



# Examining the Impact of Intercultural Education on the Levels of Intercultural Sensitivity of Primary School Teachers: Evidences From North Macedonia

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**Annotation.** The research aims to examine whether the intercultural education teachers' previous experience affects their level of intercultural sensitivity. The research results show that prior intercultural education significantly affects the levels of ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism of teachers. Considering the results, which show that intercultural education does not impact teachers' substantive knowledge and perceptual understanding, educational authorities should seek alternative ways to enhance it.

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**Keywords:** *interculturality, ethnorelativism, ethnocentrism, global competence.*

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## Introduction

A core feature of intercultural education is interculturality. It favors dialogue between indigenous and migrant groups, irrespective of their majority or minority status, promoting cultural openness after establishing connections with one's origin culture (Portera, 2014). Facilitating such dialogues is fundamental yet intricate, requiring the establishment of conducive conditions for diversity's development. Fielding (2021)

notes that interculturalism shapes self-concept, empathy, and self-awareness, forming a dynamic process of cultural interaction and exchange.

Interculturalism as a holistic, interactionist, and humanistic paradigm (Moskal & North, 2017; Chen, 2019; Beacco et al., 2016) takes form within intercultural education. Here, interculturalism underscores holistic engagement rather than segmented actions, emphasizing the interaction among its constituent elements. This approach prioritizes communication processes between individuals and fosters an environment of acceptance, autonomy, and freedom for each student. Within this framework, the teacher's role is to "implement the educational program, evaluate learning, as well as choose and use appropriate methods, techniques, and learning tools" (Polat & Ogay Barka, 2014, p. 24). However, mere instructional competence is insufficient; teachers must also develop intercultural competence, beginning with the development of intercultural sensitivity (Chen, 2019).

According to Alam (2020), a teacher's competence hinges on their possession of intercultural competence, which manifests through intercultural sensitivity. Given the multicultural fabric of North Macedonian society, it becomes imperative for our educational system to gauge teachers' preparedness for culturally diverse classrooms. This assessment is vital for the development of targeted teacher training programs in intercultural education. Despite the significance of this issue, research on the levels of intercultural sensitivity among North Macedonian teachers remains scarce. While some authors (Atanasoska & Iliev, 2010; Janackovska, 2011; Popova-Koskarova, 2015) have delved into theoretical dimensions of intercultural phenomena, such as intercultural communication and the adaptability of educational institutions to multicultural challenges, empirical investigations are lacking. Atanasoska and Iliev (2010) highlight the dearth of initiatives leveraging the advantages of North Macedonia's multicultural environment. Janackovska (2011) found that undergraduate students who completed internships in multicultural NGOs exhibited more positive attitudes towards other ethnic communities compared to those interning in other institutions. Popova-Koskarova's (2015) research underscored the existence of objectives aimed at fostering cultural, ethnic, and other forms of sensitivity. However, there remains a noticeable gap between these objectives and the practical implementation of activities to achieve them. Specific studies on teachers' intercultural sensitivity levels in North Macedonia (Petrovska & Adili, 2020; Adili & Xhambazi, 2021) revealed that primary school teachers exhibit a moderate level of intercultural sensitivity. Notably, teachers in diverse school settings had higher intercultural sensitivity. Research also showed that male teachers had statistically lower ethnocentrism levels, while both genders demonstrated high intercultural sensitivity at the DMIS ethnorelativism stage and moderate intercultural sensitivity at ethnocentrism stage.

The research aimed to investigate whether teachers' exposure to intercultural experiences, including aspects such as intercultural education during foundational

education, specialized training in the field, or self-directed study, impacts their level of intercultural sensitivity. This investigation was guided by the assumption that there is no statistically significant difference in ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism level among teachers with and without prior intercultural education.

## Literature Review

### *Intercultural Education and Intercultural Sensitivity*

The rise of intercultural education in multiethnic societies positions schools to prepare individuals for diverse settings. Teachers play a central role in enabling positive learning environments and promoting prosocial behavior and social sensitivity among diverse groups (Lasonen & Teräs, 2016; Dubbeld et al., 2019). One of the paramount challenges within education policy pertains to the cultivation of teachers who exhibit sensitivity to diversity and possess intercultural sensitivity – an aptitude for discerning and leveraging cultural differences as pedagogical assets (Berthoin-Anatal & Friedman, 2003). Education policymakers are inclined to believe that fundamental shifts in teaching practices will ensue concomitant with changes in the development and restructuring of the educational landscape (Ball et al., 2011). However, there persists a tendency to overlook the significant influence of teachers' attitudes towards policies on their adoption. Policy formulation is contingent upon teachers' varied interpretations of these policies, interpretations that are shaped by their ideologies, knowledge bases, and experiential backgrounds (Alfrey et al., 2016). A further complication arises from the prevalent notion ingrained in pre-service teacher education, wherein students are often perceived as a homogenous entity (Ball et al., 2012). Hence, throughout their teaching careers, teachers frequently confuse the concept of equality with uniformity, inadvertently overlooking the richness of diversity within their classrooms.

