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# Europeanization, westernization and identity formation in the Western Balkans

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# **Gender and intercultural sensitivity: analysis of intercultural sensitivity among primary school teachers in North Macedonia**

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## **Abstract**

The research investigated whether there are statistically significant differences in teachers' intercultural sensitivity levels according to gender. In search of the answer to this question two hypotheses were raised: there is no statistically significant difference in the level of ethnocentrism of teachers according to gender; there is no statistically significant difference in the level of ethnorelativism of teachers according to gender. The Intercultural Sensitivity Index (ISI) was applied to 217 primary school teachers in multiethnic regions in the Republic of North Macedonia. Respondents rated themselves on a 5 point Likert scale. Descriptive statistics were used to measure levels of intercultural sensitivity. Hypothesis testing was performed through *t-test*. The research results showed that both male and female teachers in the DMIS ethnocentrism stage show middling level of ethnocentrism and are positioned in the minimization stage. Male teachers show statistically lower level of ethnocentrism ( $M = 2.65$ ,  $SD = .831$ ,  $p < .05$ ) than female teachers ( $M = 2.92$ ,  $SD = .600$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Both female and male teachers show a high level of intercultural sensitivity in the DMIS ethnorelativism stage. There is no statistically significant difference in the level of ethnorelativism between teachers of both genders. Teachers are "moving" from the minimization stage to the acceptance stage.

**Keywords:** intercultural sensitivity, ethnocentrism, ethnorelativism, teacher, gender



## **Introduction**

The characteristic of today's societies is their multicultural structure. The European Commission (2017) emphasizes respect for linguistic, religious, customs and other differences between cultures as a precondition for a harmonious life in multicultural societies. Therefore, multicultural societies must implement the principles of democracy and respect for human rights. According to Brettell, & Hollifield (2013) among the many causes for the creation of multicultural societies are the 21st century's social and demographic changes. These changes include migration and migration policies that have brought a range of challenges to which today's societies cannot find a solution. However, multicultural societies existed even before the migratory trends of the 21st century. Cultural complexity today cannot simply be ignored in particular knowing that multicultural reality implies that others become part of us and we become part of them. Culture strongly influences our subjective reality considering that our cultural background and experience largely define the way we see the world and the way we approach interactions (Samovar, Porter, McDaniel, & Roy, 2016). Fruitful interactions occur only when different cultures influence each other regarding the diffusion of cultural elements, the exchange of knowledge, ideas, customs, values, art and technology. Modern societies; therefore, aim to raise societies' awareness of the new knowledge and civilizing values that will bind people of different cultures, nations, religions and races.

If we assume that an intercultural interaction has already taken place, this implies an intercultural communication process in a social context having as a premise intercultural sensitivity and the possibility of interaction between individuals or social groups who belong to different cultures and subcultures. As a premise of such a process, intercultural sensitivity is a value that can be articulated in various institutions and one of them is undoubtedly the school. Cultural diversity must be accepted as an important aspect in the creation of educational policies through the concept of interculturality (Hajisoteriou, & Angelides, 2015). Through curriculum modeling, teacher professional development and reorganization of teaching, a value system that characterizes cultural

pluralism can be established. The teacher is the one who can help the cultural interaction through the transmission of adequate knowledge, communication skills, positive attitudes and values through which cultural diversity can be affirmed. However, gaining and possessing knowledge on cultural differences does not mean that a person is willing to accept the reality of cultural diversity (Coulby, 2006). The problem lies in the question of promoting the development of students' intercultural sensitivity, their critical perception of others and the development of interaction skills with members of diverse groups through education. Therefore, providing a clear dynamic way of gaining new knowledge, interaction, flexibility and empathy, make the student and the teacher culturally sensitive. This means shifting static cultural boundaries towards effective intercultural communication and initiating a process of exchanging knowledge, skills and values within the educational systems of multicultural societies.

