	0.5	0.5	2.5
Japan	0	0	0
European average	0.7	2.1	3.1
Overall average	1.29	2.71	3.52

Source: Multiculturalism Policy Index, www.queensu.ca/mcp

The countries of open integration strategies (Sweden, Finland, Canada, Australia) are also the countries that recorded the highest growth in the implementation of multiculturalism policy from 2000 to 2010. Successful implementation of multiculturalism implies acceptance of the policy of civic integration, in the sense of promoting a common national language and national identity. On the other hand, there

are countries that adopt inaccessible and closed civic strategies based on coercive and assimilationist policies of civic integration.

The policy of multiculturalism can also be analyzed from the aspect of national minorities. The positive attitude of the state towards national minorities in terms of accepting the policy of multiculturalism was analyzed according to the following conditions: the existence of federal autonomy in full or to some extent; recognition of the minority language as an official language at the national or sub-state level; guaranteed representation in the central legislature and the constitutional court; public funding of universities, schools and minority language media; constitutional or parliamentary affirmation of “multinationalism” and the development and promotion of an internationally recognizable minority community identity (Duvieusart, 2011). The overall score of the countries in the Index shows a trend of strengthening the policy of multiculturalism (Table 2).

Table 2: Multiculturalism Policy Index for national minorities

Country	1980	2000	2010
Belgium	3.5	5.5	5.5
Canada	4.5	5	6
Finland	4	4.5	4.5
France	0	1	2
Greece	0	0	0
Italy	3.5	4	4.5
Japan	0	0	0
Spain	4	4.5	6
Switzerland	4	4	4
United Kingdom	1.5	5	6
United States	3.5	3.5	3.5

Source: Multiculturalism Policy Index, www.queensu.ca/mep

Contemporary educational discourse requires that differences in culture, gender, or abilities be approached appropriately, which will have a direct impact on future citizens at the local, national, and international levels (Rovegno & Dooly, 2006). Intercultural competence is the ability to critically evaluate practices and products in one's own culture, but also in the cultures of other peoples and groups. It is therefore important to analyze the Civic Integration Index Scores which shows that the largest changes in this domain were implemented by Denmark, Germany, followed by Austria, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

A review of these indicators shows progress in the field of multiculturalism policy, which in certain segments includes educational policies with certain differences depending on the country. With the adoption of the Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (ED /HRE) in 2010, the member states committed themselves to the aim of providing every person within their territory with the opportunity of education for democratic citizenship and human rights education. Major progress has been made towards increasing access to education at all levels and increasing enrolment rates in schools particularly for women and girls, basic literacy skills have improved tremendously, yet bolder efforts are needed to make even greater strides towards achieving universal education goals (Council of Europe, 2010).

Social entrepreneurship can be one of the ways to help integrate into society and make money. Social entrepreneurship contributes to the creation of a society ruled by cohesion, dignity and solidarity, which is the aspiration in the EU as well. The Social Entrepreneurship Initiative was launched by the European Commission as a short-term action plan to stimulate the creation, development and growth of social enterprises. The initiative defined eleven priority measures classified into three groups: the first group of measures refers to facilitating access to funds, the second group includes increasing the visibility of social enterprises, while the third group refers to improving the legal

framework for these enterprises (European Commission, 2011). The new growth model defined within this initiative promotes a competitive social market economy, which is the essence of the Europe 2020 Strategy. In the EU, the contribution of the social economy to the economy is 11%, and employment to 6.5%. In 2012, there were two million social enterprises in the EU that employed 14.6 million people. They are most often established in the sectors of restaurants and cafes, cleaning services, media, car washing, household services, recycling, second-hand goods and culture sales.

2. Review of national regulations and achievements regarding the promotion of multicultural education

The legal framework in the Republic of Serbia has legal bases in international instruments and national legislation that respect the multiethnic character of society, which is the basis for the development of intercultural education. This framework includes the following regulations: Constitution of the Republic of Serbia (2006), Federal Law on the Protection of the Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities (2002), Law on the Fundamentals of the Education System (2003, 2004), Comprehensive analysis of the primary education system in the FRY, Unicef, Belgrade (2001), Quality education for all - the path to a developed society, MoES, Belgrade (2002), Poverty Reduction Strategy, Government of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade (2003), Quality education for all - challenges of education reform in Serbia, MoES, Belgrade (2004), Action Plan of the Decade of Roma Integration, Government of the Republic of Serbia (2005-2015), Unified Action Plan for Improving Roma Education, JAP, Belgrade (2005) and other regulations.

Intercultural education in Serbia has not yet become an integral part of the general school curriculum, but certain contents, concepts or topics of different cultures have been added to the curriculum so that its existing structure does not change. In most European countries, an intercultural approach exists among the general objectives of the national curriculum or is reflected in other official education documents. Intercultural education is most often included in subjects such as: history, geography, foreign languages and religious education.

Serbia has a long history of ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious diversity. The organization of classes in the mother tongue and the possibility to "learn the language of the community" when the majority group learns the language of minorities, represent a significant contribution to the intercultural understanding and realization of human rights of minority groups. The law stipulates that classes be conducted in the Serbian language; in areas where national minorities live, it can also be realized in that language. A survey conducted by Strategic Marketing in 2004 at the University of Belgrade, Novi Sad, Nis and Kragujevac showed that there is a great social distance among students. 70% of students in Serbia would not share a room with Albanians and 63% with Roma, and a large number of them would agreed to share a room with students from Macedonia (75%) and Slovenia (70%). Serbian-Hungarian relations are the key multiethnic relations for the stability of Vojvodina, so a series of ethnically based incidents made these relations a topic dealt with by the highest state authorities, but also European and world organizations and institutions (Vodič za unapređenje interkulturalnog obrazovanja, 2007).

Conceived as Quality Education for All, as education reform, is also defined as a tool for social and economic progress, reconciliation, social cohesion and integration. The systematic inclusion of interculturality in the education system (intercultural education reform) implies, above all, the provision of systematic support to teachers and schools for the implementation and monitoring of appropriate programs. Teacher training for

working with different groups is still not systematically organized or mandatory, and it is usually reduced to a small number of programs brought to schools by non-governmental organizations (Ministarstvo prosvete i sporta RS, 2002). Education for living in a multiethnic community, and for living in a world of diversity in general, should be included in the curricula of teacher training colleges as part of the reform of higher education within the Bologna Process.

3. *The role of the integration process in the harmonization of educational policies in the multiculturalism field*

Education is an integral part and one of the key goals of the strategy for growth and job creation Europe 2020. Serbia's integration processes into the EU have strengthened the role and promotion of education through various projects:

1. Erasmus for All is based on the assumption that investing in education and training is the key for every individual, regardless of age and background, to use their potential and increase their chances of employment. Five million people will be able to study or improve abroad with the grants of the program for which 19 billion euros have been set aside.

2. TEMPUS is a project helping the reform and modernization of higher education in partner countries of the European Union. The global goal of the program is to create an area of cooperation in higher education between the EU and 26 partner countries.

3. Erasmus Mundus aims to increase the quality of higher education and the mobility of students and university professors through cooperation with partner countries. The program gives students and teaching staff from all over the world the opportunity to engage in postgraduate studies at EU institutions and vice versa: their EU counterparts can do the same in third countries.

4. Youth in Action is an EU program for young people aged 15 to 28 designed to foster a sense of active European citizenship, solidarity and tolerance, as well as to involve them more in shaping the future of the European Union. The program promotes youth mobility within the EU but also outside the Union, as well as, non-formal learning, intercultural dialogue and youth cooperation, regardless of their cultural, religious or other background.

5. Comenius for the level up to secondary school (includes exchange of students and teachers), Erasmus for higher education (exchange of students and support of project activities), Leonardo da Vinci for vocational education and training (financing of international cooperation projects) and Grundtvig for adult education lifelong learning).

6. Jean Monnet sub-program that stimulates learning, research and debate on European integration in higher education institutions in Europe and around the world, through three key activities: education in departments named after Jean Monnet, as well as funding academic programs and modules of the same name. Every year, 1,500 professors and almost 500,000 students participate in these projects.

A common feature of these programs is that they provide an opportunity for the citizens of Serbia to get involved in program activities even though they are in the process of joining the EU. In addition, Serbia can participate in some of the centralized parts of the programs managed by the European Commission, namely multilateral projects, as well as, multilateral and thematic networks. Other types of adult learning are funded through the "transversal part of the program": language learning, learning IT skills,

cooperation in policy making and innovation, as well as disseminating good practice and exploiting results.

The "Quality Education for All" Project is being implemented in Serbia within the joint initiative of the European Union and the Council of Europe, with the goal of improving the quality of education by encouraging democratic culture in the formal education system by applying an anti-discrimination approach. The project is jointly implemented by the European Union and the Council of Europe through the "Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey 2019-2022" program. This three-year program covers actions in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey, Kosovo and it is implemented by the Council of Europe from May 2019.

The main partners in the project are the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, the Institute for the Advancement of Education and other educational institutions. The total budget of the project is 900,000 euros and it lasts until May 2022. The training is based on the standards and practices of the Council of Europe as well as the implementation of the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture of the Council of Europe. Over 150 teachers, educators and professional associates joined these trainings to learn more about the Framework and its components. The project will use the Council of Europe's Framework of Competence for Democratic Culture for systematic support at two levels - school, including local communities and at the level of educational policies with students, colleagues, parents and members of the local community (Council of Europe Portal).

4. The role of school climate and extracurricular activities in the development of multicultural education

The school climate (ethos) is an important element of students' education and progress. The school is characterized not only by the academic achievements of its students, but also by less tangible aspects such as: employee-student relations, management model and others. Aspect of school life such as school climate/ethos students often remember and it has a strong influence on their later choices, priorities and values. That is why the school should be much more aware of the hidden messages that children receive and take into account whether any of these messages are in conflict with what is being taught.

In order to provide education for a developed and sustainable way of living together in a multicultural society, it is necessary for the education system to include an intercultural perspective in the education of all, not just minorities. It is necessary to develop programs for the integration of the intercultural perspective into the overall school life. Programs should cover a variety of subjects, extracurricular activities, school ethos, and opening the school to communities. The criteria for assessing school ethos: School management - clarity of vision, Overall school relationships, Equality, fairness and discipline, Participation of students in school life, Cooperation with the wider community and with other schools, Positive atmosphere in which learning takes place, in the classroom and outside, A system of praise and rewards, Friendly environment - for parents and school visitors, Positive attitude of teachers, students and parents towards learning and Respect for student achievement that includes behavior, values and skills (SICI Workshop report, 2019).

If intercultural values and principles are analyzed as a criteria in all relevant segments of school policy, its indicators are: all documents defining school policy contain parts dealing with the promotion, application and development of intercultural values and principles (or there is a special plan that includes it) (Verifier: school development plan

(SRP), regulations, annual school work plan, parent council work plan, student parliament work plan, etc.), criteria for forming different school bodies include respect for the principles of multiethnic equality (Verifier: criteria and recommendations on formation school bodies (internal document); list and ethnic structure of all ethnic bodies) and other criteria and their verifiers.

Example of a school development plan:

"In our diversity is our wealth" Based on the exposed needs, the priorities of our school are:

1. nurturing tradition and culture in students, exchange of cultural specifics between students of different ethnic groups (Serbian, Hungarian, Roma), better mutual acquaintancethrough various types of extracurricular activities and the content of individual subjects,
2. improving the school climate by working on developing humanity and empathy by organizing actions to help children and schools to vulnerable categories of students and the population in general (directing students' energy to true human values, with greater engagement department heads),
3. due to the very stereotypical way of working of teachers, it is necessary to intensify education teachers for the application of modern methods and forms of work in accordance with the needs students; therefore, improve the quality of teaching.

Development goals:

nutrition of tradition and culture of the students,

improving the school climate in the spirit of humanity and empathy

raising the quality of teaching by introduction modern methods, forms of work and teaching materials.

Thanks to working together on projects, children from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds had the opportunity to get to know each other better, make friends, cooperate and establish friendships. These some of the activities which are realized in the field of multicultural education (Grupa Most, 2007, 2010):

Ministry of Education and Sports, school administrations of Nis and Kragujevac, Open Fund the Society and the Center for Interactive Pedagogy have developed a Local Strategy improving Roma education.

The Public Achievement Team that was formed in the Elementary School "Desanka Maksimović" plans a project to connect children from Bulgaria, Poland and Serbia.

Within the program Alphabet of Democracy - Wealth of Diversity (Group 484) meetings of high school students from different cultures in Serbia were organized. The summer camp was organized, and activities related to learning about human rights and democracy, introduction to civil society, encouraging students to engage in activism based on getting to know the Convention on the Rights of the Child, encouraging students to act locally in communities, developing and practicing tolerance and learning about diversity. Students, professors and experts of various profiles participated in the program. This form of cooperation in the local community and at the level of the whole of Serbia has made it possible for students and teachers to acquire new knowledge and skills, socialize with learning, get to know new ways of communication in the group,

etc. The school thus introduced a new extracurricular activity, a new type and area of communication between students and professors, visiting high school students from other ethnic groups, etc. The program affirmed the school as a community open to diversity and the development of democratic values.

Twenty older students of the elementary school "Vuk Karadzic", from different ethnic backgrounds in the community worked on a project to make three films, one of which is a documentary, and two were plays.

The project "Science without Borders" has achieved international cooperation and exchange experiences of the Primary School "8. September" from Pirot and one primary school from Sofia. Mutual visits of teachers and students were realized. They organized in both cities identical activities: attending geography classes, getting acquainted with the principles and methods of work in schools and a tour of significant geographical objects and natural the beauty of the local community.

A seminar on Nonviolence was held at the Youth Multiethnic Center in Bujanovac communication in multiethnic communities. It designed and implemented the seminar program NGO Hrast from Nis (Center for Encouraging Psychological Growth and Development). The basic idea of the project is to present the conflict as a problem that affects every party of the conflict and equally limits them in realizing their needs and interests.

The Roma Association "AmaroDrom" from Nis is organizing a festival of children's Roma songs. Every year, new children's songs in the Romani language are performed at the festival. It's an opportunity to affirm the Romani language and culture and support efforts to overcome the social distances and prejudice against Roma. All children sing in Romani, although 50 percent of them are not Roma.

Conclusion

Multicultural education is an approach in education that is based on democratic values that affirm cultural pluralism in culturally diverse societies. It is based on the idea that all students, regardless of their gender, social class and ethnic, racial and cultural characteristics, should have equal opportunities to learn in school. The fact is that some students, because of these characteristics, have better opportunities for learning and success in school than students who belong to other groups that have different characteristics.

In an attempt to respond to the needs of a multicultural society and respect cultural differences, different strategies are used: intensification of official language learning, specially organized minority mother tongue learning and adoption of the value of one's own culture, bilingual teaching, introduction of intercultural strategy in minority and majority students. The analysis in the paper shows that there are extracurricular activities in schools that encourage the development of multicultural education, and in addition, school culture has an important place and role in terms of defined goals. Comprehensive activity in the field of multicultural education is the task of modern states, both in accordance with the defined and proclaimed goals and in accordance with the right to equal opportunities and education of all citizens.

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Towards Global Citizenship through Inclusive Academic Programs: How a Non-Formal Higher Education Initiative in Kosovo Transformed Students into Independent Learners

Artan Limani

Abstract

This paper provides an account on a socially inclusive non-formal higher education initiative in Kosovo and its transformative impact it had on students, instructors, and all other stakeholders in charge of its successful implementation. The Transformational Leadership Program (TLP), created to implement economic, social, educational, and political change in Kosovo, charged RIT Kosovo, the only American university in the region with a nonprofit status, with the American University Preparatory Program (AUPP). The paper provides an account on the program's impact on students' transformation, both personally and academically. It also gives a detailed reflection on the Kosovo education context, the RIT Kosovo Liberal Arts structure, and most importantly, the matrix employed to design the AUPP from a curricular standpoint, hire and train its instructors who became the bloodstream of it, design and implement a Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement scheme to assure world standards of learning and teaching, as well as the overall classroom dynamics, across all centers in Kosovo. The paper presents L.D. Fink's (2013) Significant Learning Experiences which was used as a theoretical lens when creating the curriculum, but most importantly, when implementing the curriculum in each learning class. According to the results of the program, Fink's lens implemented in the Kosovo context helped successfully complete the whole program cycle of 5 years, with 1150 students certified. Given this success, RIT Kosovo continues to offer its in-house Pre-College Preparatory Program, including the Summer Camp; both multidisciplinary programs aiming to enrich students' lives with global citizenship skills in an inclusive learning environment.

Keywords: Higher Education; Inclusive Higher Education; Global Citizenship; Quality Assurance; Curriculum Development; Teacher Training

Introduction

Contemporary academic environments must follow a matrix for change within their strategic development plans in order to maintain the competitiveness and attractiveness of their programs in the academic world. Regardless of a country's geographic position and size, practicality, applicability, and innovativeness of programs are crucial for attracting both national and international students. For a university to be attractive to students and organizations, it is not merely enough for faculty to engage in teaching and learning scholarship. Designing new knowledge-based programs is generally a way to attract attention within the academic realm. Similarly, outreach would not be complete without universities reaching out to the most vulnerable groups in a society. In Kosovo, women, people with disabilities, residents coming from rural areas, ethnic minorities, and members of the LGBTQ+ community are considered marginalized groups. Though the constitution of Kosovo creates legal foundations for these groups to pursue their rights and freedoms equally with other groups in the society, they are not openly and publicly invited to take part in academic, civic, governmental, public, and social life. The Rochester Institution of Technology in Kosovo (RIT Kosovo), including its subsidiaries, openly invites the marginalized to apply to academic programs and employs a non-discrimination policy towards these groups.

In these areas, RIT Kosovo sets itself apart from the majority of universities. Rather than intentionally neglecting them, RIT Kosovo specifically invites marginalized groups to apply and attend its degree and non-degree programs. The University engages in significant efforts in designing attractive degree and non-degree programs for students coming from disadvantaged groups in the society. The aim of these efforts is to create opportunities for marginalized groups specifically to allow them to experience quality education in a formal academic setting, as well as to potentially transform them into RIT Kosovo students. The ultimate goal is to make these students active and involved citizens in the democratic processes of the country. They would ideally be the changemakers of Kosovo and the region by pioneering civic engagement, promoting civic and public accountability, engaging in policy-making, teaching the importance of collaboration, and driving economic, social, and educational development in the country and beyond.

RIT Kosovo, formerly known as the American University in Kosovo (A.U.K), is located in Prishtina, Republic of Kosovo, in the heart of the Western Balkans, and it is Kosovo's only private, nonprofit higher education institution which offers RIT degrees from the school of Individualized Studies in the main campus in Rochester, New York. Students who enroll at RIT Kosovo can graduate with degrees in Economics and Statistics, Management and Entrepreneurship, Graphic Design and Multimedia, Web and Mobile Computing, Public Policy and Governance, Peace and Conflict Studies, Energy Policy Studies, and Individualized Study. Additionally, the college offers a unique Master of Science Degree in Strategic Foresight and Innovation. The school is committed to providing economic and social development to the country of Kosovo and the region through critical, practical, and innovative education while preparing students for the job market. It has managed to establish a name for itself in the country and the region for offering student-centered programs, syllabi, classes, and cooperative educational opportunities. Students leave the school with a vision about their future and specific immediate business plans—some of which gets developed through their coursework.

Education in Kosovo

Kosovo has faced serious challenges with its education system both in the pre and post-war period. Tahirsylaj (2008) reports that despite the great deal of effort by local and international organizations aiding the University of Prishtina (the largest university system in the country) to implement new curricula, new teaching and learning strategies, and new assessment strategies, the university has failed to implement any of them successfully and meet student needs. Mustafa et al., (2004), (as cited in Tahirsylaj 2008), in their study, found that traditional teaching and learning methods dominate during lectures with the teacher being at the center most of the time. All of the above is verified by Kachaniku (2020) in her study examining student teachers and teacher educators' approaches to research and the implementation of research in teaching and learning. The study revealed that classroom dynamics at two teacher education facilities centered on "knowledge transmission" from the teacher to the student while teaching remains informed from "teaching notes" rather than from research. The study reveals alarming findings where research among faculty and students, at two teacher education state institutions offering both BA and MA degrees, is almost inexistent in practice. Similarly, research is also perceived as unnecessary by the majority of teacher educators surveyed, which inherently puts higher education in the Balkans, as a whole, in an infringed situation.

Correspondingly, the 2015 Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) reported that in science, 15-year-old students in Kosovo scored 378 points compared to an average of 493 points in OECD countries. Likewise, Kosovo students scored 362 points in mathematics compared to an average of 490 points in OECD countries, as well as in reading which was 347 points, compared to an average of 493 points in OECD countries.

A 2015 Workforce Readiness Report (WRA) produced at the request of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), reports that 50%-70% of young people between ages of 15-24 are unable to find employment; within this group, the report suggests the percent may be higher among girls, marginalized groups, and minorities. Moreover, the study reports that secondary and tertiary education leaves students unprepared for the workplace where unemployed out-of-school adolescents find the education system out of date and predominantly focused on theory rather than on applied practical education. The study finds that employers are unsatisfied with the applicability of the high school and university curricula in preparing students for practical market needs.

A 2017 study published by Admovere, a local, Prishtina-based civic organization, shows that the University of Prishtina, which has the highest number of students and graduates in the country, is in a dire situation as far as quality of learning and teaching is concerned (The UP situation, 2017). According to the organization, the university has failed to meet European quality standards as it does not offer its students basic study assets such as access to online libraries, research opportunities, and updated study programs, while the faculty ranking and promotion system is not transparent and credible.

Despite all grants and investments by international donors, homework is not completed by officials. A worrisome report was recently published by the World Bank which depicts the learning gap for Kosovo students across years of education. According to

the report, by the time students are 18 years old, they should have completed 12.8 years of education. Instead, Kosovo students end up with only 7.7 years of education, which leaves them with a learning gap of 5.1 years (Human Capital Index, 2018).

This unjust realm puts Kosovo and its youth population in an inferior situation compared to their peers in developed countries. Kosovo adolescents are smart, talented, and passionate about pursuing unique and innovative ideas. However, they lack sustainable educational opportunities to help them materialize the concepts, practices, and innovative ideas and create organizations to compete in the regional and global market.

RIT Kosovo (A.U.K) and its promise to Kosovo

RIT Kosovo (A.U.K) is a learning community of faculty, staff and students who are committed to core values of scholarship, integrity, service, and civility (RIT Kosovo core principles). Initially established under its former name of A.U.K (The American University in Kosovo), it opened its doors to hundreds of high school graduates who came to materialize their personal and intellectual capacities while learning in a forward-thinking, collaborative, and innovative environment. The Liberal Arts College, located in the heart of Germia park in the capital of Prishtina, offers young Kosovars pursuit of academic excellence through research, innovation, and the use of cutting edge technology to pursue local change with a global impact.

The work placement for RIT Kosovo graduates as well as the myriad of innovative and rapidly-growing local and regional companies, speak volumes of the success of the institution. Around 95% of graduates find jobs with a potential for growth in the organization. The remaining 5% of students report pursuit of graduate studies (internal alumni survey). The institution owes a great deal of its success to the RIT main campus in Rochester, New York, to its innovative curricula, as well as the quality standards set forward by them. One of the main advantages the campus has, which puts it in the pedestal in the region, is the integrated RIT online library available to students and faculty. This allows for faculty and students to pursue research while using the most up-to-date library resources as well as inform their teaching from research.

Finally, RIT Kosovo faculty continuously grow through the professional development scheme of the Faculty Development Center (FDC) to keep up with the RIT global professional development standards (personal experience).

The Transformational Leadership Program (TLP) – Immersion Courses - An opportunity to reach out to a wider student body

In 2014, RIT Kosovo was awarded a grant through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to implement the Transformational Leadership Program (TLP) - Immersion and Public Service Courses. The TLP was a USAID initiative to help the Kosovar society through education and partnership of Kosovar universities with American universities, to drive economic, social, educational, and political change. The initiative planned to provide 185 students from Kosovo the opportunity to obtain master's degrees and 102 professional certificates in US universities and other related institutions. To date, all 185 master's students and 102 professional certificate students have completed their studies and have returned to Kosovo to engage in the market and employ the change that Kosovo and Kosovars need. It is significant to mention that among the 185 master's program scholarship

recipients, 51.3% were women, 16.8% came from rural areas, 7% were ethnic minorities, and 1.6% were people with disabilities (usaid-tlp-sp.org). Altogether, 65.4% of the students came from marginalized or under-served groups in the Kosovar society. Similarly, the professional certification program included a large number of under-served groups (63.7%). Namely, 52% were women, 12.7% came from rural parts of Kosovo, and 10% were ethnic minorities (usaid-tlp-sp.org). Today, Kosovo is much better off as its number of educated youth has risen whereas commonly under-served groups, such as women, can now be active participants and leaders of change within their organizations and communities.

Immersion Courses, also known as the American University Preparatory Program (AUPP), was an inevitable component of the TLP. The purpose was to provide logistics to the TLP through a five-year cooperative agreement which assisted students in Kosovo in gaining academic aptitude in order to compete for master's level scholarships and to pursue professional certifications in the United States. In the Cooperative Agreement, the AUPP was foreseen to academically prepare prospective graduate students to meet admissions criteria in American universities and to learn the academic requirements of the American academia in general. Having this in mind, as a result of the initial idea presented in the Cooperative Agreement, RIT faculty hired to run this program were compelled to design a general matrix for classes, as it was indicated in the agreement. The agreement included six classes for this program: English Refresher, Math Refresher, The Discovery course, TOEFL Preparatory course, GRE, and GMAT preparatory courses.

Another component of the grant, charged RIT Kosovo with providing training in Public Policy Development and Leadership. The goal of this component was to assist the government of Kosovo in increasing public policy development and leadership capacity at both central and municipal levels. Five cohorts of studies were foreseen for this component while the program is delivered by RIT Kosovo faculty, particularly those who teach in the Public Policy concentration. Nevertheless, this component is not part of this report though its impact in the Kosovar society is notable as it also reached out to almost all municipalities across the country.

RIT was chosen as a partner particularly because of the aforementioned status that the university holds in Kosovo and the region, within the academic realm. Having this in mind, designing the program and breaking down classes was seen as a great opportunity; however, delivering classes within the RIT Kosovo framework of academic quality with predominantly part-time lecturers, not necessarily trained in the RIT system, was a challenge itself.

For the first time, this unique program has focused on reaching out to the most marginalized and vulnerable groups in the Kosovo society and allowed them to experience an authentic academic non-degree program and motivate them to pursue an academic career in the US, Europe, Kosovo, or the region. Under marginalized and vulnerable, the program included women, people with disabilities, residents coming from rural areas, ethnic minorities, and the LGBTQ+ community. To do this, the program particularly targeted these groups through partnering with organizations in various cities across Kosovo to present the program and its advantages. The target group was limited to students who had already completed a bachelor's degree. The program enrolled 1150 students in total over the course of five cohorts. 1150 students completed the full pack of the program over the course of five cohorts whereas 471 students completed one or more courses in the program. It is significant to note that

75% of these students completed a master's degree in a US higher education institution, 12% completed a professional certificate in the US, 8% completed a bachelor's degree, while 4% completed a doctoral degree. Out of the total number of students who completed the program, 57% received a scholarship through the USAID funded TLP initiative, 10% through the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), 8% through the Government of Kosovo, 25% received university specific scholarships, 15% received scholarships through the EU funded project, "Young Cell Scheme," and 3% through the European Commission's Erasmus program.

Noteworthy are the various demographics. Out of all students, 57% were girls while 34.5% were boys. Out of them, 4.9% were Serbs, 0.5% Turks, 0.6% Bosnian, 0.5% Gorani, 0.6% RAE, 0.8% LGBTQ+, and 0.4% people with disabilities.

Immersion Courses – or the American University Preparatory Program (AUPP)

The AUPP was created to reach out and create a lasting impact on students' lives. It offered students the opportunity to be trained for the standardized tests of TOEFL, GRE, and GMAT. Yet it was crafted to leave a lasting academic footprint on students and make them better citizens. Part of the initial description of the program included a focus of the curriculum to develop well-rounded students. RIT Kosovo carefully drafted this program that prepares students for a study in a US-based higher education institution while helping students understand a good educational system. This knowledge prepares students to find an institution with a similar system in Kosovo and the region in order to pursue their studies further. RIT Kosovo faculty sought to develop their students into agents and advocates of change.

The program strived to create a positive learning environment with a student-centered approach while allowing instructors to experience academic freedom. Instructors were in constant collaboration with one another and learned about one another. Furthermore, they maintained decision-making power for curriculum changes and pedagogical approaches. The program, including the aforementioned elements, allowed students to create a purpose and pursue it, while training them to excel in each particular class.

The team was interested in creating a unique academic experience and chose to frame the program through Fink's (2013) Significant Learning Experiences lens. Initially, the idea was for the program to include an active learning philosophy where students are actively involved in creating and assessing their learning opportunities. The team was interested in creating learning opportunities to develop students as independent learners as a result, whether it is in one class or through a couple of classes. The exigence was to create an academic setting that included teachers lecturing less and students learning more. This was a mantra learned from Pasi Sahlberg in his *Finish Lessons 2.0* (2015). However, Langendorfer's (2011) claim that "learning doesn't always require teaching nor does teaching always result in learning" was also an inspiration for the philosophy of the program; to help create autonomous learners through providing autonomous learning opportunities. As a result, the program was created following Fink's (2013) taxonomy of significant learning. The team focused on ensuring that students learn how to learn, particularly because they came from a challenged school system. Moreover, the philosophy included a focus on students gaining, or as Fink (2013) suggests, foundational knowledge. According to Fink (2013), this would provide a basic understanding that is necessary for their academic pursuit. Within the general AUPP learning philosophy, teachers were trained to focus on these two elements of Fink's taxonomy early in the program by guiding students to become avid readers, therefore

learners; be able to find academically appropriate information online, and gain foundational knowledge to assess information critically.

Application and integration were the ultimate outcome of each course. To ensure this outcome, developing the human dimension within and among students was required as a permanent effort put forth by instructors. Sparking interest and creating value in the student learning resulted in significant learning as well as an improvement in student attendance of the program by a wide margin. Finally, instructors invested a lot of energy in collaboration as an important learning factor. Before students could collaborate, they were given the opportunity to learn about other students in class so that they could interact more effectively during learning experiences. Moreover, students were provided learning experiences that aligned with their values and areas of interests. One example was a required essay about engaging in effective intercultural communication without abandoning their unique cultural values. This assignment had them reflect on their own values and the values of others, some of whom were in their class while others were people they had met in other cultural contexts.

Altogether, Fink's (2013) taxonomy created a great foundation for the philosophy of the program and allowed for its dimensions to be contextualized specifically for students in the program. The team behind the design of the program was also interested on the holistic growth of students, which as a result, taught students perseverance, self-control, competence, global citizenship, critical thinking, accountability, communication, research methods, innovation, and leadership through every class offered in the program. Daily lesson plans were deeply rooted in these elements, and achieving these characteristics occurred mostly through our instructors serving our students as mentors and coaches inside and outside of the classroom.

The whole program offered six classes, three of which were designed to strengthen and develop life skills and civic competencies. The English Refresher intended to bring students' academic English proficiency closer to the level required for academic study in English and to prepare them for university work at the rigorous standard demanded by an American program of study. This course provided grounding in critical thinking, sentence-level grammar, expository writing, and oral communication and comprehension. It developed reading skills and academic vocabulary and gave students an introduction to such specific academic skills as attribution, citation, and basic research methods. After this course, students continued through the program where they enhanced and refined these skills. The Math Refresher class aimed to refine and refresh students' mathematical skills where specific elements of the GRE and GMAT admission tests were included. Most importantly, the class taught students to think critically for math problems, something that was not included in their previous education. This class focused on teaching students to complete math problems and to understand what they are doing and why. Students were allowed to conduct research through working in groups to understand and explain why a formula works and explain the logic behind the process of completing the math problem for a variety of reasons. The last course in this series was the Discovery course which taught students how to study, or in other words, how to cope with the requirements of the academia in the US, mainly at the graduate level. Being a graduate student in the US requires much more than only the aforementioned skills. Hence, the team decided to add some more texture to the class and make it more complete so that it meets students' requirements and it assures their success both at school and in social life. As a result, the class focused on a comprehensive exploration of the following units: The American Education System, Working While Studying, Applying for Graduate School, Developing Academic

Writing Skills, Preparing your Research, Writing about your Research, Listening Effectively, Communication and Culture, Intercultural Communication in Context, and Public Speaking. At the core of the class is a focus on understanding culture and diversity in the US. The program team and instructors, led by the academic director, aimed to ensure that students could operate easily in a highly diverse academic and social environment. Another point the class emphasized—which instructors and the team knew were relevant and necessary components to include—was academic integrity and avoiding plagiarism.