Interculturality, as an integral facet of education, underscores the presence of formal, non-formal, and informal educational initiatives designed, according to Portera (2008), to foster intergroup relations and cultivate mutual understanding and respect among participants. Schools play a key role in promoting openness to diversity and respectful interactions through projects and fostering dialogue. Thus, according to Kuramoto et al. (2017), schools, as bastions of education, are bestowed with redefined roles and functions.

In the pursuit of implementing intercultural education, alongside the pedagogical content dimension, due regard must be accorded to the social dimension of pedagogy. Teaching constitutes a distinct interactive-communicative process. As posited by several scholars (Banks, 2006a; Bennett, 2013; Chou, 2007; Deardoff, 2009), student achievement and the socio-emotional climate within classrooms and schools hinge

significantly on the quality of teacher-student and student-student relationships fostered during instruction. Adequate teacher preparation should thus strive to familiarize educators with the cultural heritage of their nation, equip them with empirical, participatory, and contextually sensitive teaching methodologies, instill in them an awareness of the educational and cultural requisites of minority groups, and empower them to tailor learning materials and instructional approaches to the needs of such groups. Furthermore, such training should promote school-community interaction and parental involvement in the educational process, thereby cultivating a learning milieu where cultural diversity is revered (UNESCO, 2006). Numerous scholars (Sleeter & Grant, 2007; Perry & Southwell, 2011; Portera, 2014; Banks, 2015) concur that intercultural education embodies a commitment to fostering and upholding diversity across all spheres of human existence. Huang (2017) highlights that as educators develop intercultural sensitivity, they guide students in interacting with diverse cultures and help them view themselves as equal members of a multicultural community. This sensitivity fosters recognition and appreciation of diverse worldviews (Hyder, 2015), and aligns closely with global competence education, which supports both multicultural and intercultural education (Liu et al., 2020; Sinagatullin, 2019). Its goals include preparing teachers to be critically reflective and possess values such as tolerance, respect, recognition, and appreciation of different worldviews to effectively work with culturally diverse students (KÖŞ & Celik, 2023).

Bennett (2017) delineates a six-stage developmental model for understanding intercultural sensitivity, encompassing denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, and integration. In this schema, the initial three stages unfold within an ethnocentric worldview, while the subsequent three stages occur within an ethno-relativistic framework. The ethnorelativist outlook embraces differences and seeks to accept them, adapt perspectives to accommodate diversity, and integrate cultural differences into personal identity and experiences (Bennett & Hammer, 2017). Individuals espousing an ethnocentric worldview perceive their own culture as the linchpin in constructing their reality, with deeply ingrained convictions and behaviors stemming from primary socialization remaining unquestioned. To them, “things are exactly as they are” (Bennett & Bennett, 2004, p. 73). Conversely, individuals holding an ethno-relativistic worldview regard their beliefs and behaviors as merely one of numerous potential ways of organizing reality, recognizing the multiplicity of perspectives and possibilities inherent in cultural diversity. According to Bennett (2004), an individual characterized by a Denial worldview typically exhibits disinterest in cultural differences, even when confronted with them directly, yet may resort to aggressive actions to avoid or eradicate differences if they encroach upon their sphere: “although he may act aggressively to avoid or eliminate a difference if it impinges on him” (p. 2). Addressing the tendency to evade or dismiss cultural differences constitutes the primary focus of the Denial stage, wherein individuals are urged to acknowledge the mere existence of other cultures,

both on a global and domestic scale: “people here need to attend to the simple existence of other cultures, both globally and domestically” (Bennett, 2004, p. 3). The Defense stage is characterized by the perception of one’s own culture as the sole exemplar of virtuous living, fostering an “us versus them” mentality, wherein one’s own culture is deemed superior while others are relegated to inferior status. Resolving Defense issues requires acknowledging the shared humanity among diverse cultures paving the way for progress into the Minimization stage where cultural differences are downplayed. The supposition typologies such as personality or learning styles are universally applicable across cultures exemplifies minimization (Bennett, 2004). Transitioning to the Acceptance stage depends on achieving cultural self-awareness, recognizing one’s own cultural identity, and being ready to embrace diversity with open-mindedness and respect. Adaptation expands one’s worldview by incorporating elements from other cultures, while integration enables fluid navigation between multiple cultural perspectives (Bennett, 2004).