## **Intercultural sensitivity**

In order to prevent the development of negative emotions in societies such as prejudice, anxiety, mistrust and avoidance of different cultural characteristics, intercultural sensitivity should be developed in all members of society (Arslana, Günçavdib, & Polatc, 2015). Intercultural sensitivity is the ability to observe and recognize the existence of different world views that allow us to accept and recognize not only our own cultural values, but also the values of culturally different people (Hyder, 2015). The most well-known model of intercultural sensitivity is the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003) which consists of three stages of ethnocentrism and three stages of ethnorelativism. The developmental model of intercultural sensitivity has been adapted by Bennett (Bennett, & Hammer, 2002) and explains the differences between the five consecutive stages of intercultural awareness and competence. The last stage of this model is adaptation. Ethnocentrism is the tendency to consider one's own culture as the only valid criterion for interpreting or valuing the behavior, customs, traditions or values of other groups, ethnic

groups or societies. The manifestation of the ethnocentric view appears as the avoidance of cultural differences, through the denial of their existence, through their labeling as negative, threatening and undesirable and as minimizing their significance. In contrast, the ethno-relativistic view of the world is oriented towards differences, ie their acceptance, adjustment of perspectives for taking into account differences and integrating cultural differences in the experience and definition of one's own identity (Jones, & Quach, 2007). According to Bennett (2013), ethnorelativism refers to the fact that cultures can be understood only in their interrelationship, and the specific behavior of the individual within a particular cultural context. Hammer, Bennet, and Wiseman (2003) attempted to overcome some ambiguities in the definition of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) by emphasizing a large distinction between intercultural sensitivity and intercultural competence. From their perspective, intercultural sensitivity is "the ability to discriminate and experience relevant cultural differences" while intercultural competence is "the ability to think and act in interculturally appropriate ways" (p. 422).

Bennett (2017) argues that intercultural sensitivity can be traced through a six-stage model of development: denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, and integration. In that model, the first three stages take place within the ethnocentric view of the world, while stages four, five and six take place within the ethno-relativistic view of the world. During the development of intercultural sensitivity the person changes in the cognitive, emotional and behavioral dimension. The core of the stages of Bennett Model makes a certain view of the world, which implies certain attitudes and behaviors. Hence, the model represents the stages of development of the cognitive structure while attitudes and behaviors are indicators of this structure (Bennett & Bennett, 2004). Individuals who have an ethnocentric view of the world perceive their culture as a persistent point for constructing their own realities, while the deep beliefs and behaviors of the primary socialization are not questioned. For them, "things are exactly as they are" (Bennett & Bennett, 2004, p. 73). In contrast, individuals who have an ethno-relativistic view of the world perceive their beliefs and behaviors only as one of the many other possibilities of organizing reality.

Based on Bennett's theoretical framework of the Intercultural Sensitivity Development Model (DMIS) and multidimensional models of intercultural competence, Lee Olson, & Kroeger (2001) developed the Intercultural Sensitivity Index (ISI). The Index represents not only the six phases of DMIS but also the three dimensions of global competence (substantial knowledge, perceptual understanding and intercultural communication). This model refers to the development of the individual's intercultural sensitivity in direct relations with different cultures, not only in the local context but also in the global context.

Intercultural sensitivity as a topic of great interest among authors lately has no clear definition due to the fact that many authors see it as part of intercultural communication competence often equating it with intercultural awareness, intercultural competence or global competence (Bennett, 2017; Chen & Starosta, 2000; Olson & Kroeger, 2001 ). According to Penbek, Şahin and Cerit (2012) intercultural competence and intercultural sensitivity are not synonymous, but are two different concepts although they are largely related. The authors state that the reciprocity between the two concepts is indisputable. Thereby, the higher degree of intercultural sensitivity indicates a higher level of intercultural competence of the person. According to Bhawuk, Sakuda, and Munusamy (2015), intercultural sensitivity is a process in which the personality can be progressive or regressive, contextual and variable. According to them, the intercultural personality changes during each encounter with a person from another culture.