Generally, students showed appreciation for the whole class. They claimed that they finished the program more aware of the advantages and strengths of diversity and that appreciating diversity makes one's life a lot easier and more productive. As for research in general, students were utmost enthusiastic. For most students, the program offered an initial opportunity to engage in writing a research paper in standard academic format, which included an annotated bibliography and review of literature. Public speaking skills and the possibility to engage in group presentations for academic matters was yet another point of pride among students in general. After each cohort, students showed more appreciation for the Discovery class compared to other classes. However, in the alumni survey—designed to survey students after a particular time following the completion of the program—students showed appreciation of the TOEFL class, slightly more than the Discovery class. This is logical considering that students saw the immediate practical application of the class when taking the TOEFL iBT test.

The three other classes were specific as they prepared students for the standardized tests required for foreign students to gain admissions in different program they planned to pursue. This series included the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) Preparatory Course, The Graduate Record Examination (GRE) Preparatory Class, and the Graduate Management Admissions Test (GMAT). Though these classes were test specific, they were delivered while incorporating significant information from the first series of classes in a manner which allowed students to critically analyze approaches and try new ones.

Teacher Training and the Team of Instructors

Selecting, training, and acculturating instructors with the RIT Kosovo culture of teaching was challenging but was seen as a great opportunity by the instructors who were selected to teach in the program. More than 80 instructors were invited for an interview, and only 25 were selected to teach during a particular cohort. Our team of instructors was very vibrant with many pursuing professional and academic advancement over the course of their involvement with the program. This means that for a single class, over the course of five cohorts, there were two or three instructors, which was another challenge for the teacher training process itself.

Most of the instructors hired were local early career high school or college teachers who were eager to learn. They were happy to be selected to teach in the program which they viewed as dynamic and exciting. A great number of instructors had previously studied English Language and Literature at the University of Prishtina with little or no opportunity to receive any additional academic training abroad.

Nevertheless, some of the instructors, predominantly those who were selected to teach the Discovery course, had completed their undergraduate and/or graduate studies in

Europe and/or the US. This created a great blend and diversity of academic experiences given that collaboration was at the forefront of teacher training topics. Despite the opportunity, the program faced a major challenge since nearly all instructors lacked organizational identification as they had just finished their academic programs and only worked for a couple of years in various—mostly non-academic—organizations. Furthermore, some of the instructors had full-time jobs in non-academic organizations, which presented an additional challenge.

It was of utmost importance for the program to create a sense of community and belonging within the academic context of organizational functioning in order to promote mutual respect based on the postulates of academia, such as: collaboration, learning from one another, and academic freedom. This was a must, as the program was set to run for a longer time and from the teacher training perspective, it was important to try to keep the same instructors in the system. At the core of any of the teacher training sessions was “learning about others” in order to promote collaboration among instructors.

Going digital

As with any standard American University Preparatory Program, this program too introduced online digital tools to enhance learning and aid teaching. In 2016, the program introduced Google learning tools to become an embedded part of the program; though back then there was no sign of a pandemic. The team judged that in order to maintain RIT standards, the program must introduce digital learning tools and move the whole program platform online, just so students can continue learning even outside of class. The aim was to create a digital learning culture and allow students to have a plethora of learning resources at the tip of their fingers, through an app on their phone. Students appreciated the opportunity whereas instructors reported ease of access to students when outside of class and a dynamic online learning community based on debate.

The future of preparatory programs at RIT Kosovo

The school decided to continue to enrich the lives of Kosovo youth through providing unique learning opportunities. After a study was conducted with high school students in Kosovo, the administration learned that English and Math remain growing concerns among senior high school students when it comes to deciding to pursue studies with Liberal Arts American universities. This created the exigence to create a program which would offer high school students the opportunity to overcome their challenges in English and Math and possibly pursue their studies at RIT Kosovo.

Given the comprehensive experience with preparatory programs, particularly from the AUPP, a Pre-College Preparatory Program was put in place in 2016 which, to date, has attracted the brightest and high achieving students from across Kosovo, as it is offered in all major cities in the country. The nonprofit school has a vision to support Kosovo and its neighboring countries in developing their economies, societies, and democratic institutions. The school offers the program free of charge to students who meet the threshold requirement. The program aims to enable students to develop skills, knowledge, attitudes, and practices that are essential for successful admission and completion of contemporary higher education. As one of our instructors, notes, through the program, he “helps young people in Europe's youngest country to gain access to an enhanced high-quality educational opportunity, prepares them to pursue rewarding careers, and helps them lead more meaningful lives”.

Just as its mission notes, both in its degree and non-degree programs, RIT Kosovo remains committed to delivering outstanding American education for students from Kosovo and the world through innovative curricula, experiential learning, and practical research in a student-centered culture.

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The Impact of Multicultural Activities on Students of the Pedagogical Faculty of the University of Tetova

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Abstract

North Macedonia is a multi-ethnic country where different cultures are intertwined, but also a country with many stereotypes and prejudices. Therefore, it is a need of our time to carry out multicultural activities that would help reduce stereotypes and prejudices among members of different ethnic communities. In this regard, it is more than evident that all this can be achieved only through the path of education, which affects the formation of the personality of children and young people.

The purpose of this paper is to inquire upon the level of impact of the multicultural activities of the Centre for Balkan Cooperation Loja, realized in cooperation with the Faculty of Pedagogy of Tetovo, and with the students of this Faculty. It aims to provide a picture about how much our students, through the respective activities, manage to reduce stereotypes and prejudices about others and how much they create and cultivate new friendships with members of other ethnic communities.

The methodology of the paper is based on a survey questionnaire, which will be conducted online through the Google Forms platform. The survey will be anonymous and will include current and former students, who will give their opinions on the questions submitted.

The data from the paper will be processed quantitatively by determining the Pirlson coefficient, as well as by analyzing the student's responses.

The conclusions that will emerge from this paper will provide also recommendations for future actions.

Keywords: multicultural activities, stereotypes, prejudices.

Introduction

This paper deals with the impact of multicultural activities of the students of the Faculty of Pedagogy of the University of Tetova, given the fact that the teachers, through different activities, can influence the students in reducing stereotypes and prejudices. Building a cohesive society depends, first, on the level of impact of multicultural education on the young generations, whose integration in the society is expected ensure welfare for all members of different ethnicities, in terms of economic, cultural, linguistic, religious aspect, etc. All this can be achieved, only if we understand multiculturalism as recognition of similarities and respect for differences, without confusing it with assimilation. Only in this way communication and cooperation, tolerance and social understanding will increase, and the awareness of diversity values will be raised. The results of the empirical part of the paper prove that the multi-ethnic activities organized by the Centre for Balkan Cooperation Loja, with the students of the Faculty of Pedagogy, not only are positively accepted, but also had significant impacts on reducing stereotypes and prejudices, as well as on their continued association with members of the Macedonian ethnicity.

The situation of the multicultural education in the country

The Republic of North Macedonia is a multi-ethnic, multilingual, multicultural, and multi-confessional country, but in these regard there are a lot of stereotypes and prejudices among members of all ethnicities, which is a dividing factor. On the other hand, the schools, instead of playing their role for reducing these anomalies, influence the deepening of divisions between members of different ethnicities through ethnocentrism in the textbooks, and through the prejudices and stereotypes of teachers. These divisions have been observed recently by local and foreign organizations, by various written and electronic media, in numerous studies on multiculturalism and interethnic relations in education. To overcome the situation, the Ministry of Education and Science in cooperation with local non-governmental organizations, as well as with foreign organizations, are carrying out various activities in primary and secondary schools, but also in the Faculties that prepare teachers.

In the last ten years, regarding the integrated education, three different strategies in the field of education have been adopted, namely: Steps towards integrated education in the education system of the Republic of Macedonia - prepared by a team composed by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Macedonia; A concept for intercultural education - prepared by the expert team of Nansen Dialogue Centre in Skopje and approved by the MES at the beginning of 2016; and the Education Strategy 2018-2025 and the Action Plan - approved by the Government in January 2018. In this strategy, the emphasis on the role of education in improving interethnic integration and social cohesion is especially important. (National Strategy for the Development of the Concept One Society and Inter-culturalism, 2019).

In the last two strategic documents from the field of education (A concept for intercultural education - MES 2015, and Education Strategy for 2018-2025 - MES 2017), the definition for the respect of the differences of every kind of nature is clearly given. Thus, the idea of the document A concept for intercultural education consists in the creation of an educational environment in which intercultural relations and integration processes will be preserved, and cultural differences will be promoted in order to create a broader multicultural and multi-ethnic social concept.

In the document National Strategy for the Development of the Concept One Society and Inter-culturalism (2019-2021), three priorities, priority goals, and related activities in the field of education have been identified, namely:

1. Ensuring interaction between students of different ethnic communities and languages of teaching in primary and secondary education.
2. Advancing the learning of the "other's" language.
3. Reinforcing the elements of interculturality in teaching contents (National Strategy for the Development of the Concept One Society and Inter-culturalism, 2019).

The study on multiculturalism and interethnic relations in education conducted by the Centre for Human Rights and Conflict Resolution, Skopje, analyses the current situation and capacities of the education system for the promotion multiculturalism and the improvement of interethnic relations in the country. The report highlights the reduction of the number of multilingual schools, as well as of the number students of different languages of teaching who study in multilingual schools. The report also states that students of different ethnicities are not accompanied in school, teachers neither forbid nor stimulate the companionship among students, schools do not have the capacity for constructive conflict resolution, and that there is a lack of self-criticism for its role in the current state of interethnic relations in school - always others are considered guilty. In most schools, there are student communities, but their role is formal and marginal; and in all the schools, there are councils of parents, but they do not participate in making important decisions. School councils have a mixed composition, but very few participate in resolving issues related to interethnic communication, while the communication with the municipality is considered satisfactory even though it is mainly formal, and mostly on financial issues. (Petroska-Beska et.al. 2009).

Multiculturalism in higher education

During the last decade, interculturalism and inclusion have emerged as challenges in the field of education aiming to bring together members of different ethnic communities. All of this intended to overcome divisions in our education system, but it has been impossible to achieve without creating strategies through educational policies and programs. It is worth noting that without the support of international organizations and local organizations we could not have progressive movements in these directions. According to Barbieri, Vrgova & Bliznakoski (2013), the creation of institutions of higher education on an ethnic basis only deepened the divisions among the members of the new generation, whose national identity fluctuated after the military conflict. According to Georgieva, Velkovski & Damovska (2014), all the initiatives so far related to multicultural education identified the pre-school, primary and secondary education as areas that are crucial for initiating the process of rapprochement between members of different ethnic communities. It must be noted that there is a lack of initiatives for integration within higher education. These data are worrying, given that such a division in higher education could undermine the positive achievements of primary and secondary education. The problem with the role of higher education in the Macedonian multicultural society has grown in the broader context of inter-ethnic relations, especially as a problem of access in higher education of ethnic groups that are not a majority. This developed in the most pronounced aspect of interethnic tensions, so that access in higher education was politicized (Bakiu, B. et al., 2016).

The Ministry of Education and Science, in the new Strategic Plan, envisages some measures that can directly contribute to more a better integration in the field of education. Namely, it is planned to start teaching community languages as an elective subject at the Pedagogical Faculties and the Faculty of Philology in Skopje, as well as to have quotas for the enrolment of members of ethnic communities that are in smaller numbers. (Strategic Plan, Ministry of Education and Science 2015-2017, 2014).

The gap of multicultural activities in higher education, especially in the faculties of pedagogy, was filled among others by the Centre for Balkan Cooperation Loja, which conducted numerous trainings for students of three partner universities: the University of Tetova, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University - Skopje, and St. Clement of Ohrid University - Bitola. These trainings aimed to reinforce the performance of students as future teachers, in the part of conflict resolution. Loja Centre has also carried out various multicultural activities with students of Pedagogy in North Macedonia and has prepared a handbook that can be used as a resource and material by students and teachers at the university level.

Analysis and interpretation of the research results

In order to have a picture of the impact of these activities on the students of the Faculty of Pedagogy of the University of Tetova, we conducted a research with former and current students who have been participated in them. The research was conducted on the Google Forms platform and have answered by 23 graduate students and 23 current students. The questionnaire contained 13 questions in total. 4 of them provided us with information on general data. The other 9 questions, formulated on the basis of a Likert scale of 1-4 (1-not at all; 4-completely) provided us with data by which we managed to confirm our hypothesis: The activities carried out with the students of the Faculty of Pedagogy of the University of Tetova by CBC Loja affect the reduction of stereotypes and prejudices of students about members of the Macedonian ethnicity.

Table 1. Gender of students

		Gender			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	8	17.4	17.4	17.4
	Female	38	82.6	82.6	100.0
	Total	46	100.0	100.0	

From table 1 we see that 85% of the participating students are female and 15% are male. This is because most of the students enrolled in the Faculty of Pedagogy in the University of Tetova are female.

Table 2. Age of students

		Age_of_students			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18-24 years	23	50.0	50.0	50.0
	25-29 years	11	23.9	23.9	73.9
	More than 30	12	26.1	26.1	100.0
Total		46	100.0	100.0	

From table 2 we see that we are dealing with current students 18-24 years who make up 50% of the respondents, 26% are 25-29 years old, while 23.9% are more than 30 years old, i.e., graduate students, some of whom being already engaged in schools as teachers. From here, we find that half of our respondents are current students, and the other half are former students.

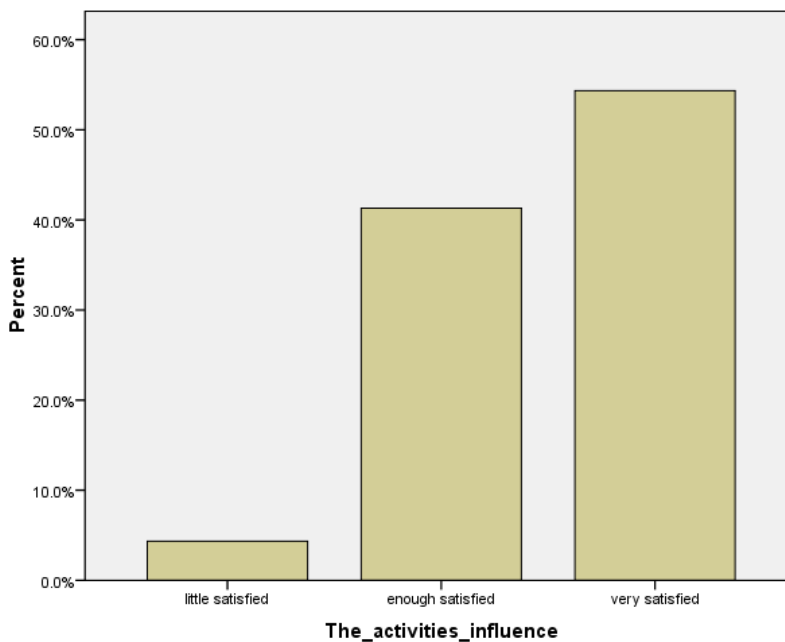


Fig.1. The impact of CBC Loja activities in reducing stereotypes and prejudices in students

From figure 1, we see that 56.5% of the students claim that the activities of CBC Loja have influenced for the reduction of stereotypes and prejudices towards members of other ethnic communities, 39.1% stated that they have had enough influence, while only 4.4% of the students stated that they were very little affected. It is important that none of the students responded that the activities have not affected at all.

Table 3. Students' opinions on the organization of activities of the CBC Loja

Organization_of_activities					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	43	93.5	93.5	93.5
	partially	3	6.5	6.5	100.0
Total		46	100.0	100.0	

From table 3, we notice that 93.5% of the students stated that the activities of CBC Loja were very well organized, while only 6.5% stated that they were partially well organized, and none of the students stated that they were not well organized.

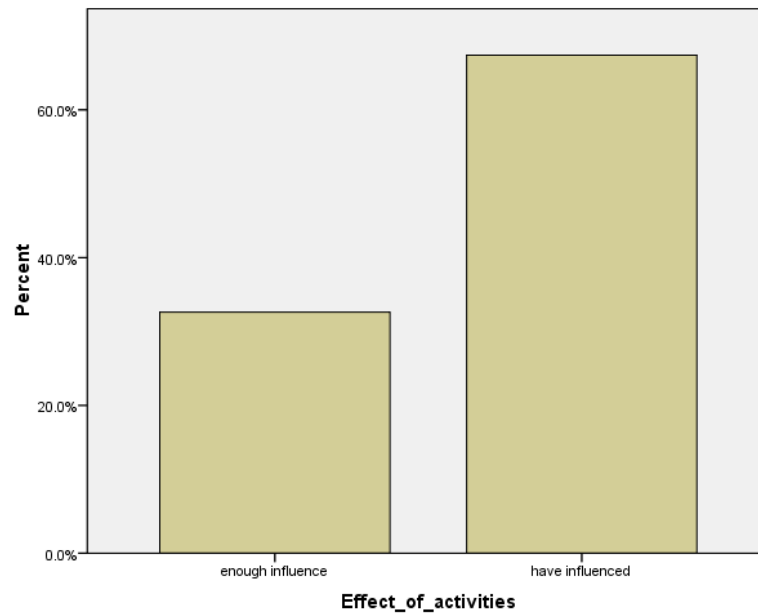


Fig.2. Students' opinions on the effect of their activities

Regarding the effect of organized activities and their impact on the students, from figure 2 we see that 67.4% of them stated that the effect is maximum, i.e., very good, only 32.6% claim that the effect was good and none of the students claimed that the effect was weak, or very weak. This justifies the realization of activities with students by CBC Loja and that such activities should be organized again in the future.

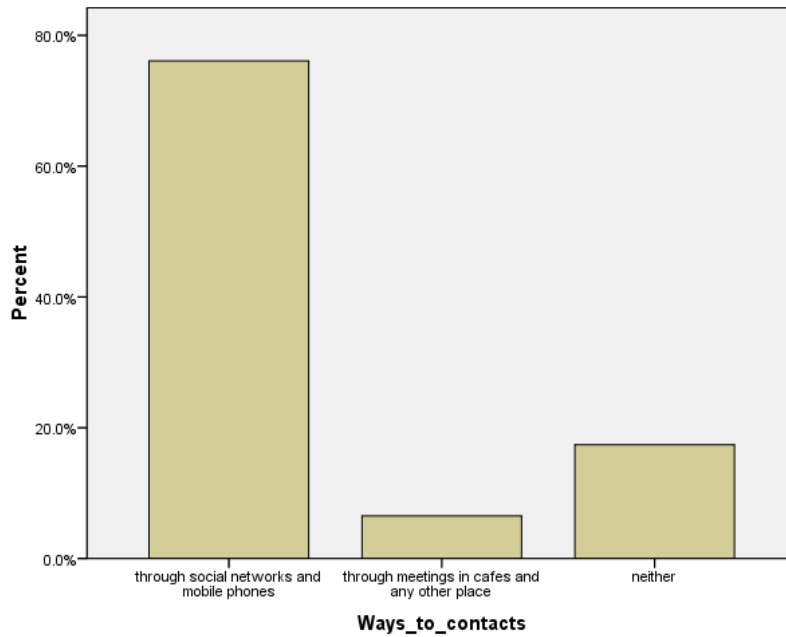


Fig. 3. Ways to continue contacts with students of other ethnicities

From figure 3, we see that 74.9% of the students have stated that the meetings with students of other ethnicities during the implementation of the joint project activities continue their contacts through social networks and phone calls, while only 7.7% do it through meetings in cafes or in other places. It is worth noting that none of the students claimed that the meetings take place through family visits. In addition, from the questionnaire we found that 82.6% of the students continue their contacts, while only 17.4% do not, a fact that speaks of the reasonableness of the project activities of CBC Loja. We must also emphasize that 100% of the students have stated that they would like to participate further in these activities and think that these activities should continue with other generations of students.

Table 4. Impact of activities and the effect achieved in reducing stereotypes and prejudices

Correlations		Ndikimi_i_aktiviteteve	Efeki_i_aktiviteteve
Ndikimi_i_aktiviteteve	Pearson Correlation	1	.519**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	46	46
Efeki_i_aktiviteteve	Pearson Correlation	.519**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	46	46

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Impact of activities and effect of activities

From table 4 we notice that in this case there is a positive average correlation between the activities organized by CBC Loja and their effect on students in preventing stereotypes and prejudices ($R = 0.51$; $p < 0.01$). The obtained values support our assumption that the activities carried out with the student of the Faculty of Pedagogy of the University of Tetova by CBC Loja affect the reduction of stereotypes and prejudices about members of the Macedonian ethnicity.

Final reviews

Given that in the Republic of North Macedonia the education is divided on ethnic basis, in this paper we tried to provide an overview of the situation of multicultural education throughout the education system, starting from primary, secondary, and higher education. In the theoretical part, the paper reviewed the educational policies undertaken by the Government in relation to multicultural education, and in the empirical part, it provided an overview of the activities undertaken in higher education, specifically in the Pedagogical Faculties by CBC Loja. From the processing of the results, it was noticed that the students support these activities, as well as express the need to be organized in the future as well. Students also emphasize that such activities help to reduce stereotypes and prejudices and that even after the completion of the project, they continue to maintain contacts and meet with their Macedonian peers whom they have met during the joint activities. What is worrying in this case is that in the faculties of pedagogy, apart from these initiatives by local and international organizations, as well as in the realm of multicultural education, there is no other concrete institutional activity in support of the integration of students in education.

Recommendations:

1. The faculties of pedagogy should create mechanisms that will initiate cooperation activities between them with the participation of professors and students of different languages of teaching.
2. The faculties of pedagogy should continue the cooperation with CBC Loja as well as with all local and international organizations that promote multicultural activities, organize international scientific conferences, etc.
3. Such activities should be initiated in other faculties of all the universities of the country that prepare teaching staff.
4. The faculties of pedagogy should use the mobility and cooperation with CBC Loja for multicultural activities with faculties of pedagogy of different European countries.

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Intercultural Competencies According to Students from the Faculty of Education-Bitola

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Abstract

The human community, like the individual, strives for achieving a certain good. Social endeavours are usually demonstrated as a commitment to provide equality in terms of a basic well-being of the people. Nevertheless, in the unstable and ever changing world it is hard to create an environment that will nurture the human rights of all people because they have different opinions, attitudes, and feelings about what is good for them. Anyway, it is clear that cross-cultural contacts impose the need for constructive communication. From this point of view, intercultural communication is generally based upon consensus building, respect and tolerance between all cultures. Because of that, openness to change and ability to see things from the perspective of the others is a fundamental step towards the development of intercultural competence. However, what is intercultural competence?

This paper attempts to examine students' perceptions of intercultural competencies in the field of education. For this purpose, we have asked students from the Faculty of Education in Bitola to define by brainstorming the term "intercultural competence". We collected 30 definitions and we applied the narrative analysis.

Keywords: multicultural education, intercultural competencies, students, teacher training.

Introduction

*One of the best ways we can help others is to continue to help ourselves
in the journey of intercultural competence building.*

Berardo & Deardorff

During the last ten years, the educational institutions in the Balkans are a driving force in the process of overcoming regional tensions and collisions. The common denominator for educational policies of all Balkan countries is one natural historic link: transition from socialism to capitalism. The relationships based on tolerance and cooperation between different groups, cultures and nations in the educational area are developing more quickly than in the political realm. Because of that, the faculties of pedagogy in the region have become nurseries of progressive changes in the society. The development and implementation of educational programs that celebrate cultural differences in society and demonstrate to the students the benefits of working together can become an appeal for other relevant national institutions to participate in this process not only on a declarative way (Sulè et al. 2020).

The competencies of teaching are a set of knowledge, skills and value attitudes, i.e., capacities of the teacher to perform complex activities in the educational process. It is well-known that the teachers' professional competencies are built on three basic levels (dimensions): cognitive level (knowledge), affective level (values) and pragmatic level (skills) (Burns & Shadoian-Gersing, 2010). That is why, when we talk about building and strengthening intercultural competencies among the teachers, we should take into account the intertwining of knowledge, attitudes and skills that a teacher should have in order to be able to work successfully and effectively in a multicultural environment. In addition, there are four key teaching competencies: teaching area competencies, teaching and learning competencies, student's development support competencies, and communication and collaboration competencies. All the four types can be strengthened and upgraded with intercultural elements.

What is intercultural competence? In short, intercultural competence is "a combination of attitudes, knowledge, understanding and skills applied through action that enables one, either singly or together with others, to understand and respect people who are perceived as having different cultural affiliations from oneself, respond appropriately, effectively and respectfully when interacting and communicating with such people, establish positive and constructive relationships with such people, understand oneself and one's own multiple cultural affiliations through encounters with cultural 'difference'" (Barrett et al., 2014, p. 16). Teachers should have awareness of other cultures, but also go beyond knowledge and include communication skills and attitudes, such as respect and empathy (Hailu et al., 2017). In this context, some researchers believe that the main guidelines that should be followed by every teacher working in a multicultural environment are the following: to teach students how to respect other cultures just like their own; to encourage students how to obtain experience of cultural differences, and at the same time how to develop an awareness of similarities of all people as human beings; how to encourage students to be open to each other, to set common goals and jointly strive to achieve them; and to help students how to successfully integrate and actively function in a multicultural society (Gulevska, 2015, a). Another reason for relating the teachers' and students' diversity can be that students of diverse backgrounds should interact with teachers from all backgrounds. Students need experiences in which people from different backgrounds work together

(Grant, 2015). Teachers' intercultural competence is never complete but can always be enriched still further from continuing experience of different kinds of intercultural encounters (Barrett et al., 2014). In addition, the educational equality, as well as freedom and justice, is an ideal towards which human beings work but they never fully attain (Banks, 2020). Because of that, working towards a vision of a critical multicultural education is often an impassioned work. It is inspiring and exhausting and it is never completed (Ravitch, 2016).

In this context, the placement of students in the schools is one of the key actions for building intercultural competences. Into the classroom, students develop values, attitudes, skills for conflict resolution, empathy, assertiveness, sharing and cooperation (Memeti et al. 2013). The comparison of the experiences in higher education institutions from the Balkans with regard to the student practicum shows that the teacher training faculties in Macedonia mark progress in the organization and harmonization of the manner of implementation of the practicum in general, as well as in the provision of quality student practicum in the NGO sector and in a multicultural environment. This is indicative of the fact that the advantage of the implementation of the practicum in the NGO sector lays in the informality of the applied approach (Gulevska et al., 2017). Based on these principles, multiculturalism in education builds a new strategy of teaching and educating whose ultimate result should be the adaptation of young people for life in conditions which dictates the new age.

Methods

This is a research, as it deals with the current issue of pedagogic practice, by applying a descriptive and qualitative approach. We consider that the application of this approach, along with the appropriate research techniques, will contribute to obtain detailed and essential analysis and interpretation of the data. Having in mind the significance of intercultural competencies for future teachers, we asked the students from the Faculty of Education in Bitola to describe them briefly. The research method that we used was content analysis. Interpreting and coding the textual material allowed us to identify the opinions, beliefs and experiences of students regarding this issue. All students' answers were collected in a brainstorming session. Because the method of content analysis usually involves some level of subjective interpretation, we decided to limit the analysis on a 30 definitions for the sake of conclusion clearness. The content analysis in our research includes three principles: how students understand the process of the development of intercultural competences (introduce core concepts), how much they recognize their own values and attitudes and others' values (explore values), and how much students define intercultural competence creatively (inspiration).

3. Intercultural Competencies According to Students from the Faculty of Education-Bitola

Introduce core concepts
Intercultural competence is an ability of a person to respect the differences between people and to accept their specifics as natural and good.
Intercultural competence removes discrimination, stereotypes and prejudices from our life.
Intercultural competence inaugurates the idea of equality and solidarity between all people.
Individuals with intercultural competences are cosmopolitans (citizens of the world).
Intercultural competence is a person's ability to empathize, tolerate and respect diversity.
Intercultural competence is the ability of a person for communication and adapting to another culture.
Intercultural competence is the power of overcoming ethnocentrism and creating a personal relationship with everything that exists in the world.
Intercultural competence is a manifestation of emotional intelligence and empathy to all human beings.
Flexibility to different cultural environments and curiosity are outcomes of the intercultural competence.
Intercultural competence is an ability for, sometimes painful, dialogue and mutual respect.
Explore values
Intercultural competence allows us to be more tolerant, more spiritual, and duty-oriented.
If we have friends with a different culture than ours, especially with another religion, then we have developed intercultural competence.
Intercultural competence implies a critical awareness of the weaknesses of one's own culture and an acknowledgment of the virtues of another's culture.
Intercultural competence is an approach to ethical relationships between people regardless their sex, race, nationality, religion, language, culture etc.
Our values and beliefs are the cornerstone of the building of intercultural competence.
Intercultural competence is obtained in a lifelong process and needs our patience, sacrifice and care for the humanity.
Intercultural competence is to strive for one of the greatest human ideals – reaching the universal happiness.

Intercultural competence is a moral capacity of an individual to express compassion, mercy, and honesty.
The integrity, freedom, and justice are the roots of intercultural competence.
Intercultural competence is the identity orientation.
Inspiration
Intercultural competence is to enjoy your own life and the life of other people.
The most powerful weapon for achieving world peace is the generous heart.
Intercultural competence is the constructive element in our mind that unites all people.
Intercultural competence is a power of our soul to understand the words spoken in a language that we do not understand.
The differences are beautiful, in them we can see the nuances of the universe.
Intercultural competence is an ability to make the distant - close, the unknown - known, and the angry - calm.
Intercultural competence is like snow that gives whiteness and purity to the world.
Intercultural competence is an ability to discover ourselves by getting to know the other.
Intercultural competence is the smoke of the burning fire of love that embraces all people.
Intercultural competence is a cross-cultural passport.

Results of the Content Analysis

The content analysis on the 30 answers above in the text shows that students have a positive opinion about gaining intercultural competences through studying.

In the first thematic area, "Introduce core concepts", students have defined the intercultural competence as an ability, power, idea, and manifestation of a certain knowledge and of certain skills. More precisely, it is knowledge and skills how to respect the differences, to accept specifics as natural and good, to remove discrimination, stereotypes and prejudices, to introduce the ideas of equality and solidarity, to overcome ethnocentrism and create personal relationships between people. In addition, according to students from the Faculty of Education in Bitola, the intercultural competence is a power for manifestation of emotional intelligence or power for empathy, tolerance, communication, adaption, flexibility, dialogue and mutual respect.

In the second thematic area, "Explore values", students have defined the intercultural competence as a value, duty-oriented approach, and beliefs. These moral capacities of the individuals should refer to identity orientation, critical awareness of the weaknesses of one's own culture, acknowledgment of the virtues of another's culture, and achievement of universal happiness. The main goals for achievement in this area are:

integrity, justice, honesty, freedom, compassion, mercy, patience, sacrifice, care for the humanity, tolerance, spirituality, friendships regardless sex, race, nationality, religion, language, culture.

In the third thematic area, "Inspiration", students have offered many beautiful and creative definitions about intercultural competence. Above in the table are given 10 original ideas that show us their youthful enthusiasm and their world-view. According to the students, intercultural competence allows the people to enjoy their own life and the life of other people, to understand the words spoken in a language that one does not know, to make the distant - close, the unknown – known, and the angry – calm, to discover themselves by getting to know the other, to achieve world peace, to see the nuances of the universe and to unite all people. Intercultural competence is defined by the students as power of the soul, generous heart, snow that gives whiteness and purity to the world, smoke of the burning fire of love that embraces all people, powerful weapon and constructive element in our mind, cross-cultural passport.

Conclusion

Cross-cultural contacts in the sphere of education impose the need for constructive communication. In this context, we can talk about change the role of the teacher in the educational process. Often the teacher carries paradigms of educational strategies, specific to the community in which they are raised. It is necessary, in line with social trends of modern times, to change their way of working. The teacher acquires more competence for the role of a mediator between students and their expectations and needs in accordance with the traditions of different cultural communities to which they belong. The goal of educational pluralism is to build positive relations between students through mutual respect and acceptance, and by setting common goals, as well as by overcoming stereotypes and prejudices. That is why the teacher is required to make direct contact with individual differences. "Aggressiveness" of macro cultures over micro cultures hampers the manifestation of the original identity, values, behavior patterns, language and nonverbal communication styles of the members of different cultural communities. The suppression of micro cultures and the inequality between people in modern society can have two final outcomes: assimilation or integration. In that sense, today more than ever, it is necessary to analyze the global feature of modern life in which cultural pluralism is recognized as an educational value and a spiritual health of any democratic and creative society (Gulevska, 2015 b).

According to the content analysis of the students' answers in our research, a progress has been noted in the development of the intercultural competencies of the future teachers, who participated in projects with multicultural components. The participants in a brainstorming session have showed an evident tendency to open up to people with different experience and ethnic background, make new friendships, and build a new mindset for the new world. Each child has a lot of dreams. Perhaps the best place to see some of them fulfilled is the classroom.