### *Research*

Findings of Anderson et al. (2006) research have shown that engagement in international educational programs increases the intercultural sensitivity level of university students. Similarly, a study conducted at two Turkish universities by Penbek et al. (2012) revealed statistically significant disparities in intercultural sensitivity among university students based on their exposure to international educational experiences. Those students who had participated in such programs demonstrated notably higher levels of intercultural sensitivity compared to their counterparts who had not. Mahon’s (2006) investigation of 155 teachers from the American Midwest positioned all participants in the Minimization stage or lower, predominantly within the ethnocentric spectrum. Likewise, Grossman and Yuen’s (2006) study of 107 school teachers in Hong Kong unveiled that 55% of participants were situated in the Denial or Defense stage, 43% in the Minimization stage, and only 2% in the Acceptance and Adaptation stage. Compounding this scenario is teachers’ tendency to overestimate their own intercultural sensitivity. Many profess to treat all students equally irrespective of color or cultural diversity, a skill deemed crucial by Mahon (2006) for further development. This self-perceived proficiency may impede progress towards a more ethnorelative stage. Pappamihel’s (2004) study further underscored this issue, revealing that university students preparing for careers as early childhood development teachers exhibited low levels of intercultural sensitivity despite having completed coursework on intercultural education and the specific needs of English language learners. Cabanová and Lynch (2023) conducted a study investigating Slovak educators’ confidence levels in teaching students from diverse language backgrounds within mainstream schools. A surprising outcome emerged, revealing that teachers who lacked prior experience with such students displayed heightened self-efficacy perceptions. The views of Lithuanian teachers

with prior experience in multicultural classrooms showed no significant difference from those without such experience (Norvilienė & Zuzevičiūtė, 2013).

## Method

### *Participants*

The research involved a sample of 217 teachers located in multiethnic regions across North Macedonia. In Table 1, data are shown on their prior exposure to intercultural education through various forms of training and experience. In Table 1, we can see that 28.1% of teachers received fundamental intercultural education during their initial education, 15.2% completed supplementary training, and 13.4% pursued self-directed study of interculturality. Additionally, 23.5% engaged in a combination of intercultural education experiences, while 19.8% had no prior exposure to intercultural education.

To facilitate clearer interpretation, the teachers were categorized into two distinct groups: those with prior intercultural education (N = 174) and those without prior intercultural education (N = 43). This categorization aimed to streamline the analysis and comparison of the impact of intercultural education on teachers' intercultural sensitivity levels.

**Table 1**

*Participants' Intercultural Education Background*

<b>Intercultural Education Experience</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Acquired fundamental IE during initial education	61	28.1
Underwent supplementary training during tenure	33	15.2
Independently pursued studies in intercultural topics	29	13.4
Engaged in a combination of IE experiences	51	23.5
No prior exposure to IE	43	19.8
Total	217	100

### *Instrument*

To investigate the teachers' intercultural sensitivity levels, a quantitative research design was chosen. Lee Olson and Kroeger's (2001) Intercultural Sensitivity Index (ISI) was administered to 217 teachers situated in multiethnic regions within the Republic of North Macedonia. The ISI is grounded in Bennett's 6-stage Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), delineating between ethnocentric and ethno-relativistic stages. The initial three stages – Denial, Defense, and Minimization are

characterized by ethnocentric perspectives while the latter three stages – Acceptance, Adaptation, and Integration reflect ethno-relativistic viewpoints.

The authors incorporated additional components to assess global competence, encompassing substantive knowledge (comprising understanding of cultures, languages, world affairs, etc.), perceptual understanding (including traits such as openness of mind, flexibility, and resistance to stereotyping), and intercultural communication skills (such as adaptation, cultural empathy, and mediation). According to Williams (2005), certain questions within the domain of intercultural awareness (ICA) directly address intercultural communication, prompting individuals to self-assess on aspects such as “I can act as a cultural mediator and serve as a bridge between people of different cultures” and “I feel self-confident and comfortable socializing with people from other cultures” (p. 361). The Intercultural Sensitivity Index can be used to identify at what DMIS stage an individual is, thereby predicting attitudes and behaviors common to people of that cognitive stage (Williams, 2005). The ISI’s Cronbach’s alpha value was 0.937 which indicates an excellent internal consistency of the questionnaire (Taber, 2018).

