

Scientific Bulletin - Education Sciences Series

Buletin Stiințific - Seria Stiințele Educației

University of Pitesti Publishing House

ISSN 1584-5915

no. 2_2013

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Web : <http://www.upit.ro/SBESSJournal>*

*^ 2004-2013, University of Pitesti, Faculty of Educational Sciences
The full responsibility for the scientific content of the papers and for the
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*University of Pitesti Publishing House, <http://eup.wis.ro>
Târgul din Vale Street No. 1, 110040, Pitesti, Arges County, Romania
Phone/fax: +4.0348.453.352*

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I. CROSSROADS IN EDUCATION SCIENCES

*THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE REPUBLIC OF
MACEDONIA – IS (WAS) THERE BILINGUALISM IN IT?*

- A REVIEW

Biljana IVANOVSKA ()*

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Abstract

My goal in the discussion below is to review the new ways of seeing the education system in the Republic of Macedonia in the twenty-first century global and European cultural diversity. First, I will briefly outline the history regarding the educational and cultural state in the Republic of Macedonia. Second, I will show that we have to admit that our cosmopolitan and global society needs a unifying discipline leading us to mutual understanding and inevitable dialogue. Therefore, we need the new way of seeing and understanding the world, which helps us to eradicate antipathy or racism, because Europe is moving towards multicultural society, which we do not understand properly yet. Hence, the dialogue arising from multiculturalism and its discourse is a chance to find the way out of our post-modern cultural labyrinth.

Key words: education; minority; bilingualism; cultural diversity; Macedonian/Albanian language

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1. Brief overview of bilingual education research

Like the study of bilingualism itself, bilingual education is an interdisciplinary field drawing upon a wide range of theory and research across different academic fields such as linguistics, sociolinguistics, second - language acquisition, psychology, anthropology, and education. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to review this research fully. Much of it is covered in handbooks on second - language acquisition (Bhatia and Ritchie 2009; Doughty and Long 2005), applied linguistics (Davies and Elder 2006; Kaplan 2002; Simpson 2011), and educational linguistics (Spolsky and Hult 2008).

Briefly, however, research from these fields helps educators make informed decisions about important issues such as identifying students in need of bilingual education, placing students in the most appropriate program model, deciding which program models best serve a given student population, determining how long students should be in the programs, and assessing student progress in language and academic development.

This research also helps to inform classroom teachers in bilingual education as they make principled decisions in planning and delivering effective language and content - area lessons, in structuring the use of the two languages in the classrooms, in helping

students adjust culturally and linguistically, in identifying their students' strengths and challenges, and in advocating for their

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students and their families (Wright 2010). /In: Bhatia and Ritchie, 2013, p. 602/

2. Macedonia and its cultural diversity

I come from Macedonia, a small country with a long name, which has always been a traditional center of mutual meetings and agreements, communication and co-existence of the people on the Balkan Peninsula, as well as one of the most dynamic regions where many of the socio-economic activities in South-East Europe and wider developed. Macedonia is a multilingual, multiethnic, and multicultural country and long time ago it was the scene of many wars and conflicts and thus was the subject of attacks, which were sometimes solved with military and sometimes with diplomatic means.

It is a small country situated in southeastern Europe, bordering Kosovo and Serbia to the north, Bulgaria to the east, Greece to the south and Albania to the west, and is a major transportation corridor from Western and Central Europe to Southern Europe and the Aegean Sea. Located in the Central Balkan Peninsula it is one of the successor states of the former Yugoslavia, from which it declared independence in 1991. According to 2002 census, ethnic groups who live in this country are: Macedonians (65.2%), Albanians (25.2%), Turks (3.9%), Roma (2.7%), and 4.0% others. Today, the official languages in the Republic of Macedonia are the Macedonian language and the Albanian language ("As of July 10, 2013, the Ministry of foreign affairs listed on its website").

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The Macedonian language belongs to the South Slavic languages and is spoken by 2-3 million people who live in the country and in the diaspora (especially in Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, the USA, Australia and Canada). On the other hand, the Albanian language belongs to the Indo-European languages and does not belong to any other existing branch. In Macedonia people generally speak two or more than two languages (Macedonian/Albanian or Turkish). The modern standard written version of Macedonian appeared in 1945. Since then many literary works have been published in Macedonian. Literary Macedonian is based on the dialects of the West Central region (Prilep, Kičevo, Bitola, Kruševo and Lerin).