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Interaction Between "The Different" in the Mother Tongue Textbooks from First to Fifth Grade of Macedonian Primary Education

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Abstract

Textbooks play a significant role in sensitizing young students for the diversity of people in the world and the community in which they live, and in developing attitudes toward the others. Hence, it is of great importance, in writing and in the selection of textbooks used especially in multi-ethnic schools and communities, to take into account the intercultural dimension of texts, tasks and illustrations in them, i.e. to promote contents that will enable acceptance, respect and interaction of the different.

The paper presents the results of a comprehensive intercultural analysis of the mother tongue textbooks that are used in classes from first to fifth grade in the nine-year primary education in Macedonia. The research was aimed at exploring whether the textbooks' contents encourage interaction between the different in Macedonia, thus nurturing the intercultural dialogue and cooperation in young students. The analysis includes 38 books used by students in teaching of four compulsory courses: Macedonian language (13 textbooks), Albanian language (11), Turkish language (5), and Serbian language (3); and two elective courses: Vlach Language and culture (3), and Roma Language and culture (3). Major focus was given on three aspects of the interaction between the different: a) socializing and cooperation between children of different ethnic background; b) personal names that are used in texts and students' tasks; and c) the authors of works presented in the textbooks regarding their ethnic belonging.

In the research are used combined qualitative and quantitative methods and procedures, and the results are shown by narrative description, tables and illustrations with examples.

The analysis revealed that almost in all textbooks there are topics that have an affirmative approach to cooperation, socializing, helping and respect for other people, but in images and words it is not evident that they belong to different ethnic or religious communities. In addition, in mother tongue textbooks prevail names that are characteristic of a community that speaks the respective language. Finally, texts of authors belonging to the respective culture are dominant, with a higher incidence of authors from foreign cultures, whereas the authors from other ethnicities in Macedonia are least represented.

Keywords: Mother tongue textbooks, Intercultural dialogue and cooperation, Intercultural education, Primary education in Macedonia.

Introduction

Intercultural education is a contemporary response to the social needs of a plural multicultural reality. As a dynamic process of building relations between different cultures and “sharing cultural expressions via dialogue and mutual respect” (UNESCO Guidelines on Intercultural Education, 2006, p. 17), the concept of intercultural education is embedded since the beginning of the century in many international declarations, reports and recommendations. (Declaration by the European ministers of education on intercultural education in the new European context, 2003; UNESCO’s “Guidelines on Intercultural Education”, 2006; Council of Europe’s “White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue”, 2008; Council of Europe’s “Policies and practices for teaching socio-cultural diversity...” 2009). These documents provide a guidance on the development of education in Europe and beyond. The intercultural dimension of education is important particularly in multicultural societies, such as the Macedonian, in which the coexistence of citizens with different ethnic, linguistic, religious and socio-economic background has deep historical roots, whereas the inclusiveness and integration in education are aimed at strengthening the democratic capacities of the country. When performed in a pluralistic environment, education needs to be directed towards developing intercultural skills, values and attitudes of all the participants in the educational process, enabling thus to find the optimum ratio between cultural diversity and social cohesion (Krsteska-Papic et al., p.4).

One of the main instruments for promoting intercultural education in schools are textbooks. They play an important role in making students aware of the diversity that surrounds them and of the need for intercultural dialogue and cooperation. Research findings show that the way the others are presented in a textbook affects the student’s formation of attitudes towards those groups. If textbooks contain positive examples, with a clear commitment for building a multicultural society, and those examples express more of basic principles of interculturalism, then there are real preconditions to form positive attitudes, opinions and behavior of the students in relation to others. Hence, it is necessary that, in writing and the selection of textbooks, especially in multi-ethnic schools and communities, to take into account the intercultural dimension of texts, tasks and illustrations in them, respectively to promote contents that will enable acceptance, respect and interaction of the different.

These considerations, at a theoretical level, are confirmed in official documents issued by the Macedonian educational authorities in relation to the textbooks used in the schools throughout the country. Thus, the Methodology for evaluation of textbooks (Концепција за изработка на учебник и методологија за вреднување на учебник, 2010), prepared by the Bureau for Development of Education, points out that in the textbooks should not be used terms and expressions of disparaging attitudes towards certain communities or individuals, but the contents and illustrations should transmit cultural values and encourage mutual cooperation and a sense of respect for the others.

In order to verify the application of these recommendations in practice, a comprehensive analysis of all mother tongue textbooks used in teaching from first to fifth grade in the nine-year primary education was carried out. The research was aimed at exploring whether their texts, tasks and illustrations encourage interaction between the different in Macedonia, thus nurturing the intercultural dialogue and cooperation in students. The findings will enrich existing the analyzes of the intercultural dimension in primary education textbooks (Petroska-Beshka et al, 2009; Davcev & Achkovska-Leshkovska, 2009) and will contribute to a better understanding of the current situation in education in terms of the development of intercultural values and attitudes among children in early school age.

Research Methodology

The research is based on analysis of 38 textbooks used in teaching of four compulsory and two elective courses of the nine-year primary education curriculum. The compulsory subjects include 13 textbooks of Macedonian, 11 of Albanian, 5 of Turkish and 5 of Serbian language. The elective subjects include The Language and culture of the Vlachs and The Language and culture of the Roma that are covered by three textbooks each. The language and culture of Bosniaks was not included because at the time of the research there were no textbooks for this course. The distribution of analyzed textbooks by grade and subject is presented in the table below.

Table 1. Number of mother tongue textbooks used from first to fifth grade

Courses	grade 1	grade 2	grade 3	grade 4	grade 5	Textbooks
Macedonian	3	3	3	3	1	13
Albanian	2	3	2	3	1	11
Turkish	1	1	1	1	1	5
Serbian	/	/	1	1	1	3
Vlach Language and culture	/	/	1	1	1	3
Roma Language and culture	/	/	1	1	1	3
Textbooks	6	7	9	10	6	38

The research employs both qualitative and quantitative methods and procedures, and the results are shown by narrative description, tables and illustrations with examples.

The qualitative processing is done by using the method *Content analysis through deductive definition of categories*. Focus was given on three categories for analysis:

- a) Interaction between *the different*;
- b) Personal names that are used in texts and students' tasks; and
- c) Ethnic and gender affiliation of the authors of works presented in the textbooks.

Interaction between the different means social communication between two or more individuals or groups that vary in terms of ethnic and/or religious belonging and of gender, and it is exercised for fun and socializing, professional collaboration, mutual support, alliance etc. In a multicultural society, interaction between the different is an indicator of integration and coexistence of people of different cultures.

In the analysis of personal names should be taken into consideration the inability to make a clear distinction and to show their percentage, due to the use of the same names in different ethnic groups.

The quantitative analysis, mainly, refers to the indicators Personal names and Authors, and it covers spreadsheets with frequencies and percentages of the represented authors based on their nationality and gender, as well as the percentage of multicultural elements represented in the text and illustrations. Due to the limitation of the length of this report, not all the tables with quantitative data will be included, but a summary table will be displayed that allows comparison of the data from the same category within the textbooks in different languages.

In the following analysis are used the codes of textbooks when the text refers to them. Each code is made up of letters and numbers. Capital letters at the beginning indicate the name of the subject the textbook is intended for, the figure is an indicator of the grade, and the capital letter following the figure is used as a distinctive landmark when for the same subject and grade are available several textbooks. For example, the code MJ-4A refers to a textbook in Macedonian language for 4th grade, which is presented in the Appendix as the first among the concurrent textbooks.

The Results/Research findings

1. Interaction between the different

The thirteen textbooks in Macedonian language contain several texts showing socializing, cooperation and unity ("Smile", MJ-3A, p.105; "The camaraderie is something sacred", MJ-4A, p.84; "I told you, you told me", MJ-4A, p.94;"Let us love", MJ-5, p. 48; "Happy New Year", MJ-5, p.80). Yet there is a small number of those showing or encouraging interaction between different ethnicities living in Macedonia. In the first and second grade textbooks the intercultural dimension is present only in one sentence promoting the coexistence of Albanians and Macedonians ("Our neighbors have two daughters," MJ-1A, p.10), which is followed by an illustration of the Albanian family, recognized as such by parts of their traditional clothes. However, in the 2010 edition of the same textbook, the illustration has been modified by removing exactly the parts of clothes the Albanian community is recognized by.

Individual examples are found in textbooks for higher grades. In the three textbooks for the third grade there is only one text ("Working action" MJ-3A, p. 90) that indicates the respect and cooperation among children of different ethnic backgrounds (Djoko, Mile, Adem, Nina): "... It should not be said my tree, your tree, but our forest! The forest is common, ours, we need to cultivate it, protect it and love it altogether!—explained Adem..." Identical is the situation with the fourth grade textbooks: only one textbook contains a text ("Together we celebrate and socialize" MJ-4C, p.74) of a female Albanian student in which there is communication and interaction between children with different ethnic origins (Anitsa, Aleyna, Ajsu, Afrim, Marko, Allen). Children of Christian faith go to visit friends who celebrate Eid (Bayram). Altogether they make comparisons between the celebration of Christian and Muslim holidays and make a conclusion that all children are equal regardless their origin and religion: "Ajsu: We are all of different nationalities, and we still wonderfully socialize. Imagine: a Macedonian, a Serbian, a Turk, an Albanian and a Bosnian, and we are still most faithful friends. Marco: It does not matter. Yet we are the same, we are children. We rejoice the same way, laugh same way and we cry same way... ". Intercultural elements are identified in the Macedonian folk tale "The peasant and the mullah" (MJ-4C, p.12).

Encouragement of the interest about the other and fostering intercultural dialogue is more pronounced in the requirements and questions addressed to the students and they are included in a large number of literary works. Thus, during the analysis of traditional Christian customs the students are required to learn about the traditions of other

religions and to differentiate the similarities and the differences with Christianity (MJ-4C, p.67). When analyzing the text "Together we celebrate and socialize" (MJ-4C, p.74), the students are encouraged to compare the Muslim and Christian holidays, learn more about Eid, visit Muslim friend, congratulate their friends on holiday who celebrate Eid and learn about their customs. A comparison with intercultural context is made in the analysis of the songs: "The night when stars were falling down" (MJ-5, p.74), with a request to the students for socializing and mutual understanding with children from different religious affiliation ("Invite some of your friends from another religion to be your guest"); "Everywhere holiday" (MJ-5, p.87), through the requirement "Talk to the friend close to you on things you know for the Muslim holiday Eid-ul Fitr *Bayram)" and through the task given to the students to compare the rules for celebrating Eid-ul Fitr at Muslims and the Christmas at Christians; "Holiday" (MJ-3A, p.43), through questions that provoke students to think and discuss about holidays of other ethnicities in Macedonia (Which holidays do we celebrate in Macedonia? What is the occasion to celebrate these holidays? How are the celebrations marked?); "Christmas" (MJ-3B, p.104), through questions for students' reflection: New Year and Christmas are holidays when it is bestowed. In which holidays in other religions it is bestowed?

In the song "Holiday Song" (MJ-1C, p.33) students are asked questions about the holidays (What holidays do we celebrate? How do you recognize that we're celebrating? How do you act during the holidays?). Although they do not directly refer to interculturality, the teacher can guide the students to think about the holidays of other ethnicities living in Macedonia. Such "hidden interculturality" is identified in the request for the students to recall, and write "important personalities from our past" (MJ-3C, p.50).

Interculturality is present in the question preceding the Macedonian folk tale "The peasant and the mullah" (MJ-4C, p.12), by which the children are required to explain who is mullah, and who is priest, as well as in the brief explanation given for the mullah and priests during the Ottoman Empire.

There are more illustrations in textbooks that depict socializing and cooperation among children, but they do not explicitly contain elements by which characteristics of different ethnicities in Macedonia are recognized. Only one illustration shows the socialization of children from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, although interculturality is recognizable, primarily, due to the text related to the illustration. (MJ-4C, p.75).

In none of eleven Albanian language textbooks from first to third grade can be found texts, tasks or illustrations pointing to interaction between members of different ethnic background living in Macedonia. Only in the fifth grade textbook, in the article entitled "Në kursin e gjuhës" ("In the language course") people talk about socializing between children who together attend a course in a foreign language and belong to different ethnicities living in Macedonia: Arta Jusufi from Gostivar (Albanian girl), Ali Ulker from Vrapciste (Turk boy), Ivica Ristovski from Gostivar (Macedonian boy), as well as Bosnians, Roma, etc (AJ-5, p.65). In addition to the emphasis on camaraderie, the text points to the knowledge of the languages of the others ("... I will try to explain in Albanian and Macedonian language. I believe we will not have problems - said the professor. Yes - shouted altogether at once. We all know the languages of our friends. We are good friends and often we are together...").

Only in one of the fourth grade textbooks it is shown a picture of an Albanian boy and a Roma boy who are embraced and below it is written: ME + YOU = FRIENDSHIP

(AJ-4A, p. 67). In other textbooks, there are no illustrations of evident interaction between the different.

In five textbooks of the subject Turkish language used in classes from first to fifth grade of nine-year primary education the interaction between the different is found in several poetry and prose compositions where socializing, relationship between students, parents and relatives is mentioned. Such are the following: "İki arkadaş" ("Two friends"), "Orkestra" ("Orchestra"), "Sihirli pasta" ("Magic cake"), "İmece" ("Cooperation"), "Gökkuşağının hikayesi" ("Story of the Rainbow") (TJ-4, p.17,19,41,67,87). In the first and second grade textbooks, texts are underrepresented, so the socialization among children is shown through illustrations. However, in these illustrations the interaction between members of different ethnicities living in Macedonia is not emphasized.

Only in the poems "Bir dünyabırakın biz çocuklara" ("Give us children a world"), "Dünya çocukları" ("Children of the world"), "Dünyayı bize verseler" ("Only if the world were ours") (TJ-1, p. 73; TJ-3, p.27; TJ-4, p.131), as well as in illustrations supporting them (TJ-2, p.66) is explicitly represented interaction between members of different cultures but in a broader context.

Although several contents in three textbooks of Serbian language promote socializing and mutual assistance, only the short story „Успомена из Охрида“ ("Memories from Ohrid") explicitly talks about friendship between two children from different cultures, Philip and Jafer ("Jafer is from Tetovo and Philip is from Bitola. They were introduced this summer at the lake in Ohrid. They immediately became close friends. Every day and all day long, they would stay together. They swam together, and collected shells together.") (SJ-3, p.36).

It can be noticed that in Serbian language textbooks there are no contents that represent this dimension. What makes it difficult to identify by the names or images whether the interaction takes place between members of different cultures, is the fact that Serbs, whose religion is Orthodox, mainly have the common names with Macedonians. For example, in the text "Три друга" ("Three Friends") (SJ-3, p.66) are mentioned Zivko, Rodoljub, Misha and Nenad, but it cannot be concluded whether all the children are Serbs or are there Macedonians or perhaps members of other communities. Anthropological features or the clothing, in the illustrations, cannot be an indicator for distinction either.

In all three textbooks of the Language and culture of the Vlachs one can see interaction that is usually between members of the Vlach ethnic community, and rarely between Vlach and other ethnicities living in Macedonia. Such examples include dialogues between children and adults with Vlach and Macedonian names - Michali, Misha, Petar, in the context of teaching greetings and nice behavior (JKV-3, p. 14), a dialogue between two children, Vladimir and Atanas (JKV-4, p. 25), a dialogue between two female friends, Angela and Marija (JKV-4, p. 43), a Christmas card from Maja to Nelly (JKV-3, p. 23), an e-mail with the subject - congratulating the name day to the Vlach Yorgu from his friend Nichola (JKV-4, p. 39). However, based solely on the names it is not always possible to draw a reliable conclusion that there is some kind of intercultural relation, because some names are common to both Vlachs and Macedonians. An explicit example of interaction between these two cultures is the text in which is represented a family of mixed ethnicity (Kaliopi: "Zoran is a Macedonian by his father, but his mother is Vlach") (JKV-5, p.20). There is only one example of interaction between a Vlach and a Turk, and it is the folk tale of Nasreddin Hodja (JKV-5, p. 56).

Several examples in each of the textbooks point to interaction between Vlachs and children from countries around the world. For example, there is an e-mail communication, related to a computer game, between Punchi, who has a Vlach name, and Mia, with an international name (JKV-3, p. 37), as well as a text that describes the introduction of Vlach children with new student Luka who is from Italy (JKV-5, p. 8). In the topic Where are you from? Who are you?, there are three examples of introducing children of different ethnic background from Macedonia, as well as examples of children of other nationalities living in other countries of the world. Thus, a child from Italy living in a family with a mixed ethnic composition (the father is a Vlach from Albania and the mother is Italian) is presented; and the family in daily communication speaks three languages: Vlach, Albanian and Italian (JKV-4, p.8). Another text describes two children, Angela, a Vlach girl from Macedonia, and George from Italy ("Vlach by his father and Italian by his mother") (JKV-4, p.9). In the exercises section there are examples of children of different nationalities: "Elena is a French girl, Marija is a Macedonian girl, Michaela is a Vlach girl from Bulgaria, Alexandru is a Romanian boy" (JKV-4, p.10).

In two out of three textbooks of Language and culture of the Roma there is only one example showing socializing between children of different ethnic background. In the text "O avgo sikljovimaskoro dive" ("After a day at school"), Zoran, Muharrem and Safet await for each other in the school yard and enter into the school together (JKR-3, p. 32); in the text "Kjeriba lafi basho palonilaj (tomna)" ("Talk about fall") students Esmeralda, Sudahan, Zoran and Fatima discuss the fall in the school yard (JKR-4, page 26). Given that in both texts is mentioned the name Zoran, which is used among the Roma population, it remains an open question whether this is an example of interaction between the different. The same dilemma applies to the text "Amalipe" ("Friendship") in which is represented the friendship between Zoran and Petar in the school bench (JKR-5, 39). In this case, also, the interaction can be related to children of Macedonian nationality, as well as to children of different ethnic background.

In the fifth grade textbook there are two examples of interaction; the text "Amari staja" ("Our classroom") in which students Esmeralda, Zoran, Elena and Ismet allocate work responsibilities in the classroom (JKR-5, page 21), and in the poem "Amalina" ("Friends"), where is presented the socializing between Atidze, Drita and Jana (JKR-5, p.46). In the same textbook – in the text "Amari lachi Shutka" ("Our beautiful Shutka"), Shutka is presented as a multi-ethnic municipality where Roma, Macedonians, Albanians, Bosnians and others live together (JKR-5, p.12). Coexistence with other cultures (Vlachs, Albanians, Macedonians, and Serbs) is mentioned in the text "Istorija thaj kultura e Romengiri" ("History and culture of the Roma") (JKR-4 p.66-68).

2. Personal names

Personal names that are found in the texts of **Macedonian language textbooks** are mainly characteristic for Macedonians. In the textbooks for first grade names that are common to the Macedonians are exclusively present, and in those of the higher grades could be met also names of members of other ethnicities in Macedonia: (Orhan, Esat, Lejla, Usnija, Esma, Shana, Qazim (MJ-2C); Haris, Jafer, Shpresa, Orhan, Vasek, (MJ-3C); Lejla, Qemal, Sevima, Julbina, Orhan (MJ-4B); Orhan (MJ-4C); Shpresa, Zani (MJ-5). However, only in two texts there are names of members of different cultures: Djoko, Mile, Adem, Nina ("Working Action" MJ-3A, p.90); Anica, Aleyna, Ajsu, Afrim, Marko, Allen ("Together we celebrate and rejoice," MJ-4C, p.74). The other textbooks do not contain names belonging to different ethnicities while they are in some kind of interaction.

In some textbooks, with a lower representation, foreign names are identified, too. These are mostly names of world famous characters from cartoons or fairy tales (Noddy, Fifi, Barbie, Popeye, Pinocchio-MJ-1A, MJ-1B; Pinocchio, Gepetto - MJ-2B, MJ-4B; Jerry-MJ-4B) or names of characters from stories and novels written by foreign authors: *Double Lottie (Lottie and Lisa)* - MJ-4B; *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, *Emil and the Detectives*, *Pippi the long socks* (MJ-5). Only in one textbook there are several names that characteristically represent other cultures (Louise, Ulrika, Trilevip, Dashenka, Luigi, Abu Ali) or celebrities from more distant countries (Walt Disney, Yuri Gagarin) (MJ-4B).

In the examples and tasks that are given in textbooks, Macedonian names are dominant. Thus, most examples are related to Macedonian names, authors, journals, Orthodox holidays, and prominently Macedonian institutions (Kole Nedelkovski, the Miladinovci brothers) (MJ-4B, p. 44-45; MJ-4C, p.163).

In the contents of the **Albanian language textbooks**, the highest percentage of personal names are characteristically Albanian (Lulja, Era, Agim, Blerim, Genti ... AJ-3A; Hadrian, Anila, Ardi, Vjollca, Zana, Rona ... AJ-3B; Emir, Zana, Taulant, Gent, Drini ... AJ-4A; Besa, Dritan, Shega ... AJ-4C; Drita, Bekim, Petrit, Faton, Krenar, Marku, Arber ... AJ-4B; Drita, Genc, Luli, Shpend, Afërdita ... AJ-5). In one of third grade textbook only, and in the only one of fifth grade, there are also typically Macedonian names (Ana, Vera, Diana, Eva-AJ-3A; Pavle, Ivica-AJ-5A) but very few. One of the textbooks also contains personal names that are common for members of ethnic communities of Muslim religion (Orhan, Halil, Hajrije, Ulker - AJ-5A). Meanwhile, in almost all textbooks from third to fifth grade there are several foreign names: Enzo Ferrari, Gilles Villeneuve, in the text "Red car" by an unknown author); Dzhambulati and Georgie in the text "Kampionët e vegjël" ("Little champions") (AJ-3A, p.177) Nikolina, Jourdain, in the text "Zhurdeni dhe mësuesi" ("Jourdain and the teacher", by Molière; Pinocchio and Geppeto in "Libri i Pinokut" ("The Book of Pinocchio"); Juan in the Chinese folk tale "Huani dhe milingona" ("Huan and the ant") (AJ-3B, p.91, 18, 11); Henric, Claudia, Pierre (AJ-4B); Henric, Eva (AJ-5).

There is not a single text in which names of members of different cultures living in Macedonia are mentioned together and that would reflect interaction between them.

Given that the texts in the **Turkish language textbooks** are mainly from Turkish authors, personal names found in all textbooks are mostly traditional Turkish names,

such as: Oguz, Pamuk, Aynur, Memish, Ahmet, Omer, Hasan, Ayshe, Orhan, Jeyda, Janan, Jemile, Osman, Sevin. In folk tales, there are characters from popular Turkish literature such as Nasredin Hodja, Adzhivat, Karagoz etc. In literary works by foreign authors, we encounter names typical of their region: Nancy, Heidi, Edmondo, Enrico etc. (TJ-5 p.34, 38, 44).

Within the **Serbian language textbooks**, there are mostly Orthodox names, i.e. Serbian (Milan, Srdjan, Gordana, Tiana...), which is to be expected because most of the authors are of Serbian nationality. In the texts written by foreign authors, such as „Писмо“ ("Letter"), „Пошта“ ("Mail")“Балон“("Balloon"), “Патување”("Journey"), "Мали цвет" ("Little Flower"), there are names of characters specific of nationality to which the authors belong to, such as Enrico, Alenka, Jashua, Fina etc. (SJ-4 ctr.51, 62, 108, 118).

The textbooks for the fourth and the fifth grade do not contain names that are commonly given to members of the Muslim religion and there is not a single text in which names of members of different ethnicities are mentioned alongside. In the third grade textbook, only in the text “Телефон” ("Telephone") by Rifat Kukaj (SJ-3, p. 141) there are Albanian names (Genc, Gazmend), but they are not put into an interaction with characters having names of other ethnic backgrounds, nor the content relates to any intercultural dimension. Only one text in the third grade textbook is about characters that belong to different ethnicities: Philip and Jafer. (SJ-3, p.36).

In the analyzed textbooks of the **Language and culture of the Vlachs** it can be observed that mostly Vlach names are used. It should be emphasized that in the fourth grade textbook are more represented names for which there is doubt whether they are Vlach or Macedonian names (mostly of Greek origin), while traditional Vlach names less are present. For example, *Kosta, Toma, Niko, Ellena, Marija (the accent is on the first syllable from the back), Atanas, Agapi*, are accepted as Vlach names, but some of them are considered Macedonian names, too. On the other hand, *Kustica, Calliope, Micha, Yorgu, Krangu, Dina, Halcha Barba, Marusha* are traditional Vlach names.

In textbooks of the **Language and culture of the Roma**, the most prevalent personal names are those that are characteristic of the Roma (Elvis, Murat, Senat, Husnija, Ferida, Muharrem, Mevche, Esmeralda, Atidze). However, it should be taken into consideration that some of the names that are identified as Roma names are used by other ethnicities as well (Susanna, Zoran, Muharrem, Atidze, Murat, and Trajko). Therefore, it is not always possible to make a clear distinction of personal names on ethnic grounds.

3. Authors of literary works presented in textbooks

More than half of the authors of works in **Macedonian textbooks** are Macedonians (55.55%), and their presence is greater in textbooks in the third (63.47%), fourth (64.89%) and fifth (69.35 %) grade. Insignificant is the percentage of Serbian (2.98%), Turkish (1.35%) and Albanian authors (0.67%), while there is more presence of authors from cultures of other countries (14.22%). In all cultures is evident domination of the male authors (81.15%). There are no female Albanian and Turkish authors, the percentage of Macedonian female authors is 20%, and nearly same is the representation of the foreign female authors (18.09%).

In terms of representation of the authors in texts that are found in the **Albanian language textbooks**, the domination of Albanian male authors is apparent. In the textbooks for the first and the second grade most of the texts do not have authorship (80.5%), and therefore the number of Albanian authors is lower (16.66%, 14.44%), while in the next three grades their percentage increases significantly (over 60%). It is significant that in the eleven analyzed textbooks there are six texts only by Macedonian authors, which is representation less than 1%, and only one text of a Serbian writer and none of Turkish authors. 8.76% of the texts are written by authors belonging to cultures that are not typical for the Macedonian society. The percentage of their representation is smaller in the textbooks of the first and the second grade (2.77%, 4.33%), while it increases and it is roughly the same in those of the third and the fourth grade (14.72%, 13.93%).

Regarding the gender of the authors, most of them are males (306, or 91.61%); while the number of female authors is significantly lower (28, or 8.38%). The domination of male authors can be noted both among the Albanian authors as well as among the authors of the wider cultural scene.

Although in the **Turkish language textbooks** there are poems and stories by Turkish writers living in Macedonia, such as Necati Zekeriya, Fahri Kaya, Recep Bugarich, Shukri Ramo, Ilham Emin etc., there is not a single text in which names of characters who are members of different ethnicities living in Macedonia are mentioned alongside. Out of the total number of authors, even though 88.8% are Turks, 10.2% belong to world literature; only 1% are Macedonians, and no Albanians and no Serbs at all. Almost the same proportion is present in the five textbooks, except that in the first to third grade textbooks Macedonian authors are not represented at all.

Regarding the gender of the authors, males are by far more represented (81.19%), while women participate only with 18.81%. The domination of male authors is present in the five books, while it is more so in the second grade textbook (91.49%).

In general, the authors of the texts included in the **Serbian language textbooks** are mostly Serbs and belong to the male gender. Compared with the other two, in the third grade textbook there is more balance in terms of gender and in terms of ethnicity, but the representation of Albanian and Turkish authors is very small there as well (by 2.70%). The Serbian authors represent in average 36.56%, followed by authors from different countries of the world (25.27%), and approximately with the same percentage is the representation of texts whose authorship is unknown (24.73%). Macedonian authors in average participate with 10.75% of the texts, and their highest presence is in the third grade textbook (16.22%), while the lowest is in the fifth grade textbook (4.08%). As the grades increase, a decreasing trend is observed among the Albanian and Turkish authors, who are anyway minimally represented.

Concerning the gender of the authors, the males dominate in the three books (81.43% versus 18.57%). The gender imbalance is most apparent in the fifth grade textbook, where female authors are represented only in 9.68% of the texts. The domination of male authors is present in all subcategories based on national affiliation.

In the textbooks of the **Language and culture of the Vlachs**, the large number of texts of unknown authors makes impossible to obtain a more objective picture of this criterion, since such works have the highest percentage (63.51%) of representation. Out

of the texts with known authors, overwhelmingly dominate those written by Vlachs (35.14%), an insignificant percentage are world authors (1.35%), and there are no texts written by Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish and Serbian authors. The absence of harmonization of the three textbooks is immediately evident when it comes to the domination of the nationality of the authors. Namely, while in the third and fourth grade textbooks most of the authors are members of the Vlach ethnic community (42.11% and 59.26% respectively), in the fifth grade textbook they are represented with 7, 14% only, while for the largest percentage of the texts the authors are unknown (92, 96%).

Another interesting fact, which is specific for these textbooks only, is that female authors are predominantly represented in two of the three textbooks. The imbalance in favor of women is particularly evident in the fourth grade textbook where they are represented in even 81.25% of the texts.

In textbooks of the **Language and culture of the Roma** there are few works by authors from different ethnicities living in Macedonia, as well as authors from other countries. The most of the literary works in the textbooks are without authors (85.11%). The representation of the Roma and Macedonian authors is approximately the same (6.05%, 5.58%), only two are Serbian authors (0.93%) while there are five foreign authors (2.32%). The prevalence of male writers is almost absolute; only one Roma female author is presented in the fourth grade textbook.

Table 2 summarizes the percentage of authors of literary works from the respective culture versus those from other ethnicities and beyond, as well as the representation of male versus female authors.

Table 2. Authors of literary works in mother tongue textbooks according to their ethnic affiliation and gender

Mother tongue textbooks	Own culture/ethnicity	Other ethnicities	Foreign cultures	Male authors
Macedonian	55,55%	0,67-2,98%	14,22%	81,15%
Albanian	38,21%	0-0,86%	8,76%	91,61
Turkish	88,8%	0-1%	10,2%	81,1%
Serbian	36,56%	1,07-10,75%	25,27%	81,43%
Language and culture of the Vlachs	35,14%	/	1,35%	29,63%
Language and culture of the Roma	6,04%	0,93-5,58%	2,32%	96,87%

Conclusions and recommendations

The conducted analysis of textbooks used in classes from first to fifth grade provides opportunity to draw several conclusions and recommendations to improve the textbooks in terms of multiculturalism and interculturalism.

All analyzed mother tongue textbooks from the first to the fifth grade of Macedonian primary education are characterized by ethnocentricity. A small number of texts and illustrations explicitly promote social interaction between members of different cultures. Topics that have affirmative approach to cooperation, socializing, helping and respect for other people are included, but it is not evident in the images and the texts that they belong to different ethnic or religious background. The interaction between the different, to the greatest extent, is present in Macedonian language textbooks, especially in the requirements for the students when processing texts. Coexistence/friendship of members of various ethnicities appears in two textbooks of Albanian language, two texts in the Roma language, one in Serbian and none in Turkish. Only in the textbooks on Language and culture of the Vlachs there are some examples of mixed marriage families.

Regarding the representation of personal names, in mother tongue textbooks prevail names that are characteristic of the community that speaks the respective language, while names of members of other ethnicities living in Macedonia have a smaller percentage. In the Turkish language textbooks, there is not a single text with names belonging to other ethnicities. Still, the nationality cannot be assessed based on the names only, because the same names are used by members of different ethnic groups.

Literary works of authors belonging to own ethnicity are dominant, with a higher incidence of authors from foreign cultures, whereas the authors with other ethnic background in Macedonia are the less represented. The percentage of authors from other nationalities is slightly larger only in Macedonian and Roma language textbooks. In all the textbooks, the proportion of represented male authors is by far greater, except in the textbooks for language and culture of the Vlachs, in which most

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UNESCO. (2006), *UNESCO's Guidelines on Intercultural Education*, Paris: UNESCO.