It is important to keep in mind that the development model of intercultural sensitivity carries certain risks, in terms of fear that individuals or culturally diverse groups while having the desire to achieve the last stage of the ethno-relational approach, may lose their own cultural identity and individuality. Achieving a level of integration of diversity and transition from a monocultural to a multicultural perspective requires constant work and lifelong learning as a multidimensional process, which according to Marginson, & Sawir (2011) implies the complementarity of the educational environment, from formal, nonformal and informal to alternative types of learning. All this process presents a significant challenge for the school as a dominant place

of educational activity, especially for teachers as the main bearers of intercultural education in culturally plural environments.

## **Methodology**

The research aimed to investigate whether there are statistically significant differences in teachers' intercultural sensitivity levels according to gender. In search of the answer to this question two hypotheses were raised: there is no statistically significant difference in the level of ethnocentrism of teachers according to gender; and there is no statistically significant difference in the level of ethnorelativism of teachers according to gender. The Intercultural Sensitivity Index (ISI) (Lee Olson, & Kroeger, 2001) was applied to 217 primary school teachers (158 females and 59 males) in multiethnic regions in the Republic of North Macedonia. Respondents rated themselves on a 5 point Likert scale. Descriptive statistics were used to measure levels of intercultural sensitivity. Hypothesis testing was performed through *t-test*. When interpreting the arithmetic means, the interval 1.00–1.79 was evaluated to be “very low”, 1.80–2.59 to be “low”, 2.60–3.39 to be “middling”, 3.40–4.19 to be “high”, and 4.20– 5.00 to be “very high” (Polat, & Ogay Barka, 2014, p. 28).

## **Results and discussion**

The difference in the level of ethnocentrism according to the gender of the teachers was determined through independent-samples *t-test* where the test results show a statistically significant difference between the teachers in the stage of ethnocentrism. Male teachers show a lower level of ethnocentrism ( $M=2.65$ ,  $SD=.831$ ,  $p<.05$ ) compared to female teachers ( $M=2.92$ ,  $SD=.600$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Such results suggest that the first hypothesis is rejected which means that there is a statistically significant difference in the level of ethnocentrism of teachers according to gender.

Table 1. Level of ethnocentrism and gender

Stage	Female (N=158)		Male (N=59)		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
<b>Denial</b>	2.81	.902	2.79	.920	.170	.865
<b>Defense</b>	2.38	.894	2.00	.905	2.812	.005*
<b>Minimization</b>	3.69	.912	3.33	1.041	2.472	.014*
<b>ETHNOCENTRISM</b>	<b>2.92</b>	<b>.600</b>	<b>2.65</b>	<b>.831</b>	<b>2.595</b>	<b>.010*</b>

\*p<.05

The results shown in the table above indicate that male teachers show a statistically significant lower level of ethnocentrism ( $M=2.00$ ,  $SD=.905$ ,  $p<.05$ ;  $M=3.33$ ,  $SD=1.041$ ,  $p<.05$ ) compared to female teachers ( $M=2.38$ ,  $SD=.894$ ,  $p<.05$ ;  $M=3.69$ ,  $SD=.912$ ,  $p<.05$ ) in the defense stage and in the minimization stage. While in the denial stage there is no statistically significant difference in the level of ethnocentrism between teachers of both genders, both female and male teachers show a higher level of ethnocentrism compared to the defense phase, but lower than the minimization stage.

As we see from the table above, in the denial stage both female and male teachers show a middling level of intercultural sensitivity. In the defense stage, both female and male teachers show a low level of ethnocentrism which means a high level of intercultural sensitivity. In the minimization stage, female teachers show a high level of ethnocentrism which means a low level of intercultural sensitivity while male teachers show a middling level of intercultural sensitivity.

These results suggest that gender affects the teachers' level of ethnocentrism, ie the level of their intercultural sensitivity. Such results lead to the conclusion that both male teachers ( $M=2.65$ ,  $SD=.831$ ) and female teachers ( $M=2.92$ ,  $SD=.600$ ), in the first stage of the Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) - the stage of ethnocentrism, show middling level of intercultural sensitivity. Both female and male

teachers are positioned in the minimization stage of ethnocentrism within the DMIS.