The largest ethnic minority in the Republic of Macedonia are Albanians. Of the 2,022,547 citizens of Macedonia, 509,083, or 25.2%, are Albanian according to the latest national census in 2002. The Albanian minority lives mostly in the north-western part of the country. The largest Albanian communities are in the municipalities of Tetovo (70.3% of the total population), Gostivar (66.7%), Debar (58.1%), Struga (56.8%), Kičevo (54.5%), Kumanovo (25.8%) and Skopje (20.5%) (Kostadinovska-Daskalovska 2005).

Macedonia is a land of ideas. Education, science and research play a central role here. In a Europe free of borders and a world of globalized markets, education lays the basis enabling us to exploit the opportunities open borders and world-wide knowledge networks offer. The Macedonian education and university system is undergoing a profound process of renewal that is already bearing

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fruit: Macedonia is one of the countries most preferred by foreign students from south-east region (especially Turkey) and its neighboring countries of this region.

Since the end of World War II, Socialist Republic of Macedonia's population has grown steadily, with the greatest increases occurring in the ethnic Albanian community. From 1953 through the time of the latest census in 2002 (initial results were released December 2003), the percentage of Albanians living in the Republic of Macedonia rose 31.3%. The western part of the country, where most ethnic Albanians live, is the most heavily populated, with approximately 40% of the total population. The net influx in the past 30 years has been close to 100,000 Albanians (Poulton 1995).

When the Socialist Republic of Macedonia was established in 1946, the constitution guaranteed the right of minorities to cultural development and free use of their language. Minority schools and classes in minority languages were introduced immediately, in order to counter the high percentage of illiteracy among these groups. In the following two decades, the Communist Party continuously introduced measures meant to promote the incorporation of the Albanian community into the economic and social life of the new socialist state through education, professional training, and social opportunities (Milosavlevski, Tomovski 1997).

In the late 1980s when the autonomy of the province of Kosovo was revoked, and the repression of the Albanian population significantly increased, these developments also took place in the Socialist Republic of Macedonia. The Albanian language was

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removed from public sight, Albanian families were prohibited from naming their children with Albanian names on the ground that it caused divisions with the other communities in the Republic, and finally, to lower the significantly high birth rate of the Albanian population, Albanian families were prohibited from having more than two children (Milosavlevski and Tomovski, 1997 and Politika ekspres, June 10, 1986). This assimilative campaign can be clearly seen by the fact that in 1990 the amended Constitution redefined the state from "a state of the Macedonian people and the Albanian and Turkish nationalities" to a "national state of the Macedonian people" (Poulton 1995). After the Second World War an academic community arose that was more broadly diversified than ever before, a fact simulated by Macedonian recognition and independence since 1991.

3. The current situation

The Macedonian education system at present consists of preschool education, primary, secondary and higher education. The higher levels of education can be obtained at one of the five state universities in the Republic of Macedonia: "Ss. Cyril and Methodius" University of Skopje, "St. Clement of Ohrid" University of Bitola, "Goce Delčev" University of Štip, State University of Tetovo and University for Information Science and Technology "St. Paul The Apostle" in Ohrid. There are a number of private university institutions, such as the European University in Skopje, Slavic

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University in Sveti Nikole, the South East European University in Tetovo and many others.

Tetovo is considered the unofficial capital of the Albanian minority and the State University of Tetovo is located in the western city of that name. The university is funded by student tuition, contributions of ethnic Albanians in their diaspora, and a "voluntary tax" from national Albanians. At the beginning, the university administration demanded legal recognition of the university as a public institution, which normally met resistance from the Macedonian university scene. The university claims to enroll more than 8 000 students who are almost all Albanian, but who include a smattering of Turks and Roma. Some 360 teaching faculty, mostly Albanians, are listed on their rolls. However, it is stated by some authorities that many of the faculty have left Tetovo for Pristina, since the international community auspices will see to it that the university there is reopened. Others state that not more than 1000-2000 students are actually attending Tetovo at the present time (Van Fleet et.al. 2000).

Another Albanian University located also in Tetovo is the private University - SEEU (South East European University, where official teaching languages are Macedonian, English, and Albanian). Although the van der Stoel proposal is designed to satisfy at least the most immediate needs of the ethnic Albanian community for university education in Albanian, it will add a new dimension to the debate over Tetovo University. The proposed new private institute will directly compete with Tetovo for Albanian students and for

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position within the ethnic Albanian community. Although it is not likely that Tetovo University will simply disappear (at least in the short run), the debate about the status and faith of the university will likely become a predominantly intra-Albanian one. (Van Fleet et.al. 2000). In the capital of Macedonia - Skopje, at the Faculty of Philology, state University St. "Cyrill and Methodius", successfully exists a Department for Albanian language and literature and educates teachers and high school professors for Albanian language and literature for primary, secondary, and tertiary education institutions and centers.