White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue- "Living Together as Equals in Dignity (2008), Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Appendix: List of analyzed textbooks

MACEDONIAN LANGUAGE	CODE
Гофовиќ – Камиловиќ, М. (2008). Македонски јазик за прво одделение за деветгодишно основно образование. Скопје: Просветно дело.	MJ-1A
Стрезовска, Е., Симитковска, Ј., Неческа, Т., Митровска, А. (2008). Македонски јазик, учебник за прво одделение за деветгодишното основно образование. Скопје: Топер.	MJ-1B
Јанушев, М. (2008). Учебник по македонски јазик за прво одделение за задолжително деветгодишно основно образование. Скопје: Македонска искра.	MJ-1C
Гофовиќ – Камилова, М. (2008). Македонски јазик за второ одделение за деветгодишно основно образование. Скопје: Просветно дело.	MJ-2A
Тримчевска, М., Трајкова, С., Кртолица, Б. (2008). Македонски јазик за второ одделение за деветгодишно основно образование. Скопје: Просветно дело.	MJ-2B
Петрушевска, Д., Васиљевиќ, С., Кртолица, Б. (2008). Македонски јазик за II одд за задолжително деветгодишно образование (второ издание). Скопје: Македонска искра.	MJ-2C
Спасевски, М., Гркова, Л., Лалчевска – Серафимовска, Б. (2009). Македонски јазик за трето одделение деветгодишно основно образование. Скопје: Просветно дело.	MJ-3A
Синадиновска, О., Андоновски, В., Јанчевска, М. (2013). Читанка по македонски јазик за трето одделение за деветгодишно основно образование. Скопје: Табернакул.	MJ-3B
Настовска, В., Севдинска, Љ. (2015). Македонски јазик за трето одделение за деветгодишно основно образование. Скопје: Просветно дело.	MJ-3C
Севдинска, Љ. и Настоска, В. (2008). Македонски јазик за четврто одделение за деветгодишно основно образование. Скопје: Просветно дело.	MJ-4A
Кртолица, Б., Митковска, В., Гавриловска – Аврамовска, В. (2013). Македонски јазик за четврто одделение за деветгодишно основно образование. Скопје: МОН.	MJ-4B
Petro, R., Kadriu, V., Terova, M. (2008). Gjuha shqipe 2 (Албански јазик 2). Tetovë: Botime shkollore Albas.	MJ-2C
Gega, XH., Bakiu, B., Sejdiu, G. (2008). Gjuhë shqipe për klasën e dytë të arsimit fillor nëntëvjeçar. Shkup: Prosvetno Dello Sha.	AJ-2C
Petro, R., Kadriu, V. (2008). Gjuha shqipe 3. Tetovë: Botime shkollore Albas.	AJ-3A

Kasapi, Gj., Etemi, S., Dalloshi, I. (2008). Gjuha shqipe për klasën e 3.AJ-3B Shkup: Besa Press.	
Petro, R., Pepivani, N . (2014). Gjuha shqipe 4. Shkup: MASH.	AJ-4A
Mustafa, A., Mustafa, Xh. (2014). Gjuhë shqipe për klasën IV. Shkup:AJ-4B MASH.	
Bojku, F., Osmani, Z. (2009). Gjuha shqipe 4 për klasën e 4-të të arsimitAJ-4C fillor 9 vjeçar.	
Shkup: MASH.	
Rustemi, Xh., Bekteshi, R. (2010). Gjuha shqipe dhe leximi 5 për klasën eAJ-5 pestë të arsimit fillor nëntëvjeçar. Shkup: MASH.	
TURKISH LANGUAGE	CODE
Emin, O. , Alil, S. (2009).Türkçe Kitabım 1 dokuzyıllık ilköğretim.Üsküp:TJ-1 MCEBB.	
Alil, S., Ali, C. , Emin, O. (2008). Benim Türkçe Kitabım 2 dokuzyıllıkTJ-2 ilköğretim. Üsküp:	
MCEBB.	
Ali, C., Emin, O. ,Alil, S. (2009). Benim Türkçe Kitabım 3 dokuzyıllıkTJ-3 ilköğretim. Üsküp:	
MCEBB.	
Ali, C., Emin, O. ,Alil, S. (2010). Türkçe Kitabım 4 dokuzyıllık ilköğretim.TJ-4 Üsküp: MCEBB.	
Ago, A. , Emin, O. (2011). Türkçe Kitabım 5 dokuzyıllık ilköğretim.TJ-5 Üsküp: MCEBB.	
SERBIAN LANGUAGE	CODE
Божиновска, Д., Спасовска, Б. и Утковска, М. (2010). Српски језик заCJ-3 III разред основне школе. Скопје: МОН.	
Стошић, Д. (2010) Српски језик за четврти разред основне школе. Скопје: МОН.	
	CJ-4
Стошић, Д., Велкова, С. и Лажетић- Јовановска, С. (2013) СрпскиCJ-5 језик за пети разред основне школе. Скопје: МОН.	
LANGUAGE AND CULTURE OF VLACHS	CODE
Mitreva, Z., Costova, V. shi Mihailova, J. (2011). Limba shi cultura aJKV-3 Armănjlor ti clasa III nau anj educatcii primară.Scopia: MON.	
Mitreva, Z., Costova, V. shi Mihailova, J. (2011). Limba shi cultura aJKV-4 Armănjlor ti clasa IV nau anj educatcii primară.Scopia: MON.	

Mitreva, Z., Costova, V. shi Mihailova, J. (2014). Limba shi cultura a Armănjlor ti clasa V nau anj educatcii primară.Scopia: MON.	
LANGUAGE AND CULTURE OF ROMA	
Petrovski, T. (2009). I čhib thaj i kultura e Romengiri bašo III klasi.. Скопје: MOH.	
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III. Other Dimensions

The Commissions for Inter-Community Relations at Local Level, Instruments for Inter-Ethnic Dialogue or Partisan Politics: The Case of the Republic of North Macedonia

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Abstract

One of the formal instruments for inter-ethnic dialogue on the local level embedded in Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA) and in the Constitutional amendments is the Commissions for Inter-Community Relations (CICR's) of 2001. The Commissions are envisioned as a forum for the discussion of policies and promotion of ideas for a policy of good inter-ethnic relations on the local level. This paper investigates the role of the Commissions for Inter-Community Relations (hereinafter CICR's) on the local level by assessing its impact in the promotion of diversity, tolerance and inter-ethnic cohesion and by identifying possible bottlenecks in terms of legislative framework, political will as well as institutional and human capacity of the CICR's. The study was conducted through an inclusive and consultative-based research process targeting all relevant stakeholders on the national and local level associated with the CICR's. It is essential to emphasize the utilization of both qualitative and quantitative information from the stakeholders. In the research, besides the use of available data, e.g. documents, reports, qualitative and quantitative information was gathered through interviews and questionnaires. The analysis shows that the legislative framework is fragmented and non-coherent, and that it lacks coordination and enforcement mechanism for a stronger position of the CICR's in the policy making process at the Local Self-Government Units. Moreover, in the majority of the municipalities that have institutionalized the CICR's, its local branches are dysfunctional and with very little credibility and legitimacy and capacity to deal with inter-community issues on the local level.

Keywords: Commissions for Inter-Community Relations, inter-ethnic dialogue, non-majority committees, Local Self-Government Units, Badinter rules.

Introduction

Inter-ethnicity and inter-ethnic community dialogue is central to the successful and rapid development of the Republic of North Macedonia as a vibrant multi-ethnic society and a future European Union member.

The country has progressed a long way in addressing these issues and implementing the Ohrid Framework Agreement, but there are factors that are obstructing the rhythm and effectivity of this process: the most important among these factors are the institutional capacity and the effectivity of communication. The aim of the study is to map the situation concerning the interethnic dialogue, focusing on the formal mechanisms as powerful drivers of interethnic dialogue in the Republic of North Macedonia.

A crucial driver of the inter-ethnic dialogue is the one that is established on the local level. In order to achieve this dialogue it is indispensable to involve all relevant actors on the community level.

Many local community actors (and to some extent the national ones) interact and engage outside of the political scene through family networks, civic associations, workplaces, media, lobby groups and other social entities. Their input into the dialogue process, or in the lack of, can affect and alter the dynamics and perceptions in between, and among, different ethnic communities. The interaction between local authorities, civil society, media, community leaders and other actors in solving community problems is at the core of this study.

The politicization of ethnicity, the institutional weakness of the municipalities and the lack of sufficient trust and collaboration between ethnic groups imply that disputes are often managed ad-hoc, if at all. The particular and unique contribution of the analysis is its concerted and systemic focus on facilitating linkages between enhanced inter-ethnic dialogue and expertise at national and local levels—an insight otherwise neglected—and in enhancing skills to facilitate inclusive dialogue, confidence building and problem-solving processes.

Agents of change, individuals, civil society organizations, non-formal groups have the expertise, knowledge, skills and attitudes to carry out this process but there is a need for political will from decision makers to have them in board for the resolution of community problems.

What is Dialogue?

The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines *dialogue* as a “conversation; piece of written work in conversational form.” For a strong political actor usually the dialogue is seen as a sign of weakness, thus the politician may prefer to avoid recognizing its struggling opponent as legitimate.

The goal of dialogue should be the transformation of members of the communities into epistemic or “learning” communities in which both sides develop a shared understanding of each other’s realities and are willing to invest a good chunk of their lives in changing it.

Local inter-ethnic committees: a comparative overview

According to the theory, a committee is formed on the level of a district, municipality, town or village with the aim to encourage and facilitate joint, inclusive peacemaking and peacebuilding processes. It is characterized by its emphasis on dialogue, promotion of mutual understanding, trust-building, constructive and inclusive solutions of conflicts and joint action that is inclusive of all the sides of the conflict and it aims reconciliation.³² Comparatively in the global context, several other names are used for denoting the Commission of Inter-Community Relations. The most common names are : District Peace Advisory Councils; District Multi-Party Liaison Committees; Village Peace and Development Committees, Committees for Inter-Ethnic Relations, etc.

The comparative analysis shows that similar commissions that work on inter-ethnic dialogue, peace, prevention, are established around the globe. The research bears into light that we can differentiate commissions comparatively according to two criteria: the *objectives* (*what are the objectives*) of the commissions and the *mandate* (*who gives the mandate*) of the commission.

Related to the first criterion, we can make a distinction between the following objectives:

Violence prevention or reduction commissions: These commissions are established in order to reduce levels of violence. They serve as early warning, by meeting periodically and taking collectively preventative steps.

Dialogue promoting commissions: These commissions facilitate negotiations and build consensus. They promote dialogue and create a basis for mutual understanding. For these commissions dialogue is an objective in itself.

Problem-solving and community-building commissions: These commissions are established in order to facilitate the processes of joint problem resolution. Their aim is to restore a sense of community under the most difficult circumstances. Each resolution of dispute or problem contributes to the building of mutual trust and confidence in their joint ability to manage their own lives.

Reconciliation commissions: Their aim is to contribute in reducing violence and to joint problem resolutions.

The second set criterion of differentiation is related to the mandate of the commissions. The analysis shows that we can distinguish two models according to the mandate:

1. The commissions draw their powers and mandate from the formal actors on the national level.

Additionally at this criterion, we can distinguish commissions that are a result of a peace agreement. This model, besides in our country, was applied in South Africa and Northern Ireland.

In countries such as Serbia the mandate is derived by the Law (Law on Local Self-Government). A similar model is introduced in Croatia, where the mandate of the commission/assembly is derived from the Constitutional Law for the Protection of National minorities. In Kosovo, the mandate of the consultative council and the

³² Andries Odendaal and Retief Olivier, Local peace committees: some Reflections and lessons Learned, The Academy for Educational Development (AED) and USAID;pg.3,8

committees derives from the Constitution and the Law on Parliament and Internal Rules.

Other countries foresee a mandate from a national statutory body (such as the Malawi Electoral Committee or the Sierra Leone Political Parties Registration Commission). It may also be mandated by a decision of the Government (as in Ghana and in Nepal).

It should be emphasized that nationally mandated commissions are characterized by their ability to incite collaboration by the local representatives of those parties and bodies that have endorsed the decision. They benefit from having a formal mandate and from being part of a recognized national process.

It is interesting to note that the competences of commissions may differ from context to context and may be general (“to prevent violence” or “promote reconciliation” the case in South Africa) or specific (such as the focus on policing in Northern Ireland). In Serbia, the mandate encompasses submitting proposals on promoting to the municipality councils, the right to submit objection to the Constitutional Court about the legality of Council decisions regarding national minorities. In Croatia, the Assembly of the minorities proposes measures for the improvement of the situation of the minorities, and proposes candidates for State administration bodies and for local self-government units, expresses opinions about the public media on national and local level, etc.

In Kosovo, the Council has the right to comment at an early stage on legislative or policy initiatives that may be prepared by the Government, to suggest initiatives of this kind, and to seek to have their views incorporated in the relevant projects and programs. In Sierra Leone and Malawi, the mandate encompasses prevention of violence during elections.

2. The second category are the commissions established by the civil society initiatives. These commissions are a product of locally facilitated process and thus are considered as “bottom-up” approach. In their composition, they normally reflect a stronger civil society presence.

They are composed of individuals who have a personal passion and capacity for peacebuilding, rather than formally mandated representatives. Civil society commissions may focus on the more general objective of preventing violence and promoting peace (as in Burundi, Sri Lanka and Liberia), but they may also be established to focus on a particular issue.³³ The civil society commissions are dependent on NGOs that provide the initial facilitation and ongoing logistical and financial support.

³³ Andries Odendaal and Retief Olivier, Local peace committees: some Reflections and lessons Learned, The Academy for Educational Development (AED) and USAID;pg 9

The scope of the analysis

The main objective of the paper is to critically assess the role of the Commissions for Inter-Community Relations (CICR's) on the local level. In addition, the paper strives to:

- Provide a comparative analysis of models of the CICR's;
- Assess the functionality of the CICR's in promotion of diversity, tolerance and inter-ethnic cohesion;
- Identify if there is any barrier/ bottleneck in terms of legislative framework, political will and institutional and human obstructing the efficiency of the CICR's;
- Provide set of recommendations as a way forward.

Methodological approach

The study was conducted through an inclusive and consultative-based research process targeting relevant stakeholders on the local level associated with the Committee and the Commissions of Inter-Community Relations (CICR's). It is essential to emphasize the utilization of both qualitative and quantitative information from the stakeholders.

In the research, besides the use of available data, e.g. documents, reports, books, files, statistics, etc., additional qualitative and quantitative information was gathered interviews and comparative analysis.

Having in mind the nature of the problem, much emphasis will also be put on personal observations and intensive informal discussions with respondents and key informants in order to provide a well-documented description of the situation.

This description is going to rely heavily on secondary data gathered from the local government and nongovernmental, international donors, and will involve summarizing empirical results about ethnicity related policies.

The legislative and institutional framework for the establishment of the Commissions for Inter-Community Relations (CICR's) in the Republic of North Macedonia

a) The responsibility of the CICR's

One of the main pillars of Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA) is the process of decentralization as one of the cornerstones of interethnic stability, because it is crucial for empowering non-majority communities. In order to hinder any attempts for majorization on the local level, the Law on Local Self-Government stipulates the right and obligation of municipalities to establish Commissions for Inter-Community Relations, and to apply the Badenter Principle for the adoption of certain decisions by the Local Self-Government Unit (LSGU) council.

The CICR's at the local level are a crucial actor (*de iure*) in promoting dialogue between the different ethnic communities, and for introducing an instrument of direct democracy, because it is one of the few mechanisms for the participation of citizens in

the policy making process. However, *de facto* the CICR's are struggling for their place in the policy making process on the local level.

The responsibilities of the CICR's are stipulated in the articles 41 and 55 of the Law of Local Self-Government. The article 55 of the Law on Local Self-Government makes a provision for establishing Commissions for Inter-Community Relations in municipalities where at least 20% of the population belongs to a certain ethnic community. The CICR's are composed of an equal number of representatives from each community in the municipality. By law, the CICR review issues that refer to the relationships among the communities represented in the municipality. They provide opinions, and propose ways to resolve problems that arise between communities. The municipal council is obliged to review the opinions, proposals of the CICR and make the corresponding decisions.

The competences of the CICR's are related to the article 41 of the Law on Local Self-Government, which defines the areas of special interest for communities in which the Badinter Principle ought to be implemented. The Badinter Principle implies a double majority voting procedure that 1) requires a majority vote, and 2) requires a majority vote from non-majority communities.

According to the Article 41 of the Law on Local Self-Government, the regulations referring to culture, use of the languages and alphabets spoken by less than 20% of the citizens in the municipality, determining the use of the coat of arms and flag of the municipality, shall be adopted by the majority of the present council members. Meanwhile, within the council there must be a majority of votes of the present members belonging to the communities that are not the majority of population in the municipality (Badinter Principle).

b) Membership in CICR's

The Law stipulates the discretionary right of the LSGU for designing the manner of selection of the members of the Commissions for Inter-community Relations.³⁴

The Statute of the LSGU stipulates the procedures for the selection of the members of CICR's, which communities will be represented and the number of members, the specific number for each community that will be represented.

Usually, the statutes of the municipalities define the term of membership in the CICR. In most cases, it corresponds with the terms of the members of the Council, which is a four-year term. Some experts see this as a problem because it can be a source for political influence on members of Commissions.

Most of the statutes of the municipalities replicate the provision from the Law on Local Self-Government that the CICR must consist of an equal number of representatives of all communities in the municipality. The Council should decide which communities should be represented in the CICR based on the most recent census. The number of the members of the CICR depends on the number of the communities that should be represented. In most cases, the Council is expected to determine the number of the

³⁴ Paragraph 3, of the Article 55 of the Law on Local Self Government („Official Gazette of the PM“ No. 05/2002)

CICR members that is optimal for an open and effective debate and representation of different views within each community.

The analysis shows that there are different approaches for the election of the members. In some municipalities, association of citizen, civic forums, opinion surveys from the communities have their role for the selection. In some other municipalities, the Commission of the mandates proposes members of the CICR (the municipality of Kumanovo). There are also municipalities that appoint members from the Council (municipality of Tetovo), or use public announcements for the selection (municipality of Krusevo). Others have mixed membership composed of council members and external members (municipality of Kicevo). Conclusively, we can make a distinction between municipalities that prohibit membership of the Council members in the Commission and municipalities that allow their membership. The model used by the municipalities that allow external members (from outside the Council) responds to certain deficiencies of the electoral model. Not always the election process will result in a situation where each community will be represented in the Council, and the model of external members of the CICR is a safeguarding approach for including all the communities³⁵

*In addition, there are municipalities that have established the CICR even though the Law does not oblige them. These municipalities are Gostivar, Vrapciste, Bogovinje, Drugovo, Karbinici, Konce, Saraj, Staro Nagoricane, Studenicani, Delcevo, Gevgelija, Lozovo, Dojran, Kratovo, Valandovo, Oslomej, Saraj, Lipkovo.*³⁶

Discussion

The analysis shows that there are various issues related to the powers and mandate of the CICR's on the local level.

It seems that the CICR's could not be situated as formal actors, due to the legislative framework that assigns solely a consultative role without any potent enforcement mechanism.

The CICR's are lacking rules of proceedings to clarify their role in the policy making process. In addition, various stakeholders and experts put the stress on the need of unification of rules that would provide specific and clear criteria for election into the CICR.

Another bottleneck is the lack of finances to cover programming activities of the CICR's. Only four from twenty-nine municipalities that have established a CICR have allocated a specific budget for these tasks.³⁷ It seems that the municipalities ought to take more responsibility for a sustainable support through earmarking a certain percentage of the yearly municipality budget for the functioning of the local CICR.

There is a need for ensuring more coherent and sustainable communication with the Parliamentary CICR. ³⁸ A good practice would be the coordination of the

³⁵ General note: All the municipalities that are obliged by Law, established their CICR. Following municipalities are obliged to establish CICR: Brvenica, Vranestica, Debar, Dolneni, Zelenikovo, Jegunovce, Kicevo, Krusevo, Kumanovo, Mavrovo Rostuse, Petrovec, Sopiste, Struga, Tetovo, Caska, Cucer Sandevo, Skopje (city), Butel, Cair and Suto Orizari.

³⁶ Information retrieved from <http://www.komz.mk/index.php/en/> on 23.12.2020

³⁷ OSCE municipality Survey were the author was engaged as consultant on Ex-post analysis of Law on Local Self-Government (2019)

³⁸ <http://www.komz.mk/uploads/publikacii-eng/3-policy-paper-commities-for-inter-community-relations.pdf>

Parliamentary Commission for Equal Opportunities for women and men with local commissions.

The analysis shows that the lack of a unified approach and of a formal regulation of membership hinders the process of attracting the qualitative individuals to these Commissions.

In parallel, there are no guiding principles or criteria/conditions that a candidate should fulfill in order to be appointed/selected as a member of a CICR. The lack of formal criteria leaves room for objecting the legitimacy of membership in the CICR's.

The analysis shows also that the members of the CICR's in certain cases are exclusively proposed by the political parties or persons who have tight professional agenda and they often do not take part at the meetings of CICR's. This prevents that the attitudes and opinions of the ethnic community they represent are conveyed to the CICR's and consequently passed on to the Municipal Council.

The analysis exemplifies that the CICR's are subject to polarization and political influence in the process of nomination and selection of their members.

The lack of support by the municipal administration (settings, venues, assigning administrators) shows that there is not sufficient political will to support the CICR.

The Municipal Councils do not dedicate resources to establish functioning committees. Having in mind the financial difficulties that the municipalities are facing, it is not realistic to have the CICR high on the agenda of Mayor and the Council.

It is evident that the local Commissions do not have capacity and financial support to implement their vision.

Coordination. The legislative framework in this area is highly fragmented. Thus, it does not provide avenues for formal coordination and communication. The function and the mandate of the Parliamentary Committee on the central level is regulated by the Law on the Committee for Inter-Community Relations, while the functions of the CICR's on the local level are regulated by the Law on Local Self-Government. This approach is hindering the communication and coordination between these institutions.

It is crucial to establish formal mechanisms with the Parliamentary Committee for Inter-Community Relations for a more holistic and programming (strategy, action plan) approach in the realm of Inter-Community Relations.

This would provide a model of vertical integration connecting national and local actors of this realm and connecting local and national level functions concerning the interethnic relations. One approach would be the model of the coordination between commissions on central and local level for equal opportunities for women and men, where there are components that make possible coordinating efforts between these bodies.³⁹ At this stage, it is indispensable to introduce programming documents (strategies, action plans) that will provide the Committee and Commissions with values, guiding principles and basis for a more proactive approach.

This model does not provide for any formal mechanisms of coordination with other institutions that are able to complement the work of the CICR's and can be crucial in this respect. The mosaic of the institutions that are responsible for inter-community

³⁹ Law on equal opportunities between women and men (Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, no.6/2012)

relations encompass the following bodies: the Secretariat for Implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement (SIOFA), the Agency for achievement of the rights of the minorities, the Ombudsman, the Commission for prevention against discrimination.

It is indispensable to initiate amendments in the legislation that would introduce formal coordination mechanisms with the above-mentioned executive bodies.

The Association for Local Self-Government Units (ZELS's) can be a platform for a horizontal coordination, where the municipal CICR can share experiences and good practices via establishment of a joint formal body. One avenue would be the establishment of the Committee of CICR's and ZELS's, where the Chairpersons of the municipality CICR would serve ex-officio. The Committee would represent an inter-CICR's institution.

This Committee would be a foundation for horizontal coordination and a holistic approach and dissemination of knowledge and experience. In addition, this Committee can be used as basis for joint projects that would be implemented in parallel in more than one municipality.

Institutional and human capacities of the Commissions for Inter-Community Relations. The research shows that, despite the time frame, most of the municipality CICR's are not able to carry out their function according to their mandate. The European Commission Progress Reports states that the elections of the members of CICR's were often not transparent and the effectiveness of these committees has been limited by poor operational capacity, unclear competences and weak status. The public is largely unaware of their role and the municipal councils often disregard their recommendations. In several municipalities, the composition of the Commissions does not reflect the ethnic structure of the local population⁴⁰. Successive reports have not noted improvements in this area. Interviews and debates confirm that the Commissions lack support from the municipality administration, do not understand their specific role in the community, and do not utilize the power of the media to improve the visibility and transparency of their work.

Similarly, a UNDP report states that a research conducted across the country has identified that the CICR's are generally "dysfunctional, with very little credibility or capacity to deal with inter-ethnic problems at the local level. The CICR's that operate, display a divergent set of characteristics - from composition to procedures and frequency of meetings. Many of the CICR's share the characteristic of convening for the sake of demonstrating that they have done so, as opposed to meeting for discussing advisory, preventive or reactive issues of concern, or areas outside of their usual mandate such as conflict transformation or diversity management and mainstreaming"⁴¹

One of the prevalent issues is the discontinuity and lack of institutional memory for the constitution of the new CICR's.⁴² This is because municipalities do not provide necessary logistical and administrative support. Moreover, in some cases the CICR's

40 Commission of the European Communities, « The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia 2009 Progress Report », Commission staff working document COM (2009) 533, Brussels, 14 October 2009. p. 20

41 National and Local Capacities for Strengthening Inter-Ethnic Dialogue and Collaboration. United Nations Development Program (UNDP), UN Programme to Enhance Inter-Ethnic Dialogue and Collaboration (Skopje, 2010),p.18

42 Sreten Kocevski Community Development Institute- Interview 19.112019

lack systems for archiving the activities, which has devastating effects on the institutional memory of the CICR's.

Last but not least, a crucial variable about the human capacity is the selection process for the membership in the CICR's. The membership criteria would have to encompass some conditions/criteria for attracting "doves" and not the "hawks" of the community. Experience from the Parliamentary CICR shows that the membership of "hawks" has devastating effects on the Committee because the Committee is seen as an arena for pursuing the interest of their own ethnic community. Thus, attracting people with ideals of multiculturalism, dialogue and reconciliation is a *conditio sine qua non* for the success of the CICR's.

Collaboration with Civil Society Organizations (CSO's). One of the main pillars of the democratization of the societies in general and of the communities in particular are the Civil Society Organizations (CSO's). A general feature of the civil society is its dependence on public funds and its susceptibility to be influenced by political actors, leading to a relatively reduced autonomy of operation. For these reasons, the civil society is the subject to continuing debates as for its role and importance in triggering change in the society. Nevertheless, several CSO's that have specific competences and capacities in the area of inter-community relations. It is evident that these CSO's can be pool of resource for CICR's at the local level. Debates and interviews have showed that there are tensions in the relations between CSO's and CICR's. In this context, some of the representatives of CSO's have argued that the CICRs' want to take the role of CSO's, that there is a tendency of overleaping of efforts and that CSO's are not provided with the avenues to be represented in the CICR's. It is indispensable to consider such avenues in order to increase the outreach and maximize the effect of the CICR's.

Conclusions and recommendations

It is evident that the legislative framework is fragmentized and non-coherent. It lacks coordination and enforcement mechanisms for a stronger position of the CICR's in the policy making process at the LSGU. It is crucial to work on the legislative framework for introducing new provisions that would introduce formal mechanisms of vertical and horizontal coordination. In terms of capacity of the members, there is a need for obligatory provisions that would entail certain experience, competence, and reputation as conditions for selection into municipal CICR's. In parallel, amendments to the Law on Local Self- Government *are needed* to ensure equal representation of all communities by enabling their members to nominate representatives through local electoral processes/neighborhood nominations, forum of the community, public announcement etc. In addition, stipulations that would allow for longer mandate for members of CICR's to avert the tendency of political pressure on the local level.

At the same time, it is evident that neither the Parliamentary Committee nor the local CICR's have the necessary information and guidance about their responsibility. At this stage, it is indispensable to have specific documents about their responsibilities and competencies (Code of Conduct, Guidebook, etc.), and this document ought to be adapted to the local context by the local CICR's.

Political will. The analysis exemplifies that one of the main barriers for strengthening the role of the CICR's is the lack of support from decision makers on the local level. This is a prevalent perception of the media, of members of CICR's and of the citizens.

Therefore, it is immanent to increase the focus on transparency and the visibility of examples of good practices in the area of promotion of inter-community relations.

To earmark certain percentage of the municipality budget for supporting the annual programs of the CICR that can encompass programs and projects concerning the following issues:

- Supporting civil society actors that work on inter-ethnic and interreligious projects.
- Supporting local electronic and written media that promote multiculturalism, and information and knowledge of others.
- Supporting business startup projects that involve individuals who are representatives of different ethnic communities.
- Local awards for the private sector organizations that support and encompass values of multiculturalism.
- Municipalities as founders of primary and secondary education for the promotion of extracurricular activities (sport, culture) that nurture multicultural approach as early as in primary and secondary education to the next generations of the community and society.

Organizational and human capacity of the CICR. The analysis shows that a significant number of the local CICR's are dysfunctional, with very little credibility and legitimacy or capacity to deal with inter-community issues on the local level. The citizens have no idea about the role of the CICR's, 66% do not know personally any member of their local CICR, and 72% have no idea if their CICR convened last year.⁴³ It can be concluded that for the majority of the CICR's communication with the public, public relations and public awareness as cornerstone for inter-community dialogue is nonexistent.

It can be concluded also that there is a twofold deficit of the members of the Commissions/Committee both on understanding the concepts that are important for their work and on their knowledge about project cycle management and programming, which is crucial for the implementation of ideas and concepts into concrete actions.⁴⁴ It is indispensable at this stage that members local Commissions and the Committee on the central level should have *obligatory orientation training*⁴⁵, which would consist of several modules and introduce core concepts vital to interethnic relations. At the same time, there is a need for political will to empower these sui generis instruments of multicultural dialogue on the local level.

⁴³ OSCE Municipality Survey where the author was engaged as consultant on Ex-post analysis of Law on Local Self-Government (2019)

⁴⁴ Capacities on project cycle and programming can be utilized to pressure Units of Local Governments and other INGO, GO to support projects that incite proactive and preventive approach

⁴⁵ Participation of the training to be obligatory condition for membership in the local Commissions/Central Committee

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Linguistic Awareness, Media and Cultural Plurality

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Abstract

The plurilingual approach emphasizes the development of effective communication skills, incorporating all of our linguistic and cultural experiences in an interactive way. This undoubtedly leads to an ongoing process of language learning, which implies that anyone can relate to a language, whether it is their native language or not. Plurilingualism enables a native speaker to become an effective pluralist communicator, who in his 'repertoire' has a variety of linguistic and cultural knowledge, in a flexible, creative and individual way. Therefore, the plurilingual concept is a qualitative step in terms of our understanding of language.

The dimension of developing editorial lines on the principles of interculturalism and multilingualism in the media or in general, significantly promotes internal competition in favor of a broader social and cultural understanding. Such an offer is impossible to be conceived in the management consciousness of media executives, unless the barriers arising from linguistic or cultural stereotypes and prejudices are overcome in advance.

However, interculturalism not only passes through the channels of communication and mutual recognition, but is itself an acknowledgment of the existing reality, not as exclusivity, but as inclusivity. The media that promote such concepts have a greater chance of being in the wider range of public focus.

Multiculturalism, by coexisting with a rich diversity of cultures and languages, has activated a developed sense of the process of exchanging the values of a particular ethnic, cultural and religious space. The spirit of multiculturalism is not exclusive in terms of the inclusion of ethnic and linguistic differences, and this is the leitmotif of all civilizational signs united within the harmony of contradictions.

Keywords: *Linguistic, Media, communication, culture, stereotypes, prejudice*

Introduction

The plurality of social patterns and situations, in environments of cultural diversity where the individual characteristics of the language user have their own specifics, undoubtedly form the core of the postulate in communication. Thus, positive social environment and cultural context are crucial factors in shaping the communicative skills of the speaker, both in the mother tongue and in all other languages. Therefore, students in higher education need to be provided with the socio-cultural context in which the language is spoken and their personal interests and needs must be met.

While plurilingualism is a widespread phenomenon that exists in almost every country in the world, bilingualism is also a positive phenomenon, and it has long been the subject of scientific studies. Recent studies have confirmed the advantages of bilingual speakers in the field of metalinguistic awareness, reading and writing acquisition, as well as other linguistic aspects (narrative ability, image description, naming), in various languages.

First, one should not neglect the contribution of linguistic communication within a community and between different communities, but also of the multilingual information on the rights of national communities, as well as the concept of the freedom of media and multicultural society within a given space, geographical and political. This confirms the old saying of our esteemed albanologist, Prof. Eqrem Çabej, that the place inhabited for centuries by the Albanian people on the Adriatic and Ionian coasts (...), would determine the historical destinies of its language and culture.⁴⁷

Linguistics can never be viewed as a discipline isolated from the achievements of a society, so it is worth affirming those opportunities in the media that make a language not only a means of communication but also an area where social identity, culture and national characteristics of individuals and certain social groups can be ennobled. The connection between language and identity can be seen from the perspective that “identity is an emergent construction, the situated outcome of a rhetorical and interpretive process in which interactants make situationally motivated selections from socially constituted repertoires of identification and affiliation resources and craft these semiotic resources into identity claims for presentation to others.”⁴⁸

New media, information technology and generally the global network communication have fundamentally changed the way we communicate and do business. The reason for the need to incorporate plurilingualism into the virtual world lies precisely in the use of new media, where their impact on public opinion requires an effort that will in any way influence and produce positive effects in the media.