The influence of gender on the level of ethno-relativism of teachers was determined through independent-samples t-test which did not show a statistically significant difference between female and male teachers in the stage of ethnorelativism. Although there is no statistically significant difference, female teachers show a higher level of ethnorelativism ( $M=3.51, SD=.741, p<.05$ ) compared to male teachers ( $M=.42, SD=.752, p<.05$ ). Such results suggest that the second hypothesis cannot be rejected, hence there is no statistically significant difference in the level of ethnorelativism of teachers according to gender.

Although there is no statistically significant difference between teachers by gender, the results in Table 2 indicate that female teachers showed a higher level of ethnorelativism ( $M=3.89, SD=.872$ ;  $M=3.33, SD=.947$ ;  $M=3.23, SD=.878$ ) compared to male teachers ( $M=3.75, SD=.916$ ;  $M=3.33, SD=1.011$ ;  $M=3.10, SD=.921$ ) in all three DMIS ethnorelativism stages - acceptance, adaptation and integration.

Table 2. Level of ethnorelativism and gender

Stage	Female (N=158)		Male (N=59)		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
<b>Acceptance</b>	3.89	.872	3.75	.916	1.064	.289
<b>Adaptation</b>	3.33	.947	3.33	1.011	-.009	.992
<b>Integration</b>	3.23	.878	3.10	.921	.930	.354
<b>ETHNORELATIVISM</b>	<b>3.51</b>	<b>.741</b>	<b>3.42</b>	<b>.752</b>	<b>.758</b>	<b>.449</b>

As it can be noticed from the table above, in the acceptance stage both female and male teachers show a high level of intercultural sensitivity whereas female teachers show a slightly higher level of intercultural sensitivity ( $M=3.89$ ) than male teachers ( $M=3.75$ ). In the adaptation stage, both female and male teachers show middling level of intercultural sensitivity. In the integration stage, female teachers show

middling level of intercultural sensitivity whereas female teachers show a slightly higher level of intercultural sensitivity ( $M=3.23$ ) compared to male teachers ( $M=3.10$ ).

Such results suggest that gender does not affect the teachers' intercultural sensitivity level in the stage of ethnorelativism. Based on the presented results we can conclude that both female and male teachers, in the second stage of the Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) - the stage of ethnorelativism, show a high level of intercultural sensitivity. Both female and male teachers, at the stage of ethnorelativism are positioned in the acceptance stage.

## **Conclusion**

The general conclusion of this research is that male teachers show higher intercultural sensitivity in the stage of ethnocentrism while female teachers show higher intercultural sensitivity in the stage of ethnorelativism. The research results showed that gender affects the teachers' intercultural sensitivity levels. Male teachers show a statistically lower level of ethnocentrism ( $M=2.65$ ,  $p<.05$ ) compared to female teachers ( $M=2.92$ ,  $p<.05$ ), which means that male teachers show higher intercultural sensitivity than female teachers. Regarding the stages of ethnocentrism, male teachers show a statistically higher level of intercultural sensitivity in the defense and minimization stage, while in the denial stage no statistically significant difference was found between female and male teachers. But there was a slight difference, female teachers show a higher level of ethnorelativism ( $M=3.51$ ) than male teachers ( $M=3.42$ ). Regarding the stages of ethnorelativism, female teachers show higher intercultural sensitivity in the acceptance and integration stage while male teachers show no differences at all in the adaptation stage.



## **Limitations**

It is possible that the results might not be representative for the whole country, given that we do not have respondents from the east. The voluntary nature of the survey itself constitutes a limitation in the fact that the research was not able to guarantee an equal participation of respondents by gender. This survey was conducted only once (not counting the pilot survey) and surveys should be conducted more than twice (Medina-López-Portillo, 2004).

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