

## **Introduction**

The modern world is characterized by multiethnic states: 82% of all independent states in the world have two or more ethnic groups within their national structure. The most striking mark of the countries in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe is their ethnic and cultural heterogeneousness. The complex historical processes that took place in these regions in the past created states with ethnic diversity in their national composition. These processes resulted in intensive interethnic mixture. In the course of the globalization and the increasing economic, scientific, cultural and political dependence, modern education is characterized by multiculturalism; schools are becoming multicultural; classes in the USA and Europe are made up of children belonging to various ethnic groups, etc.

The multiculturalism itself by definition rejects the conception of assimilation and offers familiarizing with the ethno-cultural and historical heritage of ethnic groups during the process of education, which in turn contributes to the satisfaction of the need for identity and security of minority peoples. The existence of various ethnic and national communities (minorities) is the factual situation in all the countries on the Balkans including Macedonia that has the most expressed or the most heterogeneous structure. In Macedonia there is the majority Macedonian community, but in some regions it is the minority community; then there is the minority Albanian community that is the majority community in some regions, while the Roma, Turkish, Vlach, Serbian and other groups belong to minority communities.

Since its independence the Republic of Macedonia is characterized with much expressed dynamism in building the concept of a civic society of equal citizens regardless their religious and ethnicity, following the example of the European standards. From the very moment of its independence the Republic of Macedonia makes efforts to improve the quality of the living conditions of minorities in all the spheres of social life, with special emphasis on the area of education. But, beside its efforts to integrate all the members of ethnic communities into the educational system of the Republic of Macedonia, some ethnic communities are dissatisfied with the educational policy in the country concerning the minority communities' education. The Republic of Macedonia is a signatory of all international Conventions that regulate minority rights in the area of education in their mother tongue which is legally regulated in the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia. The Law on compulsory primary and secondary education has created optimal conditions for the education of ethnic communities in their mother tongue, and for the nurturing of their own cultural identity.

Bearing in mind the fact that education is a fundamental human right, it gives children, young people and adults the power to think critically and to make choices, all this with the aim to improve their lives. Education breaks the closed circle of poverty and is the key element of the economic and social development. Education must be available to every person living in Macedonia regardless of his/her age, sex, religion, ethnicity, health, social and financial status. Education must be characterized by a dynamically and flexibly established structure that will enable unhindered horizontal and vertical mobility of pupils, students, teaching staff, and by a willingness to meet the changing needs of individuals and the society as a whole. Furthermore, education must overcome the problems and eliminate the factors that induce educational abstinence and dispersal which is the most frequent case with pupils belonging to minority groups.

When it comes to education there is a significant disparity between the education levels in the Republic of Macedonia in relation to the majority population and the rest of minority population: almost a quarter of full of age pupils belonging to national minorities has no education whatsoever. There is no credible assessment regarding the number of school age pupils who do not attend school, and research shows that the number is considerable. The rates of dispersal are difficult to establish but estimates range from 8 to 49 per cent of pupils who leave primary education early. The lack of comprehensive research of the existence or the level of segregation in Macedonia is the weakness that the government should overcome.

## **Reasons for differences in pupils' educational achievements in primary schools in the Republic of Macedonia**

The basic goal of this paper is to point out some of the reasons that contribute to differences in educational achievements of pupils belonging to different ethnic communities in primary schools in the Republic of Macedonia, at the same time taking into consideration the influence of various social factors – primarily family, life style (cultural milieu) and language, i.e. to find the reason-result relations between the socio-economic status, ethnicity, parents' readiness to invest in education and lifestyle with pupils' educational achievements in primary schools in the Republic of Macedonia

Reasons that influence the educational achievements of pupils belonging to different ethnic communities are:

- **socio-economic status of the family;**
- **traditional way of life and spatial concentration and segregation;**

- **parents' readiness to invest in their children's education;**
- **proper knowledge of the language of teaching.**

Family has both a comprehensive influence on a person's development and a crucial impact on his/her education. In the Republic of Macedonia the family has the characteristics of a traditional family (where the father's authority is dominant) – present mostly in rural areas, and those of a modern one (characterized by the principle of equality) – present mostly in urban areas. Needless to say, family environment has special significance in regard to pupils' educational achievements in primary schools in RM:

- socio-economic status of the family – financial conditions, parents' employment, housing conditions;
- family structure: parents' marital status, number of children in the family, number of members of the family;
- parents' behavior towards children – what the family and upbringing practice is like, parents style of behavior (democratic, autocratic, unorganized support, support, stimulating and helping children in learning, application of correctional measures –stimulating and repressive), parents' attitudes, cooperation;
- relationships among family members – family atmosphere.

All these factors make up a complex system of various influences concerning pupils' motivation and educational achievements.

The social structure of ethnic communities is predominantly poor: 80-90% live in poverty and the percentage of formally employed is between 10 and 20. As for employment, they most often rely on seasonal work on nearby fields; they engage in illegal trade with wood and collect scrap metal for reselling. Women are housewives or they find work in the poorly paid textile industry. Apart from these forms of earning income, most of them are unemployed and live on the dole because of their unregulated status and not having documents. As a result of this unregulated status, not having documents, money, and their illiteracy, a great number of families do not send their children to preschool institutions. Later on, when they enroll first grade these same children have difficulties in learning Macedonian which in turn is reflected upon their subsequent achievements and learning of the teaching material. Hence one of the possible reasons for poor educational achievements of pupils belonging to other ethnic communities is insufficient knowledge of Macedonian language which is the language of instruction in primary schools in the Republic of Macedonia.

Poverty itself, i.e. bad family financial situation is considered to be one of the main reasons leading to problems in the education of pupils belonging to different ethnic communities in the Republic of Macedonia. Even though primary education in state schools in the Republic of Macedonia is free, the costs of children's schooling are rather high and are a burden for these poor families.

Very often the size of these families compared to the space and conditions in which they live (substandard living conditions) and not having a working atmosphere can influence the realization of educational tasks. Most of these families have three or four children.

Low educational awareness often results in ignoring the need for education. As a consequence, a lot of children do not have any support from their parents for their educational development. Illiteracy, not understanding the teaching material, parents' struggle for survival (preoccupancy with work) - all these occur as possible reasons for not helping and supporting pupils which in turn decreases the interest for learning, causes poor motivation for learning and poor educational achievements.

Tradition and culture (cultural milieu), ways of life and their customs (for example early – under age marriages) are different and they can be reflected upon educational achievement, especially with female pupils.

## **Conclusion**

Henceforth the Government should think about updating its entire approach to the education of minorities. The general educational policy pays too little attention to their concrete needs but the organizations of civic society – with the approval of the Ministry of education and Science – actively develop and realize various projects that support the minorities' education. In the area of education the members of minorities have equal access to educational institutions and the right to education in their mother tongue; with this the state guarantees them free primary and secondary education (both compulsory) and a special nationality quota in institutions of higher education. However, the question which a great number of governmental and non-governmental organizations, associations, etc. are trying to answer is how much this is really used and realized and what the real reasons for this are.

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