In this age of communication transformation and penetrating globalization, languages and cultures come into contact constantly – driven by conflicts, migration, media, transnational capitalism and many other factors. Subsequently more and more individuals find themselves in the role of mediating between diverse languages and cultures in their daily lives: individuals working as interpreters, shopkeepers, teachers, workers in multinational companies or NGOs; as well as multilingual children and youth acting as linguistic and cultural mediators between their family and other members of society – often known as ‘language brokers’.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Prof. Gjovalin Shkurtaj, “Gjuha shqipe dhe mendësia shqiptare në Ballkanin shumetnik e shumëgjuhës”. (<http://shpirtiarbritron.blogspot.com/2009/08/gjuha-shqipe-dhe-mendesia-shqiptare-ne.html>)

⁴⁸ Richard Bauman, *Language, Identity, Performance*, Pragmatics 10:1.1-5 (2000)

⁴⁹ Melinda Dooly & Claudia Vallejo Rubinstein, *Bridging across languages and cultures in everyday lives*:

Language cannot be merely considered a means of communication between people. This paper seeks to show the existence of various socio-cultural realities in particular spaces of the world, whose identity is distinct from language cultures and civilization cultures, as archetypes of a conceived history on common geo-cultural signs. In its concept of cultural diversity, the issue of cultural identity is seen as a complex construct, rather than a response to the (overly simplified) forms of identity imposed by globalization. In incorporating concepts and categories, such as identity and change into the treatment of certain cultural phenomena, Atkinson states: “By received view, I am referring to a notion of culture(s) that sees them in their most typical form as geographically (and quite often nationally) distinct entities, as relatively unchanging and homogeneous, and as all-encompassing systems of rules or norms that substantially determine personal behavior.”⁵⁰

What makes this debate special is the need to re-evaluate new scientific developments in linguistic studies, as a valuable contribution to the imminent demand that language development follows the dialectic and nature of the social and dialectical geography of the nations.

Another objective that makes us think whenever we talk about the social status of the language is the need to establish and implement mechanisms for protecting the mother tongue from external socio-political threats, but also the institutional definition of sanctions for eventual abusers of native language.

This paper, however, will make an additional contribution in this regard, by opening a wider debate on the most crucial issues that determine the development of plurilinguistics in the present circumstances, especially in situations where the possibility of linguistic and cultural friction in addition to advantages also brings headaches, for the very purity of the use of languages or multilingualism, whether in the media or in political institutions.

an expanding role for critical intercultural communication, Language and Intercultural Communication, 2018 vol. 18, N.1, 1–8

⁵⁰ Dwight Atkinson, TESOL and Culture, TESOL Quarterly, Vol. 33, No. 4 (Winter, 1999), pp. 625-654

Linguistic diversity according to two concepts: multilingualism and plurilingualism

In a society of ethnic and linguistic diversity, such as the Republic of North Macedonia, plurilinguistics should make its valuable contribution to the affirmation of the civilizing values that come from bilingualism. However, this cannot be achieved if the development of one's own linguistic culture is not initially dynamized and placed in the context of people's needs to use language as a paradigm of individual and collective socio-cultural vitality. This need, of course, must be accompanied by the rise of linguistic awareness, as an identifying mark in the wide range of linguistic and civilizational plurality. On the other hand, higher this awareness, there will be another factor that determines the value of the language in the bidding market, linked also to the redesign of the legal framework that legitimizes the necessity of contribution of the language in increasing administrative efficiency.

Language is the essential means of performing a particular function - communication. Thus, multilingualism can be characteristic of the individuals, but also a feature of the whole community in which they regularly use two or more separate languages.

Plurilingualism is attributed to the individual who is able to use more than one language, whereas multilingualism means that more languages live together within a social group.

The concept of multiculturalism today mainly indicates the coexistence of multiple cultures in a given space. However, multiculturalism in the broadest sense will mean the peaceful coexistence of different ethnic, cultural and religious communities in the same place / in the same space. Recognizing the rights of cultural groups and positively assessing their differences is at the heart of multicultural demands.

We think that sociolinguistics should also be included in this context, which in its traditional definition is known as the linguistic scientific discipline that deals with the relationship between language and society, more precisely with the study of the social aspects of language use. Therefore, it is a study of all the social aspects of language and language use. Over time, language has been defined as a system of symbols that serves us to communicate, as an interaction with other members of our language community, hence the "plurilingual reality with different possessions of particular codes and systems and their use in concrete situations is general".⁵¹

Language and society have interacted throughout the history of human relations, but this interaction has also become known between the language, free thought and appreciation, while also playing an important role in different philosophical views and discussions.

Each language system has native speakers with their native way of speaking within a given language community as a means of communication that is transmitted and survives in time and space, that is treated as valuable, logically structured and at the same time complex. The interdisciplinary linguistics and the linguistic variation approaches within a given linguistic community are not excluded from the study context of this paper. What Saussure says is that when we remove from the spoken

⁵¹ Akademik Rexhep Ismajli: Për zhvillimet në fushën e gjuhës standarde /Ligjëratë e mbajtur në Konferencën e mësuesve të gjuhës amtare shqipe, 10 - 11 mars 2005, Landskrona, Suedi ([http://modersmal.skolverket.se/albanska/inde".php/49/-ligjeruesit-tane/80-akademik-rexhep-ismajli-palr-zhvillimet-nal-fushaln-e-gjuhals-standarde](http://modersmal.skolverket.se/albanska/inde) dhe <https://www.forumishqiptar.com/threads/49982-Akademik-REXHEP-ISMAJLI-Zhvillimet-e-gjuh%C3%ABs-standarde>, shikimi I fundit më 16 shtator 2019).

activity (Langage) all that is just individual speech (Parole), the rest can be called language (Langue), and this means only the psychological terms, the psychic knot between ideas and symbols, which it would not be correct to say relate to individual speech. But this would only be an observation of language outside of social reality. Language lives in the collective consciousness. Again, it is not about individual speech.⁵²

Saussure's findings are particularly important for the development of modern linguistics because language as an organized system entails the social function. "Language is no longer regarded as peripheral to our grasp of the world we live in, but as central to it. Words are not mere vocal labels or communicational adjuncts superimposed upon an already given order of things. They are collective products of social interaction, essential instruments through which human beings constitute and articulate their world. This typically twentieth-century view of language has profoundly influenced developments throughout the whole range of human sciences. It is particularly marked in linguistics, philosophy, psychology, sociology and anthropology".⁵³

Multilingualism is a widespread phenomenon that exists in almost every country of the world, whether officially recognized or not. Bilingualism is a positive phenomenon that has a rich tradition of scientific study. However, the practice of ignoring multilingualism is not unknown in certain environments, and this usually happens when a community overlaps irrational values of its own language over other languages. This linguistics with an imperialist mindset is also present in North Macedonia, where some false injections of the 'chosen' people were mistakenly designed over the whole multilingual cultural space. Such a mindset has produced distortions in normal communication between different communities and consequently the degree of prejudice and stereotyping is high, even though not everyone knows and practices the language of the other. In such circumstances, the so-called 'linguistic inferiority' phenomenon is also known, resulting from the rejection of the multilingual reality by the majority population. In North Macedonia, this kind of inferiority had created socio-political prototypes and self-identification of people as second-class citizens.

Sociologically, linguistic marginalization determines the reduction of identity developmental spaces, where all tendencies of social segregation originate - even to the forms of 'apartheid'. On the other hand, recent studies have confirmed the benefits of bilingual speakers in the field of metalinguistic awareness, rule of reading and writing, and other linguistic tasks (narrative ability, describe image, naming) in different languages. According to G. Hržica (etc.), bilingualism is seen as a positive representation, which has long been the subject of scientific study. Consequently, according to the same group of authors, recent studies have confirmed the advantages of bilingual speakers in the field of meta-lingual awareness, in acquiring reading and writing skills (narrative skills, image description, nomination) in different languages. "Bilingual speakers can serve as a communication link between different social groups (...). By using two languages, the bilingual speaker is constantly in a situation of choosing the right language code." ⁵⁴

The variety of social situations, cultural environment and individual characteristics of the language user undoubtedly form the core of the postulates of communication. In

⁵² Saussure, F. (1986). *Course in general linguistics* (3rd ed.). (R. Harris, Trans.). Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company. (Original work published 1972). p. 9-10, 15.

⁵³ Roy Harris (1988). *Language, Saussure and Wittgenstein: How to Play Games with Words* (History of Linguistic Thought) 1st Edition, London and New York, Routledge.

⁵⁴ Mě tepěr ně: G. Hržica, N. Padovan i M. Kovačević – Društvenojezični utjecaj na dvojezičnost . . . LAHOR – 12 (2011); *Članci i rasprave*; fq. 175–196

other words, the cultural context is crucial in shaping the communicative skills of the speaker, both in the mother tongue and in any other language. Thus, students in higher education need to be provided with the socio-cultural context in which the language is spoken and their personal interests and needs must be met.

Recent studies have confirmed the advantages of bilingual speakers in the field of metalinguistic awareness, reading and writing acquisition skills, as well as other linguistic aspects (narrative ability, image description, naming), in various languages. Bilingualism today, as opposed to not too long ago (v. Ritchie, Bhatia, 2006), argues that the birth of linguistic expressions brings a number of advantages, far beyond the mere fact of knowing two languages. Pryse Baker and Jones (1998), classify these benefits into three groups: communicative, cultural, and cognitive.⁵⁵ Bhatia and Ritchie (2012) state that “the investigation of bilingualism is abroad and complex field, including the study of the nature of the individual bilingual’s knowledge and use of two (or more) languages”.⁵⁶

"Linguistic diversity" has also been a subject within the framework of language education policies in Europe. Its treatment is based on two concepts: "multilingualism" and "plurilingualism". The first one refers to the presence of more than one "linguistic variation" in a large or small geographical area, that is, the way a social group speaks, whether or not it is formally recognized as a language; in that area, individuals may be monolingual, speaking only their own variant. "Plurilingualism" refers to languages not as objects but from the point of view of those who speak it. It refers to the repertoire of variations of language used by many individuals, so it is the opposite of monolingualism; it includes a variation of language called "native language" or "first language" and any number of other languages or variations. Thus, in some multilingual areas, some individuals may be monolingual and some may be plurilingual.⁵⁷

Furthermore, “plurilingualism is defined in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages the ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to participate in intercultural interaction where a person, viewed as a social agent, has proficiency of varying degrees, in several languages, as well as experience of several cultures. This is not seen as overlapping or confronting different competences, but rather as the existence of a complex or even mixed competence on which the user can rely (Council of Europe, 2001: 168).⁵⁸ Therefore, more attention should be paid to the development of lexical and grammatical competence. This requires acquisition and an advanced level of development of speaking skills, namely linguistic competence, to be able to participate in communication.

⁵⁵ Po aty, fq. 175–196.

⁵⁶ Bhatia, T & Ritchie, W. (Eds.). (2012). *The Handbook of Bilingualism* (2nd ed.). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.

⁵⁷ Më tepër në: Nga diversiteti linguistik në edukimin plurilingual: Udhërrëfyes për zhvillimin e politikave të edukimit gjuhësor në Evropë, Divizioni i politikave gjuhësore, DGIV, Këshilli i Evropës, Strasburg, www.coe.int/lang (shikimi i fundit 16.09.2019).

⁵⁸ Po aty.

Interculturalism and multilingualism in the media

Information provided by multilingual media should first of all be seen as a public interest. This is quite possible, and it has even happened in the media space in North Macedonia (both in the press and on television). The point is that, when a similar information is launched to both Albanians and Macedonians, bridges of communication are established through such multilingual offerings. Therefore, linguistic competence, which includes knowing a language other than English, has a positive impact on business relationships and employment.⁵⁹

The importance of interculturalism and multilingualism in the media develops internal competition in favor of a broader social and cultural understanding. Such an offer is impossible to be conceived in the management consciousness of media executives unless they first overcome the barriers in their head. Thus, interculturalism, in addition to passing through the channels of communication and mutual recognition, is itself an acknowledgment of the existing reality, not as an obstacle but as an advantage, and the media that promote such concepts have a greater chance of being in a higher focus of the public.

The contribution of interculturalism and multilingualism to the media can lead towards a reduction of the ethnic distance in the society. In this context, media executives, after elaborating market penetration strategies, will also be provided with data about target groups that follow their media and about the motives and reasons for which a target group follows their media. Without a deliberate sublimation of this research, it will be noted that there is a widespread social consensus that the most prominent media offerings generating public attention are those that inform and report on the OTHER, and this contributes to the melting of prejudice between different ethnicities within a society. After all, the first condition for achieving this merger is recognition rather than distance, and the way to recognition is through special programs prepared by combined teams, where the journalist is of one ethnicity, the cameraman of another ethnicity, and the director of a different ethnicity. In such cases of mixed ethno-cultural environments, the diversity of information emerges not only richer but also with an enlightening approach. A higher level of interculturalism, which would represent an open and dynamic multilingual communication between different communities and cultures, through adequate media content, would contribute to reduce ethnic distance in the society; otherwise, the undemocratic principles and the suppression of critical thinking within media communities would emphasize such distances. Identifying problems related to diversity has an impact on public opinion. "This thing we call 'critical thinking' or 'analysis' has strong cultural components. It is more than just a set of writing and thinking techniques - it is a voice, a stance, a relationship with texts and family members, friends, teachers, the media, even the history of one's country. This is why 'critical analysis' is so hard for faculty members to talk about; because it is learned intuitively it is easy to recognize, like a face or a personality, but it is not so easily defined and is not at all simple to explain to someone who has been brought up differently"⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Languages for Jobs. Providing multilingual communication skills for the labour market. Report from the thematic working group "Languages for Jobs" European Strategic Framework for Education and Training (ET 2020). http://ec.europa.eu/languages/policy/strategic-framework/documents/languages-for-jobsreport_en.pdf.

⁶⁰ Fox, H. (1994). Listening to the world: Cultural issues in academic writing. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, p. 125.

Interculturalism in the media should be, by definition, understood as communication and discussion, which is exactly the opposite of how elites behave - they quietly agree about media laws as well as many other things in the society.

If politics has its own alliances and coalitions that raised unprincipled intentions, the media through interculturalism go beyond these narrow frameworks defined by the politics of the day. Today, the film industry has a tremendous success in overturning cultural barriers between people, embodying motifs and traditions of various kinds, which are a very creative connection between different languages, cultures and religions. This is also possible with the various media offerings, especially the global television networks through their reporting and research channels have revolutionized the planet in offering different cultural images in the television screen.

Based on the analysis of television media such as "CNN", "Euronews", "Arte", "Aljazeera", "BBC" etc., it turns out that their media offerings have been enriched with products from the field where merging of linguistic and religious boundaries is done with excellent professional elegance by reporters. In their style of work, they offer contrasts on the shores of visible civil and ethno-cultural understanding. Today, the new media, undoubtedly due to their nature as a big potential for avoiding political influence, can play a major role in bringing ethnic distances closer. It is precisely these media that play an important role in reducing the current deficit of independent pluralistic and plurilingual information.

The new media not coincidentally hold this definition, not only because of their technological profile, but also because of the ontological relevance of information free from political parties' influence and dependence. Media scholars have divided their views on this issue, but they all agree that the impact of the new media cannot be compared to the classical media.

This is also because they are technically uncontrollable, but the issue of their professionalism remains an open debate. What is important for these media is the contribution they make to encouraging interactive dialogue in the society, and if well managed, the impacts of this dialogue are good catalysts of the democratization of public expression.

The preparation and drafting of media laws did not pay enough attention to information in the languages of national communities, which caused a number of problems that we face in the process of the media reform. The problem of multilingual information was not addressed with seriousness in the aspect of the rights of national communities, but also with the concept of media freedom and multicultural society.

Self-regulatory mechanisms should be seen as contributing to the abandonment of governmental influence to the editorial policy of the independent media. Always, when states have attempted to regulate the media through laws, it has been the media themselves and their associations that have consolidated an efficient system of self-regulatory mechanism. This system not only removes the censorship mechanism from press sites and television programs, but also enhances the moral and ethical health of the media. Through this mechanism, the media benefit in promoting professional authority in the eyes of the public and increasing the credibility of the audience and readers.

Finding long-term solutions for multilingual information should be the primary legal concern of all national media in North Macedonia, (not just of those in Albanian and other languages of non-majority communities that are obliged to provide programs and shows in Macedonian language). First, this relates to the rights of ethnic (national)

communities, but is also in line with the principles of media freedom, respecting professional and ethical standards of journalism and pluralism of thought. Competent handling of new media is becoming increasingly important. It is important to use the media creatively and safely. By using these media to communicate, we should be able at the same time to understand and appreciate the information they provide.

In this respect, generally for the media, Baacke has operationalized the following dimensions: media criticism (ability to analyze media content), media literacy (knowledge of the media and systems and production capability), media use (most component of media use, e.g. interactive use: how and how, and what consequences) and mediums of forms of action (innovative media systems, creativity and aesthetic forms).⁶¹

The national media in North Macedonia must first have their own independent editorial policies, and upon this principle, they can then develop their own programs and content. A society of linguistic, ethnic and religious diversity, such as that in North Macedonia, cannot remain a 'treasure' preserved only in certain laws that legitimize ethnic linguistic equality, but above all this type of society must develop its daily communication culture between people, through the contributions and results they achieve in their areas of life. Showing the representative model as an achievement of a group of people, must go through media communication, as a distillation system that separates the bad from the good, filtering and selecting light and heavy substrata from the cultural heritage of any nation, highlighting those that unite and update the universal value of every human being.

Closing Observations

Linguistic marginalization determines the reduction of spaces of developmental identity, from which all social segregation trends derive, so this paper confirms the benefits of bilingual or multilingual speakers in the field of metalinguistic awareness.

The media, through interculturalism, beyond the narrow frameworks of linguistic reflection that are dictated by the politics of the day, have seen tremendous achievements in breaking down cultural barriers between nations.

The Republic of North Macedonia can create opportunities for the functioning of a society of linguistic, ethnic and religious diversity through the development of a media strategy that would transform exclusivity into inclusiveness, dry interethnic dialogue into interactive communication, whereas the commonalities and particulars would be treated in terms of professional finding for greater mutual interest.

Self-regulatory mechanisms in the media should contribute on avoiding governmental influence and would emphasize an independent editorial policy in the media. This system not only removes censorship from the media sites, but it also improves the moral and ethical health of the media. Through this mechanism, the media benefits from promoting professional authority in the eyes of the public and enhances the credibility of the audience and readers.

The new media have an excellent potential to avoiding, political influence, and play a major role in bringing ethnic distances closer, and in reducing the current deficit of independent pluralistic and multilingual information.

⁶¹ Baacke, D. (2007) *Medienpädagogik*, Tübingen, Max Niemeyer, p. 40.

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TANDEM Exchange, a Direct Way to Other Languages and Cultures

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La bestia = the beast La bella = the beauty © Tandem Granada

The photo shows a German woman who wants to improve her Spanish and a Spanish woman who wants to improve her German. When these two join together to help each other, they form a tandem couple. Two native speakers who want to practise their partner's language meet and speak half of the time in one language and half in the other.

0. Overview

This article explains this approach in more detail in the following steps:

1. What is Tandem in general ?
2. A special form of application, the Peace/Dialogue-Tandem
3. Tandem for you in Northern Macedonia
4. Links

1.1. Advantages

The tandem setting is a 1:1 situation, which reduces shyness and speech inhibitions. Even the gentlest language teacher cannot avoid that corrections made in front of a class are unpleasant. In tandem, on the other hand, the partners correct each other and take turns, so there is no hierarchy. Moreover, the autonomy is higher than in class because the partners decide on their own topics and materials. As partners are chosen according to common interests, there is a combination of conversation and, if necessary, explanatory sequences, i.e. real communication and learning. This maintains a high level of motivation.

1.2. Basic terms

Tandem couple	Tandem course
Face-to-face tandem	eTandem

In the photo appears a tandem couple. In addition, there is the tandem course when groups of two different languages and teachers of both languages come together.

This can be done in person or on the internet. So there are four combinations in total:

1. Couple - personal
2. Couple - on the Internet
3. Course - personal
4. Course - on the Internet.

More detailed information on the history of the tandem movement you find on:
<https://tandemcity.info/en/history-tandem>

And about the current structure: <https://tandemcity.info/en/organizations-tandem>

1.3. Languages Tandem until now has been used in at least 23 languages:

Albanian, Arabic, Basque, Bulgarian, Catalan, Czech, Chinese, Danish, English, French, Galician, German, New Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Latvian, Polish, Portuguese, Serbo-Croatian, Slovenian, Spanish, Turkish.

Hopefully, Macedonian will soon appear on the list. In principle, any language is 'tandem-suitable' if two people are willing to start a language exchange.

1.4. Goals and skills

There are different aims and forms: the universal tandem of languages, the culture exchange oriented tandem, the special purpose language tandem, the multilingual 'Babylonia-Tandem', the antiracist 'Interkultur-Tandem', the cross-border 'Mugaz Gain' and eTandem on the Internet.

Also the skills that can be developed are diverse:

- speaking and listening
- reading and talking about
- writing
- translating and interpreting
- office skills (phoning)
- culture comparison

But tandem is not a 'miracle method'. It is difficult to use with beginners because the relationship between effort and communicable content is unbalanced. Level A 1 should be completed before starting. It is also recommended to leave the correction of pronunciation and grammar explanations to trained teachers.

1.5. Places

Tandem can be used in many ways: in nursery schools, primary and secondary schools, in vocational training institutions, in youth organizations, in universities and colleges, in teacher training colleges, in adult education, in Trade Union training within companies and immigrant centers.

The lower the age, the more structuring by the accompanying staff is necessary. Tandem couples with long phases of independent work are impossible in kindergarten.

1.6. Intermediation criteria



The mediation of partnerships (if it adheres to the quality standards) is carried out by specialised intermediators on the basis of certain factors identified in questionnaires:

- Residency / workplace
- Studies / profession
- Age
- Interests
- Motivation for learning + Language proficiency level
- Duration + Time + Additional learning
- Interests and other characteristics + Political interests Gender
- Teaching experience
- Timetable
- Miscellanies (e.g. smoker/non-smoker)

In contrast to the spontaneously formed couples, the intermediators make sure that the language levels are not too different. Otherwise there is a tendency for the more advanced to translate when there are difficulties in understanding and in the end he will learn more. For the same reason, it is also recommended to separate the two languages and to give explanations in the language being used at the moment.

1.7. Coaching at 'alpha beta'

The partnerships will continue to be supported after the presentation. Here a model from South Tyrol :



1. Questionnaire & interview
2. Introduction and first meeting
3. Feedback(s)
4. Tandem couple group meeting(s)
5. Evaluation at the 'end'

However, the parties are reluctant to announce the 'end' of the partnership, believing that any interruptions are temporary.

1.8. Other forms of intermediation

a) standard (as previously described)

b) cocktail; If there are large numbers of participants, such as at schools or universities, it is not possible to present all couples individually. In this situation, all interested parties are brought together, are given an introduction to the criteria for finding a suitable partner at the same event, simulate explanatory sequences and corrections with him or her, and then arrange for future meetings.

c) web platforms / programs / apps; There are now numerous offers on the Internet. Most of them are databases without any pedagogical background, but some of them have the placement criteria built in.

d) 'wild' couples; This is the joking name for partnerships that form spontaneously. It seems that such partnerships are very satisfied in terms of getting to know the other culture, but that the linguistic progress is not as great as in the organised ones. They are advised to use the material on <https://tandemcity.info/en/free-tandem-downloads/>.

2.1. Peace-Tandem: the idea

We all know the so-called 'religious/ethnic/language conflicts“ ...

On closer examination, a different background emerges: social and economic discrimination appears behind the 'religious conflict' in Northern Ireland. Behind 'problems in the treatment of languages' in Ukraine, one encounters various foreign powers who want to expand their spheres of influence. Behind 'tribes waging war against each other in Africa' there are large corporations financing militias in order to get raw materials supplied more cheaply.

In contrast, I prefer the following solution:



In 1888 a Catholic woman was not allowed to be buried next to her husband in the Protestant part of the cemetery (Het Oude Kerkhof in Roermond/NL). She reacted in this way. Of course it is desirable that people in conflict areas can shake hands even during their lifetime. That is why the Dialogue/Peace Tandem was developed.



It is a combination of the tandem methodology with approaches from the peace movement.

2.2. What does Tandem ?

- 1) Train teachers, peace activists etc in conflict prevention/transformation/reconciliation and tandem method, using a handbook
- 2) Develop together a project for their community
- 3) Give hints about financing (no direct financial support)
- 4) Accompany the implementation during two years (coaching)

2.3. Where ?

Up to the moment, in

- a) Arab countries
- b) French speaking Africa
- c) Middle America
- d) Balkan
- e) Ukraine

In future, it can be carried out wherever someone sees a need.

2.4. Courses and support They are for free and online, based on a handbook of ca. 200 pages in English, German or French. We use the 'flipped learning' approach, i.e. first the participants read 10-15 pages and then they discuss their doubts and the possible applications in their country with the tutor.

With one meeting per week the course lasts about 2 - 3 months, but the schedule is flexible and can be intensified or extended.

2.5. Project examples

- 1) Cybercafé with radio station for the common use of previously hostile militias, powered by solar energy
- 2) Common vocational training centre for former children soldiers and children of local farmers
- 3) Hostel in a rural tourist area, run by foreign 'workaways' which serve as tandem partners for local people
- 4) Circles of refugees and host(ile) population

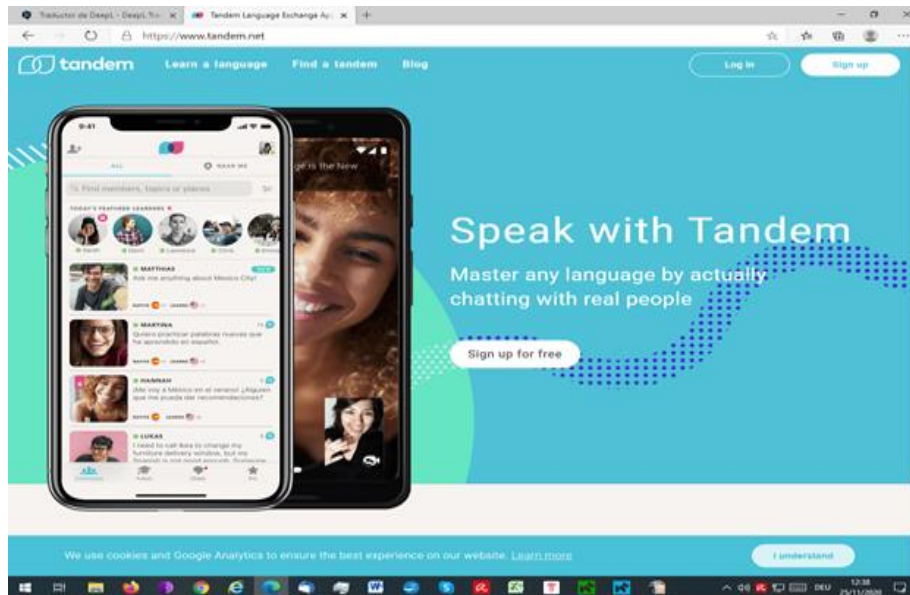
Unfortunately, it is a long way from project planning to implementation, in many places there is a lack of money, in others time, and the corona pandemic has further complicated everything.

3.1. For you personally

(Many thanks for information about the situation in Northern Macedonia to LOJA staff who have been trained for Peace-Tandem; based also on Smith, Annedore (2016) One possibility is tandem with Macedonian + Albanian to improve certain skills. Even though some areas in Northern Macedonia are officially bilingual, this does not mean that all inhabitants use both languages equally well and without bias in all facets. Both

correct writing and fluent speaking can certainly be improved. A numerical imbalance of both language groups can be a problem, but this can be solved. In addition to Tandem Albanian/Macedonian there may also be interest in Albanian/English or Macedonian/German. This is not so easy in winter, but then you can fall back on the tandem app.

3.2. Tandem App



www.tandem.net;<https://www.tandem.net/>

There is a free and a paid version. If someone tries out the payment version first, s/he should make sure to cancel it in time.

3.3. For schools and universities

- Twinning inside: If the institution accepts learners from both language groups, it can form tandems internally.
- Twinning in the same area:
 - If the learners in one institution are all from the same language group, it may twinn with an institution from the other language group nearby.
 - Using' foreign visitors and experts
 - Short visits by foreign visitors or experts who will be in the country for a longer period of time can also be used for tandem elements in class to increase the motivation of language learners, e.g. through interviews.
- Twinning abroad: If partnerships with foreign countries are desired, the difficulty arises that Albanian and Macedonian are not as much in demand abroad as English in Northern Macedonia, for example. In such cases, tandem can be supplemented by the 'knowledge exchange' approach. A partner would be an English-speaking person/institution seeking information about Northern Macedonia, e.g. fauna and flora of the national parks, and the Northern Macedonian partner would communicate it to him/her in English and be corrected for it. Some universities in other European countries recognise tandem as academic work with credits, if there has been a diary and coaching.

3.4. For translators and teacher students

Translators:

The Department of Translation at the University of Hildesheim in Germany has tested Tandem for translation students. When someone translates from his/her first language into the foreign language, the target language partner revises the text. When s/he translates from the foreign language into his/her own, s/he can ask the foreign language partner about the background of the terms.

Teacher students: All future teachers do internships where they teach in front of whole classes. It turns out that it is a good preparation to have participated in a tandem before and to gain some 'teaching experience' without being under the stress of the big group.

4.1. Links

General:

<https://tandemcity.info/>

Tips for participants in tandems, teachers-intermediators and researchers:

- Material for couples
- Tips for eTandems
- Tandem App
- Tips and self-study course for intermediators
- Bibliography and magazine

<https://tandemcity.info/en/free-tandem-downloads/>

4.2. Contact

Jürgen Wolff / TANDEM

Apdo 864

E-20080 Donostia / San Sebastián

contact@tandemcity.info (If you should not receive an answer after one week, please repeat the request.)

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Redefining How and Where Learning Happens through an Environmental Psychology Lens

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Abstract

One of the problems with the modern educational system is that it targets the majority. This means that, if students can fit in and follow the teachers' teaching methods, then they are considered good students. However, if they cannot, then the educational system categorizes them as students who don't like to learn or students with "problems". The problem is that currently, the educational system is not diverse enough in the way the learning material is delivered to respond to different learners' learning needs and styles. Einstein once said: "If you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, you will always think it's an idiot". With the "one-size-fits-all" approach, there are many fish out there forced to climb trees, thus inhibiting their personal development. In order to help address the above issues and redefine how and where learning happens, "Tianmei's World" Academy was developed as a decentralized school concept, a "network of classrooms" aiming to provide equal opportunities for everyone to access quality education regardless of their skin color, financial and cultural background, while providing the possibility for the students to experience by themselves what learning methods and environments they feel are most suitable for their individual needs.

This article explores more in depth the core issues identified with the current education system, how a "network of classroom" concept would help solve them, the research done in order to reach the results, the academic evidence to support the methods developed, the measurable results obtained so far along with recommendations for further research.

Keywords: education, diversity, decentralized, learning environments, "network of classrooms"

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Introduction

Diversity in education is a hot topic, yet it is not truly included into education systems. With increasingly developed technologies available, the only major “innovation” that has happened in education is digitalizing existing teaching methods. This means that the “one-size-fits-all” educational methods have just been spread faster without taking into consideration the negative psychological effects that they have on learners.

(Halpern-Manners et al., 2016; Williams, 2020).

What the “one-size-fits-all” education system does is to label all those who don’t fit in or can’t follow the teaching methods as students who are not good at learning or students with “special needs” or “problems”. Very little consideration is given to the physical environments in which learning happens and how these can be improved depending on the learning outcome that educators aim to achieve for learners. Little attention is given also to ways in which teaching methods could be adapted to different learning styles within the same setting. Accepting that different doesn’t mean wrong, that there is not only one way of learning and teaching respectively, and reflecting that in the classroom design and activities, is crucial for a truly inclusive, diverse and healthy education system to exist, where learners who learn differently are not labeled to have “special needs”.

This paper is both an account of the author’s personal and professional experience in relation to the subject matter and an invitation for the reader to explore education from a different perspective, as a way to challenge the status quo. The paper includes examples from different disciplines, emphasizing the need to change perspectives and adopt a more holistic/systemic approach to find solutions.

Based on this knowledge, as well as on the observations made during 3 years of continuous research (between the years 2017 - 2020), using events management as a tool to constantly prototype, “Tianmei’s World” Academy (further referred to as the Academy) was able to innovate in the education sector in two ways:

1. Redefining the idea of the classroom by turning every available space into a learning environment and developing the world’s first decentralized “network of classrooms” school concept;
2. Creating a teaching methodology that takes into account diversity in delivery while offering learners the freedom to choose what learning environments and methods they feel are most suitable for themselves.