The two Universities in Tetovo (The State University and the SEEU) support the fact that the access mechanisms to higher

education available to ethnic Albanians and other minorities are more than fair, and that actual practices on admissions provide substantial advantages to them.

Today, some 80 000 young people study in Macedonia. More than one third of every age set enters tertiary education, and the ratio is growing. Nevertheless, Macedonia is still below the international average, firstly owing to the relatively low ratio of pupils who obtained a high-school leaver's certificate and secondly because the number of students' enrolling at the Faculties in the past was limited, which was a result of the previous social system. Anyone wanting to study in Macedonia is now able to choose between 23 higher education institutions (public and private) that are spread across the entire country. Be it in cities or in countryside (by the Lake Ohrid), traditional or highly modern, small in everything in a walking

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distance or large and spread across a pulsating metropolis - today almost every larger Macedonian city has its own college or university, or at least a Faculty as a unit of a University or as a Department of it.

Again, unlike many other countries, private universities play a comparatively subordinate role: more than 90% of students attend public institutions that are subject to state supervision and control (probably because of the low tuition fees) and are essentially open to anyone who has a high-school leaver's certificate (or a comparable certificate) that authorizes them to enter university.

4. Why is bilingualism important for my country?

Bilingualism is also creating new challenges for the Macedonian scientific and university community. The policymakers and universities have taken the initiative, with a series of reforms to adapt the university system to the new international standards. These innovations are in the process of fundamentally shaking up Macedonian academic world. Be it switch to staggered degrees such as Bachelor's and Master's degrees or the introduction of tuition fees and selection tests, be it the emergence of private facilities for academic training or the stronger strategic alliances between universities and institutes outside the higher education system - it is safe to say that hardly a section of society is at present undergoing such major changes as is the education system.

The goal of the reforms is to strengthen research and teaching to better face the ever fiercer international competition and to reclaim

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Macedonian's leading position. Changed legislation on Universities grants each university greater scope, and established professors are being paid more clearly according to their performance. Each bigname university tries to give itself a keener profile, and various rankings on university quality and popularity enhance competition. Studying in a bilingual society enables the Macedonian and Albanian students a greater chance of acquiring communication and cultural differences, give them an opportunity to overcome their

personal opinion and attitude toward certain social, political and scientific problems (something which was inherited from the previous social and political system), provide them with a greater level of awareness, understanding and tolerance towards other people, cultures and languages, and a greater chance of employment in future, improving their linguistic and communicational skills and competence, which is also very important for their personal and professional lives.

5. Conclusion and directions for future work

In the present paper I highlighted the importance of the bilingualism within Macedonian culture because it creates a unique cross-cultural understanding absolutely inevitable for our modern/postmodern society of cultural clashes, conflicts and misunderstandings. Our present society is a society of modern slavery and new ways of colonialism, and the bilingualism shows the way out of these current phenomena. If only it could eradicate antipathy and violence because the use of bilingualism is a

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phenomenon arising from theory to action. Macedonia's higher education system compared to the past, is improved and can be improved dramatically with little cultural support from all citizens in the country. Along with those changes, a significant upgrading in higher education achievement by Albanians, as well as other minorities, can be achieved in the coming five to ten years.

There should be emphases on learning in languages of the Republic (Macedonian and Albanian) and learning English, too, with a distinct emphasis on nontraditional classroom approaches. Both of these thrusts - teaching and learning both language as well as English and learning through informational sciences - will ameliorate present conditions of ethnic tension in Macedonia. Despite its long history and a strong research base, much work remains to be done in the field of bilingual education in our Republic. I conclude this paper with brief comments on some of the directions needed for future work. Greater emphasis on and support for strong forms of bilingual education is greatly needed in the Republic of Macedonia.

There continues to be a great need to conduct research and document the effectiveness of various forms of bilingual education and other forms of education for language minority students. We must recognize that 'bilingual education is the only way to educate children in the twenty - first century' (p. 5). As Garci' a explains:

"One of the biggest changes in the globalized community of the twenty - first century is the blurring of territory that was clearly demarcated by language and culture. Although many territories had

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only given the appearance of being homogenous, they provided a context, even if imagined, to enforce monolingual schooling. In the twenty- first century, however, we are aware of the linguistic complexity of the world in which monolingual schooling seems

utterly inappropriate. Language differences are seen as a resource, and bilingual education, in all its complexity and forms, seems to be the only way to educate as the world moves forward.” (p. 16).

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