The research during the three years has not been done according to conditions requested in academia, but in a “trial and error” manner, more specific for the start-up entrepreneurial environments (Osterwalder et al., 2014). Therefore, this paper will explain the problems noticed in education that triggered the need to innovate the understanding of a learning environment from an environmental psychology perspective, with academic evidence to support the findings and proposed solutions. A study case for the pertinent application of the methodology, as well as user feedback to further back the findings up will also be provided. The limitations and further research directions will be discussed at the end of this paper. To position the reader within the research context, it must be mentioned that the research was done in China in the adult continuous education sector, and the events will be further referred to as learning experiences. The author’s role was that of a facilitator, employing academic research tools like observation and discourse analysis to collect and analyze data that would later be turned into proposed solutions and retested.

Problems identified and the need to innovate

The concept of the Academy and the need to innovate have its roots in the author's personal and cross-functional professional experience of having worked in different areas, like architectural design, sales, customer service, education, and later on environmental psychology academic research. By changing many jobs across various sectors, apart from the "one-size-fits-all" approach mentioned above, the author was able to observe several additional issues:

1. Field-specific jargon for the same concepts

In many fields, people talk about the same concepts that are called differently across different fields. Such field specific jargon creates unnecessary confusion and becomes a source of disagreement when people believe they are talking about different things while actually they are not. They just use different jargons to express the same ideas, not being aware of the biases they create.

This was found to have a great impact on education, as it creates a loop. It starts from the way in which learners are taught to learn by focusing only on one field, neglecting the connection with other fields. To give one example, in many universities, innovation is taught as a separate major. It is not integrated as a subject in all other majors, so that every student is taught how to innovate within his or her specific field. This further reflects into the workplace with companies having to employ innovation consultants in order to compensate for employees' lack of skills on this side, to mention just one example.

It also comes back to the education system by making it more and more dispersed through the subdivision in different micro-fields, further adding to the confusion. One of the consequences is that the same concepts will be studied in different fields under different names. To give an example, what in neuroscience is called "anchoring" (Furnham & Boo, 2011), in environmental psychology is called "nudging" (Thaler & Sunstein, 2009) and "anchor" is just an "environmental cue" (Booker & Mullan, 2013; Stöckli et al., 2016). Lack of dialog between fields is counterproductive because it can easily lead to misunderstandings and even conflict. Apart from potentially creating conflicts, it also distracts attention from the part that each element plays in a bigger system.

For example, in adult continuous education, there are schools for teaching foreign languages and there are schools for teaching soft skills like communication, self-confidence etc. However, while learning foreign languages, soft skills are improved as well. Conversely, language is used when learning other skills, having as a result the improvement of language skills as well. By focusing one's attention only on one skill at a time, learners don't only have the impression that they are not learning other skills. They also become anxious about not knowing what skill they would choose to learn first, due to the numerous choices that suddenly become available (Schwartz, 2016) when in reality there are more effective learning options that need just a change of perspective. As such, a more systemic approach (Senge, 2006) to education is needed.

2. Lack of incentive to innovate

Another problem with the education system is that, due to its institutionalization, there is not a great incentive to innovate. Having strong support from the government or some of them functioning as NGOs relying on donors, their educators are afraid to try new things and innovate, due to fear of "failure" (Pallotta, 2008). In other words, experimentation and trying new things are generally discouraged for being considered

a waste of money. This in return gives birth to the continuous education sector as a business, making higher quality education less accessible to those with less financial means, widening the gap between the rich and the poor.

3. Unequal access to education

By being available only in institutions or tied to a specific physical location, access to education becomes a big issue for people living in remote areas or coming from lower economic backgrounds, as they cannot afford travelling to where the educational institution is. However, equal access to high quality education is one of the crucial issues for the achievement of the UN Sustainability Development Goals (UNICEF, 2019). It must be mentioned that equal access here does not mean only being able to go to school, but also easy access to educational facilities, less possible for rural and remote areas.

4. Lack of learning tools, not of information

At the same time, in the information era, availability is not a problem anymore, unless people do not have access to the internet. The problem is information overload and a lack of tools and of awareness to filter the information that is most useful for one's individual situation. In other words, teaching information in schools becomes a less useful endeavor, as by the time that students graduate, the information itself might be already obsolete. However, by being equipped with the tools to disseminate what information should be used and how (e.g. critical thinking), learners can better cope with information overload and become more adaptable to the inevitable changes that development brings. Although this might not reflect the situations in all educational institutions, it is an aspect that was considered in the Academy's research, as well as for the solutions proposed.

5. Misconceptions about language learning

Based on the author's own language learning experience, another issue identified was the inappropriate way foreign languages are taught in schools, the misunderstandings that it creates in learners' minds and how these limit academic performance. This is believed to be further rooted into a general misconception of how a nurturing learning environment should look like. It is the aspect that this paper will discuss more in detail.

Becoming aware of these issues, the Academy was created and developed based on the understanding of the underlying elements that create a nurturing learning environment, both from a physical and social perspective, and creating frameworks and methodologies that can be replicated in any space beyond geographical barriers. In this way the learner will have the freedom to explore through personal experience what learning methods and environments he or she considers to be most suitable for oneself and choose accordingly, without having to be labeled as a student with "special needs". For clarity purposes, a diagram was created in order to highlight in the author's work the elements that are considered as shaping an environment (see Fig. 1). This diagram is at the core of all the Academy's projects.



Fig.1 - Diagram explaining the definition of the environment as understood in the interpretation of "Tianmei's World" Academy

For paper length considerations, the physical elements discussed are Light, Sound, Furniture, and Layout. The social elements discussed are People Relationships and Language, even if other elements will have an influence on learning outcomes too.

Physical environment

From an environmental psychology point of view, learning happens in a physical space with other people around. This means that both educators and learners should take into consideration the elements that shape the physical learning environments. However, for a very long time, the design of educational facilities has been the job of architects, with little understanding of how the physical environment design actually influences the learners' learning outcome and classroom behaviors.

Light

The human body is directly connected to the movement of the sun. This means that humans are biologically programmed to wake up when the sun rises and fall asleep when the sun sets. In other words, due to the human body's circadian rhythm, it is very easy to feel sleepy if a room does not have windows or enough light (Walker et al., 2020). Not having enough light sends the human body the signal that it is time to sleep, as the human body cannot differentiate sun light from artificial one. To make an analogy, this is one of the reasons why many people seem very tired during meetings when lights are turned off for a presentation screen. It can be safely assumed that the same will happen in a classroom setting if there is not enough light. Even if there are many more influencing factors for a student's behavior in the classroom, the human body's biological functions should not be neglected when trying to encourage learning. Unfortunately, when this situation occurs in a classroom setting, a teacher's first impression might be that the respective student is not interested in learning or that he or she is a student with "problems", not that the learning environment is improperly designed.

Sound

Sound is another very important element of good learning environments. Better said, the overall acoustics of a space in general, and of a classroom in particular, is very important for speech intelligibility and for overall communication (Delhom, 2020). If educators are not aware of how a space's design will influence the way their message is received, it becomes easy to assume that students sitting in the back of a classroom and not paying attention to the lesson, are not interested in the content. However, the students actually might not be able to hear very well due to bad acoustic design. When teachers believe that students are not interested in learning, they might start subconsciously to change their attitude towards them. In a very short time, this situation could lead to the student being labeled as "not good at learning", and will not receive equal amount of attention from the teacher as other students, further influencing in the students' academic performance (Achor, 2010).

Layout and Furniture

Depending on the desired learning outcome, the layout of a learning environment, as well as the furniture chosen, are very important. For example, clustered layout will encourage students to have more conversations, brainstorm and boost their creativity as a result. It allows learners to engage in dialogue, look each other in the eyes, and connect at a much deeper level (Marx et al., 1999). In contrast, a row type of classroom layout will only encourage learners to listen to the speaker in front. It will discourage any type of group discussion, as it would be very uncomfortable to turn around in such a layout without experiencing physical discomfort. This is not to say that one layout is better than the other, but just to show the impact that the physical environment has on learning outcomes and the need to create environments adapted to the desired learning outcome (Simmons et al., 2015), to facilitate the desired learning outcome.

Furniture should be comfortable and flexible enough for the learner to be able to move it depending on their learning needs. This will make learners feel in control over their immediate environment and help them engage better with each other. Feeling in control was found to be an important element of human basic needs for wellbeing (Gabriel et al., 2020) and is believed to positively influence academic performance.

It is important to mention that these are generalizations and might not represent the situations in all the educational institutions. What the author wants to emphasize is that

understanding how different physical elements influence learning outcome, any space that fulfills these requirements can become a learning environment beyond the traditional setting of a “classroom”.

By understanding all the physical elements that contribute to the creation of an environment conducive to learning, adapted to the biological functions of the human body and brain, it becomes easy to imagine how these characteristics can be extrapolated and reproduced in any other spaces. This way, the development of a “network of classrooms” becomes possible. By making a set of guidelines available for how the learning environments should look like, education can be brought closer to learners beyond geographical barriers.

Social environment (context)

Having understood how the physical environment can be recreated beyond the premises of a traditional school in order to make nurturing learning experiences more widely available beyond geographical barriers, it is also very important to understand the barriers that might inhibit academic performance beyond the “one-size-fits-all” approach.

Social Relationships and Language

These two elements are discussed together, as language is considered by the author to be one of the binding elements for the creation of social relationship. They mutually influence each other and are difficult to consider separately.

Throughout the research, it was noticed that adults in general are expected to be much more confident and proactive in a social context, thus participate in learning experiences much more actively. However, that was found not to be the case in many situations. Some of the elements identified to influence these social relationships are listed below:

- a. “Diffusion of responsibility” (Darley & Latane, 1968), i.e. not knowing who should make the first step, creating a long silence before someone actually gets to start speaking in a social setting unless participants know each other before;
- b. Lack of self-confidence out of fear of being judged, a layer aggravated when another language is involved (e.g. feeling afraid to speak and make mistakes);
- c. “Learned helplessness” (Canino, 1981; Maier & Seligman, 1976), or a learner’s belief they have no control on future outcomes of their overall learning experience;
- d. Self-perception of being or not a “talkative” person, or one’s own explanatory style (Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 1986) of self-identity;
- e. The mental association of the word “different” with being wrong (NLP - Neuro-linguistic Programming);
- f. Misconceptions about language learning as limiting academic progress.

Literature Discussion

Diffusion of responsibility

This theory has been first investigated starting from the murder case of Kitty Genovese in New York in 1964 in which 38 witnesses were supposed to have witnessed the crime without taking any action (Darley & Latane, 1968). All the research that followed was based on a New York Times article that was later found to have had many inconsistencies (Takooshian et al., 2005). However, much more research has been done since then to show that diffusion of responsibility exists across different areas. They include restaurant tipping (Freeman et al., 1975), public safety (Scott et al., 2005), charitable donations (Wiesenthal et al., 1983), cooperative collectives (Forsyth et al., 2002), social networking sites (Martin & North, 2015), diminishing of altruistic punishment (Feng et al., 2016), and more. This means that the responsibility to take an expected action is diminished within a bigger group than when by an individual. For example, it is assumed that crowded places are safer, yet it was found not to be the case due to the diffusion of responsibility. If people would get sick or be attacked in a public space, help will delay in being offered if there are bigger crowds witnessing rather than only one person. This can be changed through direct role attribution. If a victim directs their cry for help to only one person in the crowd, then help will be offered in a shorter time (Scott et al., 2005).

In the case of academic performance, the expected action is for participants to be proactive and participate, ask questions, engage in conversations, express their opinions. However, based on the author's observations throughout over three years of organizing learning experiences, this seems not to be the case. Even though there was no evidence found in literature to support the impact of the diffusion of responsibility on learning outcomes, this assumption was taken into consideration in the design of the interactions in the overall learning experiences. Through trial and error, this leads to the creation of an icebreaker activity that can eliminate diffusion of responsibility and get participants ready for the overall learning experience. A more detailed account will be provided in the section describing the educational methodology developed, as well as the study case chosen.

Lack of self-confidence out of fear of making mistakes

The research has been done in China, in a strong "face saving" culture (Hu, 1944). This means that making mistakes is generally not accepted and has a great influence on behavior. The result is the inhibition of different behaviors, including one's willingness to express their ideas in a public setting out of fear of making mistakes and being judged. This aspect becomes particularly obvious when people are expected to express themselves in public in a foreign language (Noguchi, 2015) they don't feel very confident in using. However, this element is far from being a characteristic of Asian culture and was found to have an influence in other contexts as well. For example, it was also found to inhibit sports performance in relation to perfectionism (Sagar & Stoeber, 2009) in a Western context. This is an aspect that was found to be deeply rooted in the education system, with educators and parents at the core of it (Heath, 2009). By not being encouraged to make mistakes in childhood, the perception of making a mistake as being wrong is perpetuated in adulthood. It is then reflected in the behavior in many social situations, including in workplaces and ways in which businesses are run. There will be varied degrees of this fear of making mistakes depending on the cultural background, but Culture, as an influencing social environment element as described in Fig.1, will not be discussed in this paper.

Learned helplessness (Maier & Seligman, 1976)

This theory was first proposed by Maier and Seligman in 1976, through an experiment looking at how dogs react to electric shocks in different situations. After being exposed to the same outcome for a longer period of time, the dogs had learned that they have no control on their circumstances anymore, a state observed to continue even when the conditions had changed and dogs could have easily changed their behavior (Peterson, 2010). The theory was found to be applicable to humans as well, being directly correlated with high levels of depression and low academic performance (Alloy & Seligman, 1979). This could explain the recent findings that mental health issues are linked with education (Padget, 2020; Williams, 2020). It was also found to explain why some victims become numb and passive during and following different attacks (Peterson & Seligman, 1983). The most worrisome part is that learned helplessness was found to spillover across different areas of life, even if it was experienced only within a particular circumstance of one's life (Alloy et al., 1984). This means that people who are victimized at home, will exhibit low academic performance, because of their learned helplessness spillover. At the same time, students who do not fit in the "one-size-fits-all" educational approach might enter a "learned helplessness" state, thinking that no matter how much they try, they have no control over their learning progress and just give up learning entirely. It is important thus to understand the origins of learned helplessness, in order to be able to reverse the process for adult learners, but also start avoiding its creation for younger learners.

There is evidence that learned helplessness is first developed during childhood and is directly related to teaching methods (Johnson, 1981), but also to parenting. The author of this paper believes that learned helplessness is also one of the causes to the belief that one may or may not have the talent to learn, which will further influence their academic results, instead of their actual abilities. One striking example is that of memorizing words in a foreign language for a very long time, only to realize that after a while all the words would be forgotten if not constantly repeated. The first instinct of many learners in this situation is to assume that they do not have the talent or ability to learn a new language since their memorizing efforts have proven useless. They do not realize that the method they employed to learn is not helpful to achieve their desired learning outcome to begin with. Having adopted such beliefs like "I don't have the talent to learn", "I can't do it", is later on reflected in all the learners' endeavors making their progress very slow or even making them give up at some point, thinking that learning is not for them.

Self-perception and identity

The perception that people have about the self will influence their behaviors (Bem, 1972), be it purchasing behaviors (Grubb & Hupp, 1968), or academic results, as Frisby and Tucker (1993) proved for African-American children. It was also found to be correlated with levels of depression (Gara et al., 1993), although it is hard to assess which one comes first to trigger the other.

Individuals will form attitudes, emotions partially by inferring them from observations of their own behavior in relation to other people's reactions, as well as the environment (context) in which it occurs. This makes it safe to assume that environments can be designed so that people's self-perceptions could change and they could use this to drive academic performance in educational settings. One such example of changing students' self-perception about their own abilities was identified in the Marva Collins approach to teaching (Hollins, 1982). After having served as a teacher in several public schools and being discontent with the methods she saw applied, Marva Collins decided to open her own school where she worked with marginalized black children, usually perceived

by society as doomed to failure (Collins & Tamarkin, 1990). Her methodology will not be explained in detail in this paper. What will be emphasized is the one common element found to be employed throughout her teaching, i.e. helping the children enter an “I believe I can (beyond what others think)” mental model (Collins, 1992).

In the book “The Marva Collins’ Way”, before finally opening her own school, she is described as having worked with some of the most problematic children, with all sorts of behavioral problems that were often sent to her from other teachers’ classes (Collins & Tamarkin, 1990). Throughout the book, in all the examples given about the children that she had been working with, the one common element was to instill in these children the idea that they can achieve great academic results, regardless of how others perceived them. The success of her method was proven by the academic success of children that were otherwise condemned by society to become failures. The same intent to change self-perceptions of learners was developed also throughout the methodology tested by the Academy within the three years of continuous research through the “trial and error” method. The design of the educational methodology was aiming to include these elements. The results indicate that mental models indeed inhibit or encourage academic performance. These findings will be discussed in the outcomes section.

Cognitive Dissonance

This theory was developed by Leon Festinger (Festinger, 1962) and states that people’s beliefs tend to be aligned with their behaviors. As a result, when behaviors are changed, a change in beliefs tends to follow. For example, someone who continues to smoke even though they know smoking is bad for them might end up thinking that either smoking is so enjoyable that it’s worth the health risk, or that they won’t be able to avoid all the negative contingencies and still live anyway. In other words, the human mind will find explanations to justify behaviors, so that the alignment between beliefs and actions is kept consistent. There are many examples in which cognitive dissonance can be used to explain people’s behaviors, including why people might engage in some pro-environmental behaviors and not in others (Blake, 1999; Cialdini et al., 1995). To give another example, some people might believe that they are entitled to use more electricity if they pay more for it, even if the initial measure of making electricity more expensive by the authorities was to discourage consumption.

When referring to academic performance, from a cognitive dissonance perspective, it can be assumed that performance will be directly related to one’s perception of oneself, whether they see themselves as “good or talented at learning” or not. In other words, if learners’ belief is that their efforts are not helpful towards their academic success because no matter how much they try, nothing will change, then their behavior will become not trying. In this situation, it can be safely assumed that “learned helplessness” and cognitive dissonance are directly correlated. This paper tries to emphasize the need to understand the mechanism behind this mental process and its direct connection to the learner’s environment.

The Academy’s work in the research that this paper talks about is focused on using cognitive dissonance to create learning behaviors that will trigger changes in learners’ self-perceptions. In other words, changing learners’ self-perceptions to “I can”, “I am good at learning” and ultimately, help learners unlearn their helplessness by building self-confidence.

The word “different” being perceived as wrong

This observation relies on the author’s growing up experience, as well as observations made in different environments in comparison. The first experience of different being

perceived as wrong was during the author's bachelor studies, during a discussion held at the author's home between the author, born and raised in the Dobrogea territory, known for its ethnic diversity, and a university colleague from the Northern part of Romania. The discussion revolved around a traditional dish the author had cooked in the same way as she always did, but perceived to have been cooked in the wrong way by the Northern Romanian colleague. The same attitude was then observed by the author in many other situations and was assumed to be underlying many conflicts, in which people are not aware of how their growing up environment has created this bias of "What I know is what is right".

This concept was also discussed by Mike Hulme in the sustainability area in his book "Why we disagree about climate change" (Hulme, 2009). His argument is that due to different understandings of what climate change means within different cultural backgrounds, disagreements are imminent. It is easy to assume that the same principles apply to many other areas as well. This phenomenon is believed to be rooted in the cognitive dissonance theory. If people are used to behave in a certain way for a very long period, the assumption is that it becomes an involuntary bias to conclude that what they are doing is right. This might lead people to enter a defensive mode to protect the beliefs that follow their behaviors when others might present different opinions or ways of doing things.

Although there is little evidence in the literature to support this statement, the author believes that this is due to the angle from which research has been done previously, not the phenomenon itself. In other words, there are very few known locations in which being different is accepted as different, not wrong, and it is celebrated rather than being a cause of fight. Dobrogea is among the very few places where many ethnic groups live in harmony and diversity is celebrated through different festivals every year (Centrul EUDivers, 2019). What's more, it is the only place in the Balkan Peninsula where this happens, compared to conflicts between other Balkan territories. This angle and view on diversity was also embedded in the educational methodology developed through trial and error in the 3 years of research as part of the Academy's work.

Misconceptions about language learning limiting academic progress

Language plays an important role in mediating social relationships, through both NLP, as well as the ways of thinking it created depending on one's native language. For this reason, additional layers of complication are added when communication in a second language is involved. However, the complexity of language will not be discussed in this paper. What will be mentioned is some of the most often encountered misunderstandings, identified through a discourse analysis approach. The author's aim in mentioning them in the paper is to further emphasize the influence that cognitive dissonance might have on learning behaviors.

1、 "I don't have a language environment"

In the author's experience of living eight years in China, having achieved native fluency in the Chinese language in approximately five years of learning, many Chinese nationals were heard complaining about their lack of progress in English language due to improper language environments, even if they learned the English language at school. The reference here was made to living in a native speaking country as being a good language environment. However, based on this assumption, every non-Chinese national living in China should be a fluent Chinese speaker and that was found not to be the case. Perceptions of not having a good learning environment were identified as distracting the learner from other learning opportunities available, especially with

information increasingly available online. The result of such a way of thinking is the inhibition of academic performance.

2、*“Living abroad will help improve language skills”*

Although it would make sense for this belief to be a fact, the reason this is not always the case is believed to be due to low adaptability skills and to “different” being generally perceived as wrong. In other words, it depends on personal willingness to “do as the Romans do when in Rome”. Low adaptability will make many people stick to their comfort zones, eat the same food as at home, speak the same language as at home etc., a reason for the existence of many Chinatowns around the world and many foreigner bubbles in Chinese cities. It is a different location, but it is the same environment according to the definition of an environment introduced in this paper (Fig. 1).

3、*“There is no point to listen if I don’t understand”*

There is a general misconception according to which, listening to material in another language that cannot be understood, is a waste of time and not helpful to make progress in language learning. Thinking of newborns, they are exposed every day to sounds they do not understand, yet they have no concept of what not understanding means. They also do not have a choice to select what sounds to hear and what not. At the same time, depending on what sounds they hear, that is what they will be able to reproduce as speech patterns. Conversely, adults have the choice of blocking out sounds they do not understand for fear of wasting time, without realizing that the brain does record information subconsciously and that, besides, it also needs time to get used to the sound and rhythm of the new language one is trying to learn. For example, it was found that listening to the language one wants to learn while sleeping, is helpful for knowledge consolidation (Fenn et al., 2003). A general misconception is the one that adults learn differently from children, but according to the author’s personal language learning experience, this is not the case. The author’s experience is backed up by recent discoveries in neuroplasticity (Costandi, 2016), which show that the adult brain also continues to learn, although additional research is needed to understand the exact mechanism.

4、*“Learning a foreign language is hard”*

When asked, many people believe that their lack of progress in language learning is that the language they are learning is difficult. However, the author believes that language in itself represents an expression of culture and a way of thinking, so the difficulty lies in the willingness of changing one’s mindset, adaptation to the culture represented by the foreign language, as well as the willingness to get out of comfort zones. Focusing less on the language itself rather than the content, it makes the learning process not only easier, but also faster.

5、*“I don’t have the opportunity to ‘use’ the language”*

Throughout the whole research process, many learners were complaining they do not have opportunities to use English language, so that is why their progress is slow. Based on a discourse analysis approach (Johnstone, 2018), it was concluded that what people

actually meant by the word "use" was "speak" (output). However, without input, there cannot be any output. Input is a very important aspect of language learning; as such, it can be "used" by listening to an audio material, by reading books or by watching movies, for instance. Language is an element of the environments people live, learn and work in, regardless of whether people are aware of it or not. Not having the opportunity to speak (output) a language should not be an excuse not to input information in the language we want to learn, although understanding might be slower at the beginning.

6、 *"Only talented people can learn foreign languages"*

This belief was found to be deeply rooted in learners' past endeavors of memorizing English words, only to realize that they do not remember. It is consistent with the "learned helplessness" theory as well. For this reason, it will not be discussed in further detail here.

7、 *"I need to finish English classes first, do fun stuff second"*

Having heard many people mentioning this, the author assumed that many people consider learning as happening only in a classroom setting, which will deny learners the access to many other learning opportunities outside of it. However, attending English classes is not the problem; relying only on the time spent in a classroom to learn, one will limit their academic progress.

8、 *"No native speakers around, so no language environment"*

This misconception was found to be directly linked with the misunderstanding of what makes a language-learning environment, as well as what the overall process of language learning involves. As an example, even if native speakers would be around, if the English level of the learner would be too limited, not much conversation would happen. The parties involved in the conversation would just become very frustrated for not being able to understand each other. Frustration and anxiety were already found thirty years ago to inhibit academic performance (Horwitz et al., 1986). Having native speakers around could indeed help to have output (speak), but not without focusing first on as much input (listening, reading) as possible when native speakers are not around.

9、 *"I can learn English only from native speakers"*

Depending on one's language level, this is not the case. For an absolute beginner to learn English from a native speaker who has never experienced learning a second language might be an extremely frustrating process. It might be argued that the native speaker may have specialized degrees in teaching, but without understanding the frustrations involved in language learning, it is difficult to empathize with students and motivate them to learn. What's more, this only aggravates the negative outcomes that the "one-size-fits-all" educational approach creates, accelerating feelings of "learned helplessness".

Although the observations related to language learning were made on Chinese people learning English, it is believed that these findings are universally applicable for any learner of any language. Learning a foreign language implies the same psychological barriers and anxieties no matter the nationality of the learner and the language they are trying to learn. By understanding the underlying mechanisms, a nurturing language-learning environment can be created in order to allow for progress in the shortest time. However, the condition is that learners' mindsets should change.

The above misconceptions support the author's belief that there is a general misunderstanding of what a proper nurturing learning environment should look like. One of the reasons believed to trigger the above misconceptions is the disconnection between disciplines, discouraging a systems thinking approach to learning. For example, architectural design is taught in architecture school, the influence that architectural design has on human behavior is discussed in the field of environmental psychology, and teaching methodologies are taught in the education field, whereas in reality, all these fields are interconnected in the outcomes they produce.

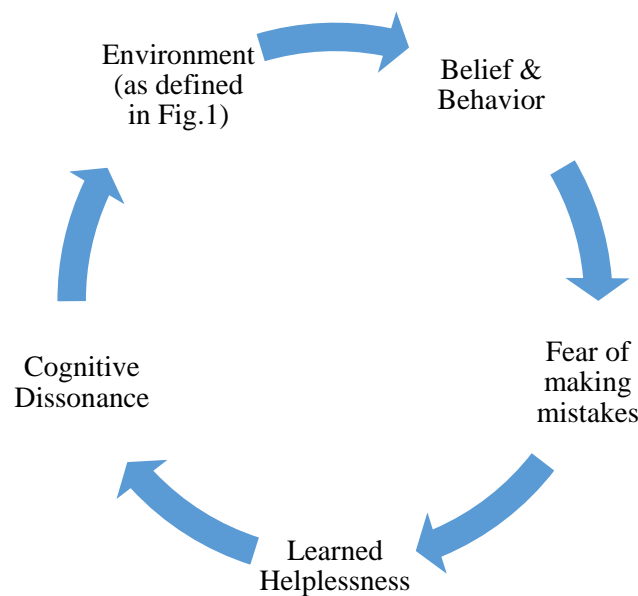


Fig. 2 - Diagram proposed by the author to explain the mechanism by which the environment affects academic performance, as a way to create change

Educational Methodology

The educational methodology proposed by the Academy includes four stages (see Fig. 3)

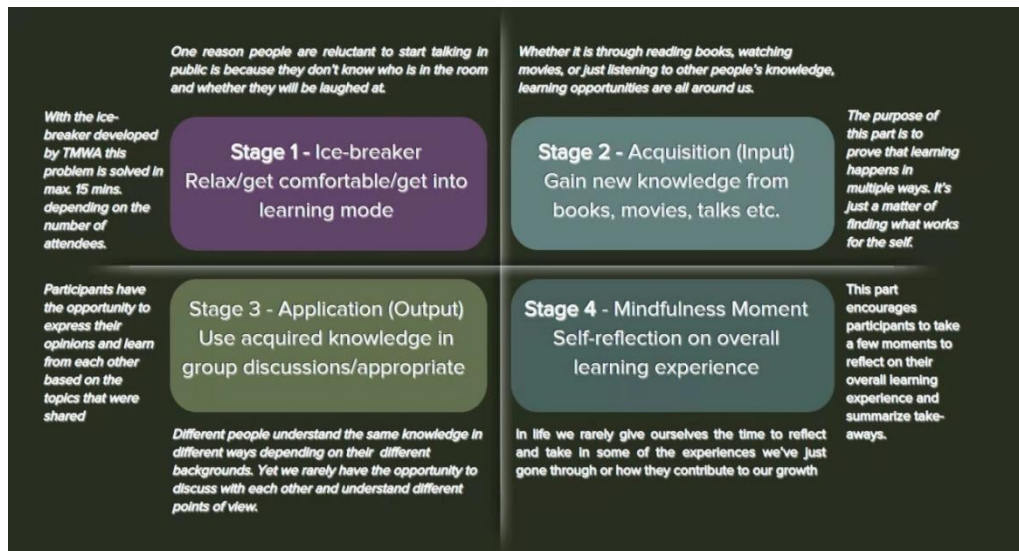


Fig. 3 - Educational framework developed by “Tianmei’s World” Academy Source: <https://www.tianmeisworldacademy.com/events-1>

Stage 1- Icebreaker, the importance of eliminating the fear of making mistakes in a learning environment

Based on the assumption that participants in a learning experience will generally not be proactive and engage in conversations with people they do not know in a social setting due to the diffusion of responsibility, but also taking into account fears of being judged, the first stage of any learning experience designed by the Academy is the icebreaker. This stage aims to eliminate the fear of making mistakes, and make the participants feel they are in a safe environment. The activity is a short, but a very effective tool in helping the participants to relax, and feel safe to make mistakes and learn from them in the new environment they find themselves in. Before the actual learning experience starts, the participants are divided in small groups of 4 to 5 people and asked to share 3 words, including their name, and either star sign and hobby, or places they want to visit, or jobs. During the icebreaker, the most important part of the activity does not consist in the actual information required from the participants, but in the outcome. The condition for this activity to be effective, however, is repetition. Each person will have to repeat all the information he or she has heard beforehand from the other participants, and adding their own. The first participant in every group will have to repeat all the information of all the group members. From the point of view of neuroscience, this activity will help the participants to remember all the names of their immediate group. By getting to know some personal details of their group members like star sign, favorite color etc., they will also feel closer to each other and subconsciously understand that, although they are different people who may or may have not known each other before, they are more similar than they supposed. This contributes to the creation of feelings of safety.

One interesting thing that happens during the icebreaker is that people start changing their perception about their own abilities. The first spontaneous reaction that was observed in many participants when they hear what they have to do during the icebreaker is the verbalization of their inability to remember new information: “I don’t have a good memory”; “I am not good at remembering names” etc. However, through the repetition and the help of others group members in the end they are able to repeat

all the information. This does not only help them remember names and change their self-perception of being someone who is not good at remembering things, but it also makes them feel that, although they have made a few mistakes during the exercise, nobody judged them. Consequently, in just ten minutes that are needed for the activity, the participants would have remembered the information that their group members have shared. Besides, they would have started changing their self-perception about being someone who cannot do something to someone who can, they would have learned that they are in a safe environment where mistakes are allowed as a part of learning and not judged, but also feel closer to the other group members by finding similarities in likes or preferences.

It may be argued that this works best for people who are not generally very confident, or whose self-perception is generally negative, and not so much for participants that are more confident. Even if this activity might not bring any additional positive change for those who exhibit a positive self-perception, the exercise is believed to be equally valuable due to the immediate connections that it creates, as well as to the fact that it solves the diffusion of responsibility issue of not knowing who should start interacting.

Stage 2 - Knowledge Acquisition (Input)

An important part of a learning experience is knowledge acquisition that can take the shape of a book sharing, a lecture, a movie screening or any other type of input. Input here is understood as the information that is consumed through either listening and/or watching. With the amount of information available by the development of the internet, the author considers that what learners are missing is not the information itself, but the tools and awareness for disseminating the information that is most suitable for themselves, as well as the opportunities to engage with peers in discussions that are more meaningful. In order to promote the development of critical thinking skills, and to create more opportunities for learners so that they could express their ideas and appropriate the knowledge presented, the input stage is not designed to be very long. Depending on the overall outcome desired from the learning experience, the input stage will not be longer than one hour, unless the input is a screening and the movie duration is longer than 60 minutes. The most important part of the learning experience happens in Stage 3, also called output, when participants get to express their thoughts on the information received during the input stage (see Fig. 4).

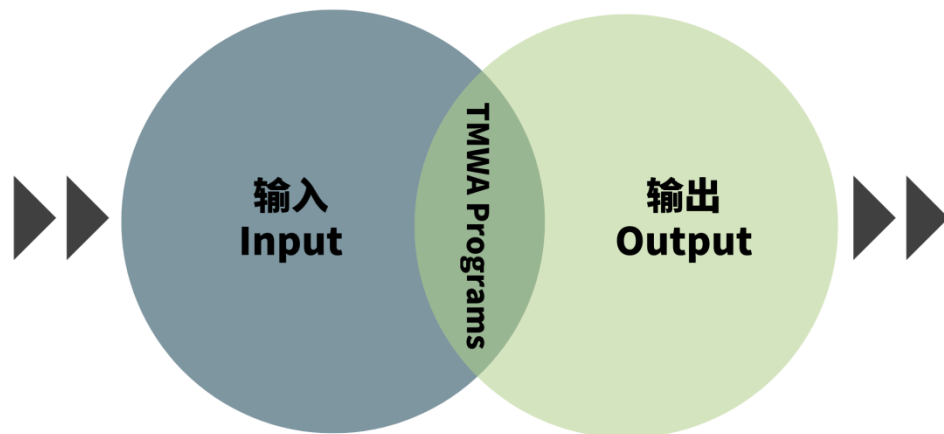


Fig. 4 - Model used by “Tianmei’s World” Academy to design learning experiences

Stage 3 - Knowledge Application (Output)

In the third stage, participants are asked to go back into the same group in which they did the icebreaker activity and to answer a set of questions previously prepared by the facilitator, based on the content introduced in the input stage. Participants are then advised to answer each question in turns so as not to disrupt the flow of thoughts. Depending on the time available, the questions will be between 6 to 10 with half of them related to content understanding and the other half related to any similar personal experiences. There were several reasons considered for this distribution:

1. By being able to hear different answers to the same question, participants get to understand that different people from different professional backgrounds have different opinions and understandings of the same content, but different is not equal to wrong;
2. By reflecting on the questions, participants get to express their opinions in a safe environment, thus further building their self-confidence and practicing language skills if a second language is involved in the learning experience;
3. By having to answer in turns to the same question, every participant will get to feel included in the conversation without running the risk that the most confident participants monopolize the conversation and that the most shy ones will not get to express their thoughts, remaining in a listener mode;
4. Even if participants don’t manage to answer all the questions previously prepared by the facilitator, the fact that they were able to answer together a part of them is enough to create feelings of inclusiveness;
5. By allowing participants to express any personal experiences that they might have had in relationship with the knowledge introduced during the input stage, they appropriate the knowledge presented. This aspect is particularly important if any behavioral changes are expected from such learning experience, e.g. adopting more pro-environmental behaviors, exercising more etc.;
6. Such group discussions help create self-esteem, by helping participants to understand that the opinions and experience they share can be useful for other people’s growth too;

7. It helps participants to understand that even if they come from different backgrounds, there are many other people out there who are facing similar issues, and thus get to feel more connected, extremely useful in dealing with depression issues, although more research is needed in this direction. It is not discussed in this paper, but this is the principle that AA meetings and other support groups function on;
8. By questioning each other's ideas in relation to the knowledge received during the input stage, participants' critical thinking and communication skills are enhanced, thus further contributing to the build-up of their self-confidence;
9. The learner behavior is created, thus allowing those participants who didn't consider themselves very good at learning or very "talkative" at the beginning to change their self-perception into someone who can learn, contribute and be "talkative";
10. By answering the same set of questions, participants get to a common ground and working language even if they come from different professional backgrounds. This promotes mutual understanding.

Stage 4- Mindfulness Moment: The importance of self-reflection on the overall learning experience

Before every learning experience is finished, 10 minutes will be allocated for the self-reflection, also called the Mindfulness Moment. In these 10 minutes, people are encouraged to take 1 to 2 minutes to reflect on their overall experience and think about their main take-away from the learning experience. To allow the reflection to be more effective, participants will be given postcards to write on. After writing their thoughts, participants are invited to share their reflections in the same discussion group or openly to all the participants depending on the total number of attendees. By doing so, participants will realize that although everyone in their group attended the same learning experience and heard the same information their understanding of it is different. Their take-away from the learning experience is different, but not wrong. At the same time, by allowing participants to have such a reflection time, they are able to repeat and consolidate the knowledge they have gained during the learning experience, which is what will remain in their long-term memory. The participants are encouraged to take the postcards home and these will act as a reminder of the overall experience. At the same time, by collecting several postcards, participants will be able to quantify their learning progress and reflect on their growth at regular intervals of time. The postcards will function as environmental cues for reminding the participants of the behavioral change even outside the setting of the learning experience, with the condition that they are exhibited in a visible spot. For this reason, participants are usually advised to create a learning board in their homes on which to add the postcards.

Outcomes observed during research

The most striking outcome of the application of this methodology was to hear participants during Stage 4 sharing the experience of how they changed their self-perception and realized that they are someone who can talk and share ideas, even if they thought otherwise before attending the learning experience. Actually, it was such a kind of feedback that triggered the author's additional research within the respective literature, trying to understand what had happened.

In the learning experiences in which the methodology has been applied, the retention of participants in a space is on average higher with at least 50%, and longer with an average of 1 hour for those who decide to stay than any other events or lectures. The assumption here is that participants feel so proud of their achievements that they want to stay longer and communicate more with other participants.

Another influencing element for the decision to stay longer might be the choice of venues for creating the learning environments, which are usually coffee shops or co-working spaces, and the fact that food and refreshments are always made available. The above numbers are solely based on the author's observations on-site. Additional research needs to be performed in order to identify exactly the elements that play a role (e.g. who are those who stay, why some leave immediately after the learning experience has finished and others decide to stay, how is that correlated to self-perceptions, what role does food play as an environmental element in the overall learning outcome etc.). However, these results, along with the existing empiric evidence, as well as the feedback received from participants are evidence that the methodology works and can be replicated in different settings, for different intended learning outcomes.

Example of how the methodology is applied on a specific type of learning experience

“Not your typical book club” - a study case

This specific type of learning experience, apart from all the behavioral outcomes mentioned previously, also aims to be useful for non-native English participants for acquiring skills of reading original English books in order to help them enrich their vocabularies in a more engaging way rather than just by memorizing words. The learning tool is based on guessing the meaning of unknown words by employing questioning and critical thinking skills. The tool is embedded in the educational methodology as input.

Such learning experience can usually accommodate up to 20 participants without compromising the overall learning outcome of each individual, and lasts for 2 hours.

The physical environment of the learning experience

In order for the learning to be effective, its physical environment should allow for cluster type of furniture arrangement with soft and comfortable chairs. Given that it is a reading activity, there is a great emphasis on the presence of suitable natural light or artificial light, also needed to keep participants alert.

The spaces chosen for a reading activity should be semi-closed or completely separate from corridors and movement, so that the attention of the participants is not distracted throughout the duration of the learning experience.

The types of spaces usually chosen to create this type of alternative learning environments are coffee shops and co-working spaces. Coffee shops are normally furnished with very comfortable seating and provide a cozy space, suitable for both learning and working. Before the learning experience starts, pens and refreshments will be made available on the tables for participants' easy reach (see Pictures 1, 2 & 3).



Picture 1 - Learning experience unfolded in coffee shop environment



Picture 2 - Group discussion in Stage 3 unfolded in coffee shop environment



Picture 3 - Group discussion in Stage 3 in coffee shop environment

The flow of the learning experience

In the first 10 minutes of the learning experience, the participants are welcomed by the facilitator in both English and Chinese and are invited to split in groups of 4 to 5 people. The reason for bilingual facilitation is to move participants' focus from the language itself to the purpose of using the language, i.e. knowledge acquisition. This decision was made on basis of the author's findings in relation to language learning while learning Chinese language herself, described in the in previous sections of this paper. Once divided in groups, participants start the icebreaker activity. During these sessions, participants usually go from a state of "I am not good at remembering names" to laughter and overall relaxation. The facilitator usually reminds them when they have one more minute left from the icebreaker. When time is up, the facilitator asks bilingually who would like to volunteer for repeating all the details from their team members. As the number of participants in this type of learning experience is not more than 20, it is possible to allow a person from each group to repeat, thus allowing other participants to hear the information and get to know other participants outside their small group too. The volunteers are usually rewarded with symbolic gifts for their courage of standing up and trying to repeat the information regardless of their performance. The gift is usually made of either candies or bookmarks. The important part is not the gift itself, but its meaning, as it further encourages participants to be brave and express themselves in public even if they have made mistakes. It also sets an example for those who did not volunteer to answer.

After the icebreaker session is finished, the facilitator will introduce the beginning of the second stage, defined in the methodology as input, in which the content of the book will be shared briefly. The facilitator will then give handouts to each participant with the book content to be read and will instruct them to use the pens available on tables to underline the unknown words that will be explained after the reading part is finished. The facilitator will then start reading two or three sentences from the text previously prepared. Each participant takes turns to read aloud two or three sentences from the text until all the text on the handouts is finished reading. This part allows the facilitator to help all participants correct their pronunciation in English when and where needed. Once the reading part is finished, the facilitator first explains the steps for the guessing method (see Annex for full description) and then invites participants to share words that they do not know so that they can be guided through the guessing process. The reading part usually takes up 20 minutes and the guessing time takes another 30 minutes including the explanation of the unknown words. Since the purpose of the learning experience is to familiarize the participants with the guessing method and encourage them to read more original English books in daily life as an alternative to just memorizing English words, beyond just a "classroom" setting, there is not so much emphasis on guessing/explaining all the unknown words. The rest of the time is dedicated to group discussions based on the read text. Usually the facilitator will prepare between 6 to 10 questions, with half of them focused on text understanding and half of them focused on personal experiences in relation to the read text that the participants would have to answer in the same groups as for the icebreaker. By answering the questions in groups, the participants can support each other and practice peer learning, while deepening their understanding of the read text. By answering the questions related to their personal experience, participants get to practice further their language and critical thinking skills, while understanding that different people have different opinions and experiences, but that does not make them either right or wrong.

Ten minutes before the learning experience should finish, participants are reminded to finish their discussions and are handed the postcards on which to write their reflections. They are advised that they are the only ones to see the content, so that they do not feel discouraged to write and that they will be able to take the postcards back home with them as a reminder of the overall experience. After they have had 2 minutes to reflect by themselves on the overall learning experience, each participant will have to share aloud their thoughts. Through this step, participants have the opportunity to repeat one more time some of the knowledge that they got during the learning experience, thus deepening the learning outcome, but also to strengthen the idea that different people will experience the same content differently depending on their background, and that this is not either right or wrong. It is just different.

Why is this piece of research important?

- By understanding the underlying elements that create a nurturing learning environment, and by replacing any one of them, the learning experience feels completely different and novel on behalf of the learner, yet the methodology stays the same regardless of the content. This gives participants enough flexibility and control to explore by themselves the learning environments and methods that are most suitable for themselves without adding extra workload on the facilitator;
- The flexibility of the methodology allows its application in any contexts and promotes a holistic approach to the development of many skills at the same time, while promoting diversity, inclusiveness and mutual understanding. It could be argued that it is similar to the PBL methodology, but additional research is needed in this regard in order to exactly identify the common points;
- There is evidence that the methodology is useful in dealing both with conflict management (Tait, 2020), as well as with mental health issues (Padget, 2020), but additional research is needed within these areas;
- With the proper guidelines and limited amount of training, it is easy to train new facilitators and make high quality learning opportunities available beyond language and geographical barriers.
- It can integrate language learning in the development of many other soft skills, thus making learning much more effective and promoting systems thinking skills.
- Following research performed by the Academy, the following working model was developed to highlight the reliance of individual performance on the creation of a nurturing environment (see Fig. 5).



Fig. 5 - Working model developed by “Tianmei’s World” Academy to emphasize the influence that the environment has on behavioral outcomes

Feedback received from participants

The feedback of five different participants in different “Not Your Typical Book Club” learning experiences were chosen as an example. Even if more feedback is available, the author’s aim is to highlight the changes experienced by participants during the learning experience, and some of the most representative comments were chosen. In order to help the reader to understand better the feedback that gave by the participants, it must be mentioned that participants often call the learning experience as an “English reading activity” and that Tianmei is the author’s Chinese name. As the author also played the role of the facilitator in the learning experiences, she is mentioned often in the feedback. The author of this paper also did the translation of the feedback from Chinese to English.

Participant 1

第一次参加英文读书会，全程下来感觉非常好！不仅认识了天美老师和众多有趣的伙伴们，还学到了英文阅读的干货，更重要的是在现场大家的交流中了解到很多有趣的事情，看到了很多可能性，每个人都很优秀，为我提供了积极向上的动力。宽敞的空间环境很舒适，天美老师的小礼物很贴心。可是，这么多有趣的灵魂在一起为什么没有一张合照？难不成是下次再聚的节奏？期待天美老师后面的活动！



Picture 4- Original feedback from Participant 1

Translation: “This is the first time I attend the English reading activity. I believe that the whole experience was great! I didn’t only have the chance to meet Tianmei and many interesting friends, but I was also able to obtain a great tool for reading English books. The most important is that during the event all the participants discussed many interesting things and saw many more possibilities. Every person is excellent and provided me the motivation to further improve myself. The physical environment was very comfortable and the small gifts that Teacher Tianmei prepared were very warming. Nevertheless, how come so many interesting people gathered together, but no group picture was taken? Is this a strategy to make us eager to attend the next event? I am looking forward to attending following events.”

Participant 2

善***生 普卡会员



每次的读书会都有新的惊喜。这次的活动场地阿灿花园与主题小说《garden spells》高度契合，如同置身热带雨林中的花园小屋，使人心情舒畅。通过对小说内容的理解和大家对各种问题的深入讨论，我对于不同生活方式的追求有了新的理解。感谢这次相遇，感谢天美的分享和大家的倾心交谈，让一个下午变得短暂又富有意义。



Picture 5- Original feedback from Participant 2

Translation: “Every time I attend the reading activity I experience new surprises. On this occasion, the location for the event was ‘Arles Garden’ Restaurant, whose atmosphere was in total harmony with the content of the book ‘Garden Spells’. Being in such an environment makes people feel extremely comfortable. By reading the content of the novel and discussing with other participants, I succeeded to understand different people’s lifestyles better. I am very grateful for this encounter, as well as for Tianmei’s sharing. It made a very short afternoon become extremely meaningful.”

Participant 3

青岛一个很好的读书会，首先说一下我是个慢热的人，参加这种线下的活动一般都不太说话，但是今天的活动让我一开始就感觉很舒服很健谈，天美是一个很爱交朋友，很喜欢分享自己的思想和经历的人，我们四个人从十点聊到了下午两点多，要知道这个活动最开始限定的时间是到十二点半的。

然后大力表扬咖啡店老板做的的布朗尼！用料扎实的布朗尼上面加上刚做的无糖轻盈奶油，真的超级好吃！！很多人会感觉读书会60的门票太贵了，但是这家咖啡店的点心和环境就已经值回来了，更不用说还有读书会带来的新的视野和不同思想价值观的交流以及会认识有趣朋友的机会，参加完这次的读书会，以后每一期的读书会都想参加 🥰



Picture 6- Original feedback from Participant 3

Translation: “Qingdao [a Chinese city] has a great reading activity. First, I need to say that I am a slow-moving person and every time I attend such offline events, I don’t talk too much. However, today’s atmosphere made me feel very comfortable to talk. Tianmei is a person who loves making friends and likes sharing her thoughts and experience. All four of us talked from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm although this event was supposed to finish at 12:30 pm. [...] I am looking forward to attending the next event.”

Participant 4

不一样的读书会，我很高兴参加天美组织的不一样的读书会。英文原版阅读，完全采用轻松的模式，边吃边聊，完全沉浸在语言的环境当中，并且采用双语学习，感觉特别棒，我很喜欢，英文在我的理念中学习英语不需要有意识的记单词，不需要有意识的背一下东西，而是读更多的原版书籍，学更多的知识。天美让我们意识到学习语言不仅仅是为学而学，而是让我们把语言作为一种工具，通过学习人文，地理，数学，科技等等，读更多的英文原版书，能够连接我们的生活，。学习他们的西式思维方式，开拓我们的眼界和视野的。这样不用记单词，无形中学会地道表达。非常感谢认识天美。
I am very glad to join the different reading club organized by TianMei. Reading original English, fully using the light pattern, chatting with eating, totally immersed in the environment of language, and use the

Picture 7- Original feedback from Participant 4

Translation: "I am very happy about having attended 'Not Your Typical Book Club'. I loved reading an original English book in a completely relaxing way, both eating and reading at the same time, being completely immersed in a language-learning environment. [...] My idea of learning English is not to intentionally memorize English words, but to read more and English books in original, to acquire more and more knowledge. Tianmei made us understand that language shouldn't be learned for the sake of learning a language, but in order to make it a tool to learn other disciplines. By reading more and English books in original, one can link the knowledge to one's own life. Through this event, I was able to understand better the Western ways of thinking and to broaden my horizon. This way, I don't need to memorize English words, but I can remember them through conversation. I am very grateful for having met Tianmei."

Participant 5

天美的世界~我的能量加油站🔋，学习无处不在😊相逢不必太早，只要刚刚好[爱心]
我是从2017年开始参加的天美的世界，最主要是对心理学感兴趣，同时环境氛围很轻松，很喜欢那种大家畅所欲言的感觉，英语当然也能得到锻炼提高，每一次去都能有不同的收获，感觉重新认识审视自己一次重新上路，说来也巧每次参加完后都能给我迷茫的生活带来一点触动发生一些大的改变。真的可以说，天美的世界~我的能量加油站🔋感恩遇见🌸🌸



Picture 8 - Original feedback from Participant 5

Translation: “*Tianmei’s World’ is my energy station. Learning happens everywhere. [...] I came across this organization in 2017. I was mainly interested in psychology, but at the same time I found the environment to be very relaxing. I love sharing ideas with everyone. Of course, English skills can also be improved. Every time I attend an event, I have a different take-away. It feels like I see myself with new eyes every time I attend an event. It is also a great coincidence that every time I attended an event it has helped me understand how I could solve some big problems I was facing in my life that would otherwise make me feel very confused. I can honestly say that ‘Tianmei’s World’ is indeed my powerbank.*”

Next steps

Evidence from multiple sectors was taken into consideration in this paper in order to show that across sectors similar issues are faced. It is also an invitation to the reader to adopt a systemic approach to be able to address problems in education and to find more innovative solutions.

In order to be able to further develop the work of the Academy and to create more positive impact, as well as to keep the advantage of innovation, the Academy is now positioned as a hybrid organization, a mix between an academic institution and a social enterprise. The aim is to be able to build bridges between the academic environments across various disciplines, and to make more applied research. In other words, the Academy functions as a normal business, but a lot of its work is grounded directly in academic research, providing a tailored approach. Its revenue model focuses on consulting services for companies in an attempt to make learning experiences free of charge for participants and make education accessible for all.

Partnerships with different universities are sought in order to allow students to do their research in a more applied setting, but also to further ground the work of the Academy in academic evidence, while being able to turn the knowledge into applicable projects outside an academic environment, and ultimately to create more value for all the stakeholders involved.

At the same time, the Academy is currently exploring TechEd technologies in order to leverage the power of technology to expand beyond borders and to be able to make high quality educational opportunities widely available while continuing to perform research.

Limitations of this research

Due to the lack of professional equipment, most of the research was based on the author's observations. It may then be argued that the research is not valid according to academic requirements. However, by using the "trial and error" methodology specific to entrepreneurship, also called "prototyping" to test the outcome of the assumptions in non-academic environments, it can be asserted that the methodology works, or at least it gives a cue that further research in this direction is worth pursuing. At the same time, the author's intent is to perform applied research. As such, criticism that the research did not follow academic rigor would not hold in front of the evidence that such methodology works and has palpable results with happy learners, even if additional research will be needed to further explore the different variables at stake.

Future directions of research

During the author's research, the following questions have come up:

With increasing access to information, what will be teachers'/educators' roles in the future?

How can this methodology be applied into an institutional setting for different age groups?

How can the methodology that the Academy developed be used to mediate conflict? What impact does it have in alleviating mental health issues?

How are the other environmental elements influencing the overall learning experience?

Can the methodology be applied within different Cultures with the same successful outcomes?

The above and others that might arise in the process are questions that the Academy will try to answer as it further develops.

Applications for the methodology to other areas

- Create a safe space for conflict mediation;
- Usefulness as a tool in cross-cultural dialog to promote mutual understanding;
- Drive learning and innovation across different organizations by promoting a more holistic approach;
- Help learners reverse "learned helplessness" across a varied range of fields.

Benefits of a decentralized education model

“Tianmei’s World” Academy Model's value

1. It creates a system to satisfy multiple needs, much more efficient;
2. The flexibility of the model allows for rapid expansion;
3. It brings educational opportunities closer to each individual, overcomes geographical barriers, allows each individual to explore the learning environments most suitable for them;
4. It leverages knowledge already available online, but focuses on building offline communities, allowing participants to connect in a more meaningful way, increasing levels of well-being;
5. On the long term, it will be able to provide equal educational opportunities for everyone regardless of their social-economical background;
6. It challenges and changes “one-size-fits-all” traditional educational system by providing alternative options;
7. It takes education outside the traditional four walls and makes it widely available;
8. It contributes to the achievement of some of the Sustainability Goals (e.g. Goal 4 - Quality Education; Goal 10 - Reducing Inequality).

Annex: Guessing Method

- 1、 Look at the root of the word (e.g. computational, root: computer; computational = something computer related)
- 2、 Look at the context (sentence) in which the word appears. Try to see which words you know and which you do not and try to connect them in a logical sequence, in order to guess the meaning of the word(s) you do not know.
- 3、 If looking at the sentence is not enough, read the whole paragraph and try to understand what the word means.
- 4、 If none of the above are possible (which sometimes can happen), then try to look into an English-English dictionary for a definition (www.dictionary.com).
- 5、 If none of the above methods work, then you can look the word up in an English-Chinese dictionary. The condition is to check more uses of the word and learn it in a context.

Remarks: Depending on each learners’ language level, it is recommended to use method gradually, starting from novels that have more dialogue and leave more room for imagination, and later on move to literature that is more descriptive.

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The Concept of Multiculturalism in Times of Crisis

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Abstract

Today's reality has been rapidly changing. The time has confronted the world with an unprecedented health crisis that has taken so many lives, inflicted so much pain and changed people's normality. What was considered as a routine daily life yesterday has become abnormal today. Different segments of the society have been faced with negative implications since the beginning of the crisis, including the health sector, economy, culture, education, among some of them. Recent developments have caused adverse multiplicative effects to the concept of multiculturalism as well. All of a sudden, the question of how to respond to the challenges associated with diversity based on ethnic, cultural and religious differences in times of crisis has appeared in the spotlight.

Coronavirus pandemic has once again displayed the global interconnection level, but at the same time forced us to become more alienated, thus limiting the social interactions between people from different backgrounds. Adverse reactions to the recent developments across the world have become daily music to our ears. This situation has brought many unknowns, raised many questions, created a lot of uncertainty. This insecurity about people's health and future raises the questions about our ability, as a global community, to efficiently tackle the negative social outcomes of this crisis, including the effects on the multiculturalism. With the rise of the pandemic, many countries see rise of equally infectious nationalism and xenophobia as well. Some political leaders could not restrain themselves in such time to sparkle the flame of isolationism, distorting the rules of good, responsible governance by respecting the multiculturalism as a value for which many generations fought.

Will society continue to value the idea of multiculturalism as a precondition for integration? Or is it that are we heading to disintegration by becoming more insular? What lessons will we learn from this? The ongoing pandemic is an opportunity for ourselves to brainstorm, to make proper adjustments and, if we are wise enough, to proceed nurturing and promoting the values of diversity, equity and multicultural understanding in a much-changed reality.

Keywords: *Multiculturalism, pandemic, reality*

1. Introduction

Today's reality has been rapidly changing. The time has confronted the world with an unprecedented health crisis that has taken so many lives, inflicted so much pain and changed people's normality. SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) coronavirus pandemic has highlighted the global interconnection level, but at the same time forced us to become more alienated, thus limiting the social interactions between people from different backgrounds.

Adverse reactions to the recent developments across the world have become daily music to our ears. This situation has brought many unknowns, raised many questions and generated a lot of uncertainty. The overall insecurity about people's health and well-being raises the question about our ability, as a global community, to efficiently tackle the negative social outcomes of this crisis, including the effects on the concept of multiculturalism as a "moral movement" that is not only concerned with decreasing oppression but seeks to "enhance the dignity, rights, and recognized worth of marginalized groups" (Fowers & Richardson, 1996). Multiculturalism not only deals with the inclusion of citizens with different cultural backgrounds in the society, eliminating the power of domination of one group over the other, but also aims at termination or at least enervation of the exclusion mechanism. (Pajaziti, Sela & Trajkoska, 2016)

This paper aims to investigate the impact of the ongoing health crisis on the concept of multiculturalism by using targeted research methods for the purpose of this paper, as it appears further.

2. Impact of the pandemic crisis on the concept of multiculturalism

Pandemic diseases are part of the human history. The newly discovered COVID-19 coronavirus occupied the world's attention since late 2019. From the earliest reported cases in early December 2019 in Wuhan, China, the battle with the vicious enemy is still ongoing and seems it will not end near soon. Many people have already lost their lives to COVID-19; many people have lost their loved ones, relatives, friends, colleagues.



Scientific community is in race with the time to understand better the real source of the outbreak and to find an effective remedy for solution of this global health crisis, which has generated negative effects in all segments of the society. What was considered as a routine daily life yesterday has become abnormal today. Different segments of the society have been faced with negative implications since the beginning of the crisis, including the health sector, economy, culture, education, among some of them. Recent developments have caused

adverse multiplicative effects to the concept of multiculturalism as well. All of a sudden, the question of how to respond to the challenges associated with diversity based on ethnic, cultural and religious differences in times of crisis has appeared in the spotlight. With the rise of the pandemic,



many countries have faced rise of equally infectious nationalism and xenophobia as well. Some political leaders could not restrain themselves in such time to sparkle the flame of isolationism, distorting the rules of good, responsible governance by respecting the multiculturalism as a societal trait, representing not only cultural, but also ethnic and religious pluralism within the society as well.

3. Applied methodology

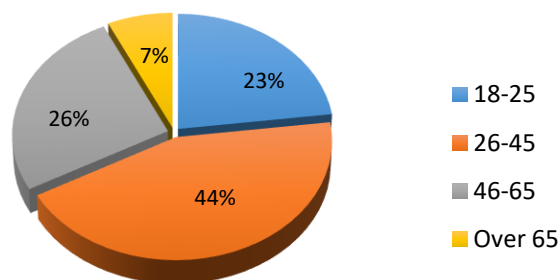
This research is a combination of methods such as historical analysis, content and data analysis. The empirical part is based on a survey consisting of 20 questions, conducted in December 2020 with 122 respondents included, divided by different indicators such as age, gender, level of education, ethnic, cultural, religious background etc. The objective of the survey was to investigate and measure the impact of the crisis on the concept of multiculturalism in the local community and countrywide by using qualitative and quantitative questions.

4. Field research results

Despite the limitation of the research paper length, most of the segments included in the questionnaire have been elaborated and graphically illustrated in this part.

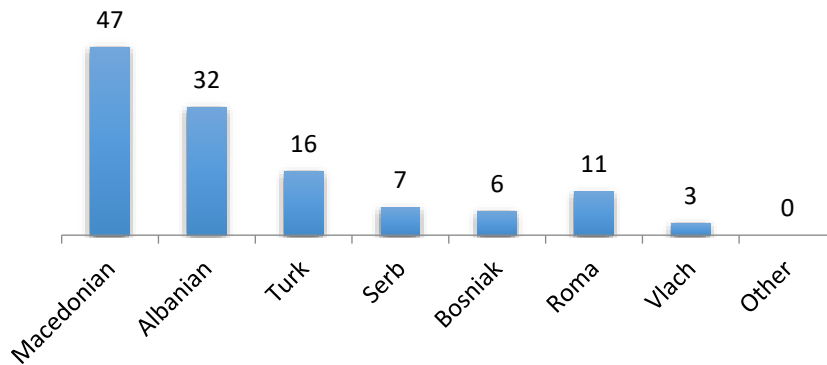
The analysis begins with a categorization of the survey by respondents' age, detecting the differences in perception among generations. According to this indicator, more than 2/3 or 67% of the respondents belong to the age group between 18-45 years, seen as the most progressive and productive part of the population (see Chart 1).

Chart 1. Respondents by age



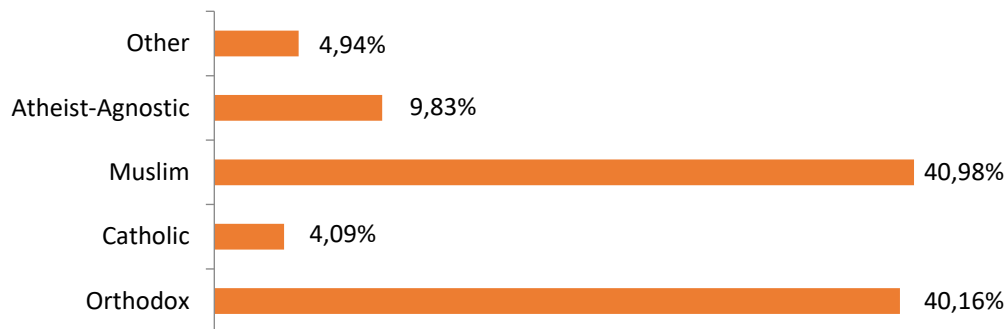
In order to reflect the multiethnic diversity and demographic reality of our society, respondents from all ethnic groups were part of the survey. Based on the ethnic background, 38.52% of the respondents were ethnic Macedonians, 26.23% Albanians, 13.11% Turks, 5.74 Serbs, 4.92% Bosniaks, 9.02% Roma and 2.46% Vlachs (see Chart 2).

Chart 2. Respondents by ethnicity



According to the religious affiliation indicator, 44.25% of the respondents declared as Christians (Orthodox and Catholics combined); 40.98% as Muslims; 9.83% as Atheists-Agnostics and nearly 5% of the respondents with other religious affiliation than previously stated (see Chart 3).

Chart 3. Religious affiliation



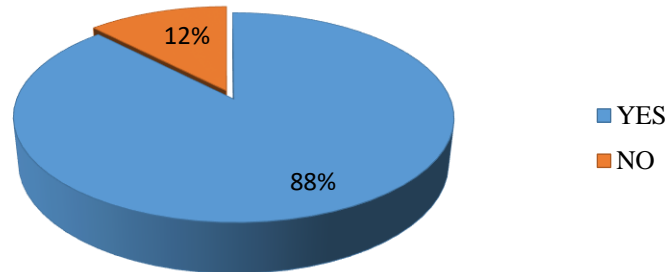
An important indicator of every survey is the respondents' level of education. Nearly half of the respondents or 48.36% had university education completed; 2.46% with postgraduate/master studies completed; more than 1/3 or 34.43% with secondary education; 7.37% with primary education and 7.38% without any educational degree.

Identical responses were given on separated, but practically related questions regarding the respondent's **assessment of the communication between people from different cultures** in the municipality/area where the respondent lives in and general assessment of the intercultural interaction on a national level. The 14.75% of the respondents' assessment was "very good"; 38.52% "good"; 25.41% "unsatisfactory"; 13.93% "bad" and 7.39% "very bad". Respondents' assessment led to a conclusion that majority of them or 53.57% have good or very good assessment of the intercultural communication in the local community and on a national level, whilst 46.43%, which is a significant percentage, have different perception categorized from "unsatisfactory" to "very bad".

The majority of the respondents (87.7%) thought that **learning the language/culture of other ethnic community** is an advantage in many segments of life: in verbal communication, language/cultural interaction, labor market competitiveness... Respondents with higher educational level have developed greater awareness about the

importance of learning other languages and cultures, multilingualism, intercultural understanding etc. (see Chart 4).

Chart 4. Do you think that learning the language/culture of other ethnic community is an asset?

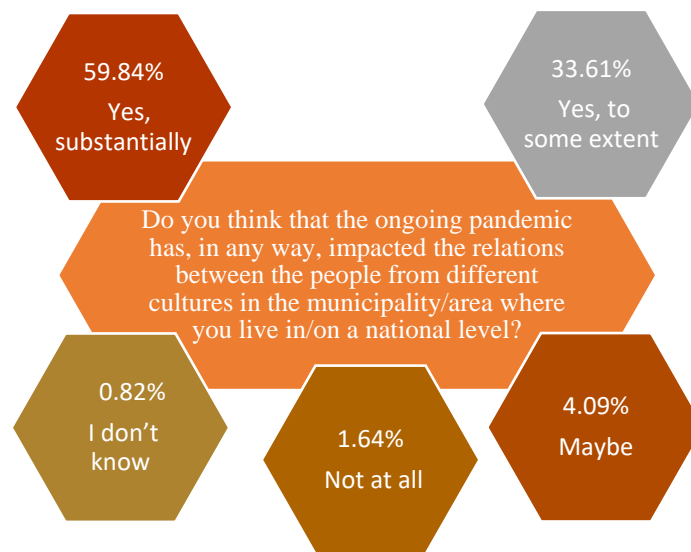


The 82.78% of the respondents' preference is a multicultural environment, as opposed to 17.22% of the respondents who prefer monocultural environment instead.

Based on the indicator regarding **the meaning of the term "multiculturalism"**, 22.13% of the respondents chose *Cultural pluralism* as an option; 31.97% - *A mixture of people from diverse ethnic and cultural background*; 18.03% - *Different cultures in one place*; 11.48% - *Coexistence of different cultures in harmony*; 10.66% - *Respect and acceptance of other cultures*. The 5.73% were not familiar with the term.

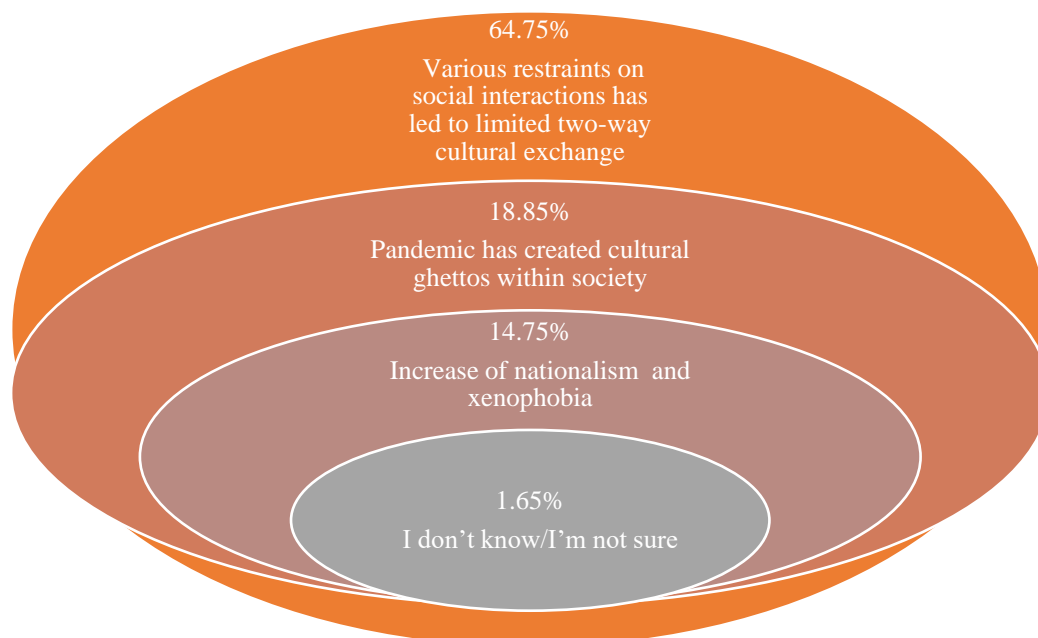
Significant data closely related to the paper's main research focus can be extracted out of the respondents' answers to the closely related questions on **whether they think that the ongoing pandemic has, in some way, affected the relations between the people from different cultures** in the local community and on a national level. The 93.45% of the respondents agree that the pandemic, in some way, affected the relations between the people from different cultural background, substantially or to some extent, both in the local community and countrywide (see Chart 5).

Chart 5



Nearly 2/3 of the respondents or 64.75% stated that the pandemic negatively affected the multiculturalism countrywide by imposing various limitations on the freedom of movement, preventing or limiting cross-cultural interactions; 18.85% thought that the pandemic has created cultural ghettos within society; 14.75% that the pandemic has led to increase of nationalism and xenophobia; and the remaining 1.65% belong in the category - Don't know/I'm not sure (see Chart 6).

Chart 6



It is very indicating that respondents tend to maintain frequent communication with people from other ethnicity and/or cultural background in their local communities in non-crisis. On the question **whether they communicate, in normal circumstances, with people from different ethnicity/cultural background** in their local communities, 76.23% of the respondents' answers support this claim. 22.13% have occasional, but are still open and practice cross-cultural communication, and only less than 2% of the respondents do not practice it at all (see Table 1).

Table 1.
In normal circumstances, do you communicate with people from other ethnicity/cultural background in your local community?

Yes I do, frequently	76.23%
Sometimes	22.13%
No, I only communicate with people from my ethnicity/cultural background	1.64%

The 14.75% of the respondents thought that the multicultural relations have been improved since the beginning of the pandemic; 59% stated that they have not been changed and nearly 20% saw tendency of worsening (see Table 2).

Table 2.
How do you evaluate the development of the multicultural relations in the Republic of North Macedonia since the beginning of the pandemic?

Improved	14.75%
Unchanged	59.02%
Worsened	19.67%
I don't know/I'm not sure	6.56%

During serious health crisis with a global impact, the care for multiculturalism is overshadowed by the primary care for public health and protection of human lives. This thesis is supported by nearly 83% of the respondents who stated that **nobody cares about multiculturalism during pandemic and nothing has been done by policy makers** toward protection and promotion of the multiculturalism in the country in the time of pandemic (see Table 3).

Table 3.

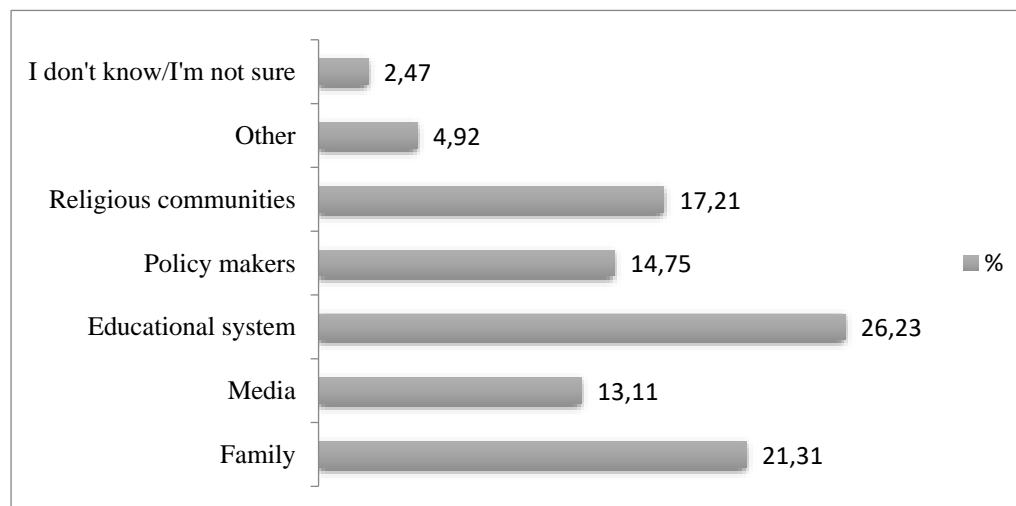
Despite the multiethnic and multicultural character of the Republic of North Macedonia, do you think that, even in a time of pandemic, policy makers have undertaken measures toward real protection and promotion of the multiculturalism in the country?

Yes, they have done a lot despite pandemic	2.46%
Something has been done, but insufficiently	9.02%
Nothing has been done	27.87%
Nobody cares about multiculturalism during pandemic	54.92%
I don't know/I'm not sure	5.73%

Respondents were divided on **who is the most influential subject in promotion of the multiculturalism**. Educational system and family values together combined nearly reach 1/2 or 47.54% out of the listed options as the most influential subjects. Less than 1/2 or 45.07% is a combination of other three factors combined together: religious communities, policy makers and media (see Chart 7).

Chart 7

In your opinion, which of the subject listed below is the most influential regarding the promotion of multiculturalism in the society?



For the purpose of development of the multiculturalism in the society, other factors such as family, media, educational system, policy makers and religious communities are of great importance. The most negative influencers on multiculturalism are politicians (58.2%) and the media (54.1%). On the other hand, the most constructive factor shaping the course and the development of the multiculturalism in the society is the family (64.75%), which shows that respondents believe that family members'

authority and their personal traits can positively impact and facilitate shaping one's character by teaching the importance of creating a culture and spirit of tolerance towards others, cross-cultural understanding, respect and coexistence. Educational system (58.2%) and religious communities (28.69%) also positively affect multiculturalism as well (see Table 4).

Table 4.
In your opinion, how much do the subjects listed below influence the development of the multiculturalism in the society?

	Positively	Negatively	Doesn't influence
Family	64.75%	27.87%	7.38%
Media	26.23%	54.10%	19.67%
Educational system	58.20%	36.07%	5.73%
Policy makers (on a national/municipal level)	18.85%	58.20%	22.95%
Religious communities	40.16%	28.69%	31.15%

5. Conclusions

The concept of multiculturalism associated with cultural diversity, derived from national, ethnic and religious differences, in times of crisis certainly deserves a closer scientific observation from a standpoint of analyzing the trends and challenges in the midst of today's health crisis. Diverse ethnic, cultural and religious composition is what makes Republic of North Macedonia a true multicultural society. Will society continue to nurture the multiculturalism as an integration concept where all ethnic groups freely exercise their distinctive identity or are we heading to disintegration by becoming more insular? What lessons can we learn from this crisis?

Based on this research, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- There is still space for improvement of cross-cultural relations and increased inter-ethnic interaction.
- Nearly 88% of the respondents feel no repulsion when it comes to learning the language or the culture of their fellow citizens from other ethnic community, thus displaying respondents' built-in sense on the advantage of learning something new.
- There is almost unanimity in the perception that the pandemic has affected the cross-cultural relations, to a greater or lesser extent.

- Nearly 2/3 of the respondents believe in the negative impact of the pandemic on the multiculturalism countrywide due to the limitations on the freedom of movement, preventing or limiting cross-cultural interactions.
- Respondents' preference is predominantly a multicultural environment, instead of monocultural.
- Majority of the respondents think that there is neither positive nor a negative change in the country's multicultural relations since the beginning of the pandemic.
- The care for multiculturalism in pandemic is predominantly overshadowed by the primary care for public health and protection of human lives.
- The family and the educational system are perceived as the most positive factors in the development and improvement of the multiculturalism, as opposed to the policy makers and the media.

The ability to recognize and celebrate our differences is something that makes our country and local communities more cohesive even in crisis. This pandemic is an opportunity for ourselves to brainstorm, make certain adjustments and to continue nurturing and promoting the values of diversity, equity and multicultural understanding in a much-changed reality as the only way towards coexistence and prosperous future.

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7. Appendix A: Questionnaire

Questionnaire

Name & Surname⁶²

Place & Date of interview

Dear respondent,

This questionnaire's objective is to serve as a tool for the purpose of completing a research paper on the impact of the ongoing health crisis on the concept of multiculturalism in your local community/countrywide.

Your participation is on a voluntary basis.

Any personal data contained herein (if stated) shall be treated in accordance with the relevant national data protection laws.

All gathered data contained herein shall be analyzed and used for research purposes only.

Thank you for your valuable participation!

Please check mark only one of the proposed answers in the table.

1. Gender

Female	
Male	

2. Age

18-25	
26-45	

⁶² Optional

46-65	
Over 65	

3. Ethnicity

Macedonian	
Albanian	
Turk	
Serb	
Bosniak	
Roma	
Vlach	
Other	

4. Religious affiliation

Orthodox	
Catholic	
Muslim	
Atheist-Agnostic	
Other	

5. Level of education

No education	
Primary	
Secondary	
Undergraduate	
Postgraduate/Master	
Doctoral/Postdoctoral	

6. What is the ethnic structure of the municipality/area where you live in?

Multiethnic/Multicultural	
Monoethnic/Monocultural	

7. How do you assess the communication between the people from different cultures in the municipality/area where you live in?

Very good	
Good	
Unsatisfactory	
Bad	
Very bad	

8. How do you assess the communication between the people from different culture on a national level?

Very good	
Good	
Unsatisfactory	
Bad	
Very bad	

9. Do you think that learning the language/culture of other ethnic community is an asset?

Yes	
No	

10. What environment would you choose out of the following options?

Multicultural environment	
Monocultural environment	

11. What is multiculturalism in your opinion?

Cultural pluralism	
A mixture of people from diverse ethnic and cultural background	
Different cultures in one place	
Coexistence of different cultures in harmony	
Respect and acceptance of other cultures	

Not familiar with the term	
----------------------------	--

12. Do you think that the ongoing pandemic has, in any way, impacted the relations between the people from different cultures in the municipality/area where you live in?

Yes, substantially	
Yes, to some extent	
Maybe	
Not at all	
I don't know	

13. Do you think that the ongoing pandemic has, in any way, impacted the relations between the people from different cultures on a national level?

Yes, substantially	
Yes, to some extent	
Maybe	
Not at all	
I don't know/I'm not sure	

14. In your opinion, how has the ongoing pandemic impacted the concept of multiculturalism countrywide?

Various restraints on social interactions has led to limited two-way cultural exchange	
Pandemic has created cultural ghettos within society	

Increase of nationalism and xenophobia	
I don't know/I'm not sure	

15. In normal circumstances, do you communicate with people from other ethnicity/cultural background in your local community?

Yes I do, frequently	
Sometimes	
No, I only communicate with people from my ethnicity/cultural background	

16. Based on your perception and/or personal experience, which of the following ethnic group (other than yours) do you prefer interacting with the most?

Macedonian	
Albanian	
Turkish	
Serbian	
Bosniak	
Roma	
Vlach	
Other	
I have no particular preference	
I don't know/I'm not sure	

17. How do you evaluate the development of the multicultural relations in the Republic of North Macedonia since the beginning of the pandemic?

Improved	
Unchanged	
Worsened	
I don't know/I'm not sure	

18. Despite the multiethnic and multicultural character of the Republic of North Macedonia, do you think that, even in a time of pandemic, policy makers have undertaken measures toward real protection and promotion of the multiculturalism in the country?

Yes, they have done a lot despite pandemic	
Something has been done, but insufficiently	
Nothing has been done	
Nobody cares about multiculturalism during pandemic	
I don't know/I'm not sure	

19. In your opinion, which of the subject listed below is the most influential regarding the promotion of multiculturalism in the society?

Family	
Media	
Educational system	
Policy makers (on a national/municipal level)	
Religious communities	

Other	
I don't know/I'm not sure	

20. In your opinion, how much do the subjects listed below influence the development of the multiculturalism in the society?

	Positively	Negatively	Doesn't influence
Family			
Media			
Educational system			
Policy makers (on a national/municipal level)			
Religious communities			

Investment in Developing Civic Skills as a Key Factor in Raising Future Citizens

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Abstract

Citizens' education includes “for” and “through” ways of learning and is about equipping students with the basic tools for becoming capable citizens of a democratic society. These tools include knowledge and knowing, skills and abilities, values, and affection for something. All of them are needed for the active participation of the young person in the role of a capable and responsible citizen. Of course, to achieve this, the quality of education and the approach that would enable that process, the process towards creating a better society, with more prepared generations and more competent individuals, is of the utmost importance. In addition, besides school, the role of parents as well as of the local community is important. Together, these entities have a direct or indirect impact on the education process and, therefore, should make every effort to invest in the development of civic skills among young people. There is a large number of civic skills that are available, but also crucial in terms of raising young people as future citizens of a democratic society. Specifically in this paper we will pay attention to: the cooperation, managing and resolving conflicts, participation, critical thinking, creative thinking, reflection and patience.

Keywords: *democratic society, education, student participation, skills, development*

1. *Introduction*

Schools, families and the wider community shape the lives of citizens, creating modalities that enhance or reduce their ability to operate in a democratic society and to live up to democratic ideals. Careful and purposeful training of students in acquiring the knowledge and skills needed to function as adult persons in a democracy shapes the democratic society of the future. This is a very complex task, which is quite difficult to implement, and those who will find themselves in the leading roles in order to realize it, will have to face the congestion of change in society.

A number of authors have dealt with and elaborated on these issues, and in particular, the prominent Dr. Karol Sifelt points out that: “through every experience, young children learn to be valuable, valued and respected. They know that their individual needs and demands will be satisfied and that their rights will be protected. At the same time, they learn to expand their concerns and interests and to give up some of their self-centeredness for the good of others and the group. As members of a democratic community, children develop a sense of shared concern, recognizing that their interests partially overlap with the interests of others and that their well-being is inevitably related to the well-being of others.” (Kochoska 2007)

“Our education should encourage young people to see themselves, not only as citizens of their own countries, but also as citizens of Europe and a modern world. It is important to help young people acquire the responsibility and ability to preserve and promote democracy, human rights and freedoms.” (Osler 1995) The whole school system should strive to educate young people on the initiative of democratic living, accepting responsibilities, the challenge of active participation, using knowledge, abilities and skills, as an indispensable part of the entire development process of future citizens of democratic society.

2. *Defining skills and their types*

Skills consist in having the expertise or talent needed to complete an activity, job or task. Human life skills make it easier to carry out daily tasks. We can list many different types of skills that are of great help in all aspects of life, such as in school, work, sports or hobbies. Skills make a person feel secure and independent in life and are essential to his or her success. Gaining skills requires endurance, perseverance and practice, but one thing is clear: every skill can be mastered, learned and can always be improved. This can be achieved by setting realistic expectations and goals, and good organization in the process. (YourDictionary, Examples of Skills n.d.)

2.1 Job Skills

The skills needed in the workplace that are necessary to develop a position and relationship with co-workers can be categorized into different categories, including the following: Leadership and Management Skills, Professionalism Skills, Organizational Skills, Team Building Skills, Analytical Skills. (YourDictionary, Examples of Skills n.d.)

2.2 Life Skills

Everyday life dictates the need for a large number of skills that are necessary for easier functioning. These skills vary from person to person, depending on age. Certain skills are crucial in overcoming some of the common challenges that can arise when a person learns to be independent and confident. Some common life skills include: Cleaning, Driving, First Aid, Basic cooking, Getting ready for work/school on time, Making a household budget, Organizing: closet, cupboard, attic, garage, Parenting, Setting and clearing the table, Studying, Tracking personal finances, Washing and drying clothes, dishes, windows or car, etc. (YourDictionary, Examples of Skills n.d.)

2.3 Personal Life Skills

Many skills are important for personal development to one person. Personal life skills can influence the improvement of one's life, opening and expanding one's views, as well as improvement in different areas of life. As more important can be listed: Cooperation, Friendship, Effort, Caring, Flexibility, Adaptability, Organization Initiative, Integrity, Patience, Problem solving, Responsibility, Stress management, Verbal and nonverbal communication. (YourDictionary, Examples of Skills n.d.)

2.4 Student Skills

During their education, students need to possess a range of skills and improve them in order to achieve greater success. These skills are essential for students as they prepare them for the next level of education and, besides, help them succeed at the current level. Some student skills include Analysing information, Communication, Follow directions, Initiative, Organization, Problem solving, Time management etc. (YourDictionary, Examples of Skills n.d.)

2.5 Sports Skills

Every sport is unique and has a wide range of skills needed to practice it. Depending on the type of sport that is in a particular person's field of interest, there is a specific set of skills needed to master it. (YourDictionary n.d.) If basic movement skills are mastered, basic sports skills will be easier to master. These two kinds of skills, as a combination, represent the foundation of physical literacy and open the door to new sports and physical activities. That way build a better and more confident person and athlete. (Kids 2015) Sporting skills can be mastered by possessing: Coordination, Concentration, Flexibility, Power, Precision, Tactics, Teamwork, Dealing with pressure.

2.6 Civic skills

Civic skills can be described as citizen-related, city or citizenship skills. They include personal communication skills, knowledge of political systems, and the ability to critically reflect on civic and political life (Comber 2003) A person's success and emphasis in different spheres of life can be achieved by learning different skills and constantly working to improve them. By improving skills, one becomes more productive and confident in plans. Acquiring and improving skills in everyday life can be accomplished with great effort, with the help of a mentor, teacher, and regular training and practice. (YourDictionary n.d.)

3. *Civic skills - one of the main competencies in democratic citizenship*

Citizenship education involves the development of knowledge, skills and confidence among young people, in order to offer them the opportunity to make independent decisions and take responsibility for their own lives and the community.

Democratic society is much more than institutions and laws; it needs dedicated, competent, responsible and engaged citizens who can make a positive contribution in supporting democracy, human rights, cultural diversity and intercultural relations. Education plays a key role in achieving that goal, as well as in developing these competencies. To support this idea and purpose successfully, the Council of Europe has developed a competency tool, designed for teachers, educators, academics, policy makers, NGOs and other entities who use them in a variety of ways. (Teaching 2018)

According to Düerr, Spajić- Vrkaš and Ferreira Martins (2000), Education for democratic citizenship promotes a three-dimensional development on an individual:

- Cognitive development, which is about understanding the concepts and values of democracy and their functioning, such as: human rights and freedoms, democracy and democratic principles, citizenship, civil society, globalization and development;
- Social development, which implies the acquisition of skills and competencies that enable the individual to have an effective social connection and activities in various circumstances and throughout his or her life, such as: critical and reasoning skills, creative and productive skills, application of knowledge, problem solving skills, communication skills, democratic leadership skills, negotiation and compromise skills;
- Affective development that relates to the concepts underlying pro-social attitudes and activities. These consist in respect for the principle of universality, interdependence and indivisibility of human rights and freedom; commitment to the rule of law, justice, equality and equity in the world of differences; commitment to peace and participation, non-violent and constructive resolution of social problems; belief in the importance of personal responsibility and responsibility, etc. (Elvi Piršl 2007)

Every person must acquire the basic competences for democratic citizenship, regardless of the type and degree of education, profession or age. It is about competences in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. Each competence has its own components that determine it as such. Our focus is on civic skills, as one of the key competences of every young person who is a citizen of a democratic society.

A large number of civic skills are available; however, we will focus on the following, as crucial in raising young people as future citizens of a democratic society:

- Cooperation
- Manage and resolve conflicts
- Participation
- Critical thinking
- Creative thinking
- Reflection
- Patience (Grindal 1997)

3.1 Cooperation

Cooperation is the joint work or effort of people to achieve certain results or help each other to achieve a common goal. (YourDictionary, Cooperation n.d.) The definition of “cooperative person” is someone who is willing to work with others nicely, or is working together with other people for achieving a common goal.

Cooperative learning is a systematic strategy used in teaching, so that students can adopt it as a skill. Students work together to face a common problem, explore a common theme, or develop a mutual understanding, to create new ideas, new combinations or innovations, important not only for themselves, but also for the development of other students in the learning process. In cooperative learning, students have a responsibility to master the material and to make sure that other members of the group do the same thing. All members discuss together, help each other, motivate to further work and in this way expand knowledge. (Kochoska 2007)

Cooperative skills consist in what is needed for successful and effective cooperation – i.e. to work with others in a collective, non-hierarchical, democratically governed organizational structure. Cooperative skills include:

1. Communication skills - understanding communication as a process in which two skills are intertwined: active listening and assertiveness. It is the foundation of all collaborative skills.
2. Meeting and decision-making skills - different ways of making decisions and sharing the responsibility of all stakeholders in the process.
3. Conflict management - resolving conflicts, but also using negotiation techniques that encourage and value disagreement as a means of producing the best outcome of cooperation.
4. Team working - recognizing individual roles in the team, their behaviour and skills; as well as techniques to inspire the team towards common goals. (Brown 2013)

A necessary basis for developing cooperative skills is the young person's emotional intelligence, self-knowledge and self-awareness, reflection, thinking, empathy and social awareness, etc. Such skills are not innate and can be learned - if students learn the classroom collaboration skills and apply them skilfully, they would be more willing to help build the better world we all want to see. (Kate 2012)

Cooperation is about working together and helping others. When students cooperate, they have more positive social interaction and can socialize better. The family and the school play a very important role in acquiring these skills among students. Early development and encouragement of students' cooperative skills is a lifelong benefit. It is one of the sure-fire ways for building and maintaining friendships and positive social relationships. Students who can cooperate are improving at home, at school and with their peers. Encouraging and teaching students to cooperate from an early age, indeed has great benefits for the future, both in their personal lives and in social life as citizens. (K. Brown 2016)

3.2 *Resolving conflict situations*

One of the essential and necessary skills that influence building a person and raising a future citizen in a society is conflict resolution. Contemporary theories point to conflict

because of ethnic, social, and racial differences between people. Conflict is actually the tension between different attitudes in a society, or personal needs and interests. Dealing with conflicts and resolving them is not easy at all. Often, conflicts can be positive as well, which is a prerequisite for making good decisions and achieving greater proximity to stakeholders. The main purpose of conflict resolution is to prevent destructive behaviour, reduce emotional tensions and overcome disagreements. (Muhic 2018)

The strategies used to resolve conflict situations include negotiation, moderation, mediation and facilitation. It is more effective when strategies are used by someone who has already mastered resolution skills and is effective in interpersonal skills, communication, and the way groups interact. The negotiator, mediator or facilitator should be able to establish association with the parties involved in the conflict. In the process, there should be neutrality about the conflict or dispute and no bias towards anyone involved. The negotiator, mediator or facilitator should constantly work to create a climate of open dialogue and problem solving.

One of the most essential skills for conflict resolution is “active listening”. While actively listening to another person, one actually shows respect and confirms the attempt to understand what the person is saying. It does not lead to the conclusion that there is agreement with the perspective of the person, but that there is empathy for what the other party is saying and feeling. At the very moment of showing empathy, the other person is able and more willing to hear and understand the other's perspective. When there is mutual hearing and understanding, then the ground for resolving a conflict or dispute is opened. (Technology n.d.)

When considering all the assumptions, strategies and skills in this area, it is clear that resolving or dealing with a conflict is not simple or easy. That is why today there are so many conflicts around the world. By better understanding and acquiring this skill, younger generations will not be afraid when they find themselves in a position to manage or resolve conflict situations, and will be able to walk firmly in life, which is full of challenges.

3.3 Participation

One of the basic criteria in a democratic society is the effective and active citizen participation. It should be nurtured and practiced by young people from school period. In other words, one of the important skills a learner should possess is participating in school and community-related activities. It is also the basis on which his or her personality will be built, through active participation in activities in different areas of life and different areas of interest.

Student participation can be placed in a variety of contexts, such as: democracy, participation and engagement in different activities during class; participation in teaching methods and inclusion; participation in extracurricular activities; cooperation between teachers and students, as well as for the improvement of the quality of teaching. (University 2017)

Student participation is a kind of assessment of performance in a course beyond student assessment. Student participation is designed to create a learning environment where students have the opportunity to contribute, to have interaction and a steady engagement in activities that are recognized and rewarded by the lecturer. Student participation during class is an important aspect of the education process. When students speak up in class, they actually learn how to express their ideas in a way that others could understand. On the other hand, when they ask questions, they learn how

to get information in order to improve their own understanding of a topic. Talking to a group is not easy for adults at all, and much less for students. This difficulty needs to be overcome by young people and efforts should be made to get rid of such constraints. Students should be encouraged about a variety of attitudes, such as:

- Signing up to speak voluntarily on a topic or answer questions,
- Not hesitating to ask for help when they need it,
- Speaking in any given activity, when working in a small group or with the whole class. (Shore n.d.)

The main indicators of a student's success in mastering this skill consist in engaging in class discussions, in various activities (individual or group), in online discussion, in research, projects, etc.

3.4 Creative thinking

Creative thinking means perceiving things in a new and different way, a way of thinking "out of the box". Creativity involves lateral thinking or the ability to perceive things that are not currently apparent. People who have creativity skills actually have the ability to devise new ways for accomplishing tasks, solving problems, and facing challenges. They bring a fresh perspective into their work. This way of thinking can help students to move in more productive directions. (Doyle 2019)

Creative thinking offers the opportunity to think differently, to consider a particular problem or issue from a completely different, new angle or perspective. Thus, a new solution is reached, and in certain situations, we come to the realization that there is no need to find a solution for something. (SkillsYouNeed, Creative Thinking Skills 2017)

Why is creative thinking important for young people at school, at home, in the workplace? Most often creativity is associated with art, music, poetry, fiction, etc. Creative thinking is an indispensable skill in every sphere of life, including in business and science. It means being able to come up with something new. (Today n.d.) Precisely because of this, creative thinking is one of the most important civic skills that play a major role in the young people's future life and his personality building.

3.5 Critical thinking

Often, students need to think about a particular topic or issue in an objective and critical way. For this, they need to have critical thinking skills. These are diverse and include observation, analysis, interpretation, reflection, evaluation, conclusion, explanation, problem solving and decision-making. (SkillsYouNeed, Critical Thinking Skills 2017)

Critical thinking provides opportunity to analyse the way of thinking and expressing ideas, rather than simply to accept one's judgment on something as sufficient evidence. The benefits of mastering critical thinking skills are numerous and they imply better control of one's own learning and perceptions of others views. It indicates self-directed, self-disciplined, self-supervised and self-corrective thinking, including effective communication and problem solving skills.

Critical thinking is a valuable skill for students, as it will benefit them not only in solving problems in class, but also in dealing with real-world situations. These skills are not limited to one area. They are very important in any profession further in young

people's lives and an asset to everyone's career. Critical thinking is a thinking skill in every domain and is applied in every life situation that calls for thinking, analysing and planning. These are key civic skills for the development and raising young people. They improve both language skills and presentation, promote young people's creativity, and they are a key factor in self-reflection and the basis of science and of the democratic society as well. The proper functioning of a society requires its citizens to think critically about all social issues and events in the political community and to express their judgment about it. (Islam 2015)

A person who has masters critical thinking skills will have less difficulty for understanding the connections of ideas; for recognizing the importance and relevance of arguments and ideas; for evaluating the arguments, and for identifying inconsistencies and errors in reasoning. He or she will have a consistent and systematic approach to problems; and will reflect on the justification of one's own assumptions, beliefs and values. (SkillsYouNeed, Critical Thinking Skills 2017)

3.6 Reflection

Reflection in the education process is a very powerful practice for any modern classroom. Students are usually honest when it comes to their own and their peers' judgment. Students' reflection and self-assessment practices can provide a powerful dimension to learning in any classroom. Using this skill allows students to think about their actions, choices, and decisions; to review and refine new knowledge, to know how to give feedback and reinforce important concepts; and to decide independently about their future learning paths.

Reflection can be viewed from many angles and aspects. Workplace reflection emphasizes its importance; experience reflection encourages insight and further learning. It involves relating current experience with prior knowledge, but does not exclude cognitive and emotional information from multiple sources: visual, auditory, kinaesthetic and tactile. For reflection, the person must be activated in the processing of information, by synthesizing and evaluating the data. Reflection means applying what is learned outside the context of the original situations in which it was learned.

A successful teacher always uses methods and techniques of work that encourage students to be active participants in the learning process, which means that they are required to be producers, not just consumers of knowledge. To achieve this goal, the teacher is positioned as a mediator between the student and learning, directing him to approach a particular activity in a strategic way. Primarily, the student should have insight into the obtained knowledge, and then apply it to a given situation or context. The student becomes mentally engaged and transformed in this process. (Kallick 2008)

3.7 Patience

Patience is a kind of skill that young people need to possess in order to facilitate their daily lives, and not to disturb interpersonal relationships at school, at home, with friends, and in the wider environment. There is a great need for patience in the lives of all generations. Young people need to work for increasing their ability to be patient and be involved in practices to become patient. Patience can be defined as "the ability to accept or tolerate delay, distress, or suffering without anger or anxiety," with an emphasis on accepting or tolerating a particular situation without anger or anxiety. The importance of this component, in defining patience, actually refers to the separation of the feeling of anger and behavior in anger. Everyone can choose a way of behaving, but not one's own feelings. Feelings occur on their own, and therefore, when a person

feels something, he or she is responsible for managing that feeling and choosing the appropriate behavior in response to that feeling. In such a situation, the main weapon is thought. Because, what one chooses as a perception and response, supported by behavior, may have a heightened or diminished intensity of feeling. In developing patience as a skill, that mental process of the person is crucial. (Barbian 2017)

Patience is a human ability for being able to wait for something or for being able to endure something painful or difficult, while remaining completely calm and without anxiety. At some point, patience is the ability of a person for stepping back from the situation, for assessing it and for deciding very carefully and slowly. Then it becomes known the flexibility and the recognition of the need for waiting and being patient. Here are some of the characteristics of a patient person:

- Acceptance of the fact that the delay is likely in different situations, instead of opposing it and putting pressure
- Suppressing negative emotions associated with intolerance, such as anger, frustration, and anxiety
- Direct confrontation with difficulties or obstacles that slow down the process or threaten to disrupt it completely
- Rational decision-making on how to proceed in a given situation (Funk 2017)
- Young people need to be aware that life is full of challenges and obstacles. Therefore, it is necessary to master this life skill so that they could overcome the obstacles in the future. Old and wise people have said that patience is the salvation of man. Patience is one of the most important human characteristics and carries the primacy of virtue.

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