**Table 2**  
*Instrument Reliability Analysis*

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>No of Items</b>	<b>Cronbach’s alpha</b>
Ethnocentrism	13	0.79
Ethnorelativism	11	0.87
Substantive Knowledge	7	0.92
Perceptual Understanding	6	0.77
Intercultural Communication	11	0.87
ISI	48	0.937

### *Data Collection and Data Analysis*

In collaboration with school principals, an online link containing the questionnaire was sent to 300 primary school teachers. Ultimately, 217 complete responses were obtained, yielding a valid response rate of 72.33%. Participants self-rated their responses on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, denoting degrees of agreement: 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Subsequently, the collected data were entered into SPSS v. 25 software for analysis. The reliability of the ISI was tested using Cronbach’s Alpha. The normality of variable distribution was tested using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The SPSS operation “Recode into Different Variables” was conducted to condense 5 variables into two variables. Descriptive statistical analyses were employed to ascertain data characteristics, and mean comparisons were conducted using the t-test. At the significance level of  $p < 0.05$ , the statistical significance of the mean differences



was tested. Arithmetic means were interpreted based on predefined intervals: 1.00 – 1.79 denoted ‘very low’, 1.80 – 2.59 ‘low’, 2.60 – 3.39 ‘middling’, 3.40 – 4.19 ‘high’, and 4.20 – 5.00 ‘very high’ (Polat & Ogay Barka, 2014, p. 28).

## Results

The level of intercultural sensitivity was assessed based on teachers’ self-assessment using two stages of the ISI: the ethnocentric stage encompassing denial, defense, and minimization, and the ethnorelativist stage comprising acceptance, adaptation, and integration. The ISI ethnocentrism scale comprised 13 items (4 items for denial, 5 items for defense and 4 items for minimization). The internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach’s Alpha) of the ethnocentrism self-assessment scale for teachers was determined to be 0.902 which indicates a reliable internal consistency of this scale (Taber, 2018). It is pertinent to note that lower means across all three stages indicate a higher level of intercultural sensitivity in terms of ethnocentrism. The results of teachers’ self-assessment regarding their levels of ethnocentrism are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3**  
*Teachers’ Self-Assessed Ethnocentrism Levels*

STAGE	N	M	SD
Denial	217	2.80	1.098
Defense	217	2.38	1.146
Minimization	217	3.43	1.106
<b>ETHNOCENTRISM</b>	217	2.87	.943

As illustrated in Table 3, teachers exhibited a lower mean in the defense stage ( $M = 2.38$ ,  $SD = 1.146$ ), followed by the denial stage ( $M = 2.80$ ,  $SD = 1.098$ ), and the highest mean was observed in the minimization stage ( $M = 3.43$ ,  $SD = 1.106$ ). Based on the predefined interval for mean interpretation, it can be inferred that teachers in the denial stage displayed a middling level of ethnocentrism, indicative of a middling level of intercultural sensitivity. Conversely, in the defense stage, they demonstrated a low level of ethnocentrism, suggesting a high level of intercultural sensitivity, whereas in the minimization stage, they exhibited a high level of ethnocentrism, signifying a low level of intercultural sensitivity. These findings imply that teachers in North Macedonia possess a middling level of ethnocentrism and are situated at the Minimization stage. Consequently, the level of teachers’ intercultural sensitivity on the ethnocentrism scale of the ISI was determined to be middling ( $M = 2.87$ ,  $SD = .943$ ).



The impact of teachers' prior intercultural education on their level of ethnocentrism was assessed using Independent-Samples t-test. The results, as depicted in Table 4, revealed a statistically significant difference in ethnocentrism levels among teachers. Specifically, teachers with prior intercultural education exhibited lower ethnocentrism levels ( $M = 2.67, SD = .800, p < .05$ ) compared to those without such education ( $M = 3.68, SD = 1.053, p < .05$ ). Furthermore, teachers with intercultural education displayed significantly lower ethnocentrism across all three stages of the ethnocentrism scale – denial, defense, and minimization ( $M = 2.61, SD = .958, p < .05$ ;  $M = 2.16, SD = .947, p < .05$ ;  $M = 3.25, SD = 1.066, p < .05$ ), compared to their counterparts without prior intercultural education ( $M = 3.59, SD = 1.278, p < .05$ ;  $M = 3.27, SD = 1.435, p < .05$ ;  $M = 4.17, SD = .957, p < .05$ ).

These findings suggest that prior intercultural education, including education received during initial training, specialized training, or independent study, influences teachers' ethnocentrism levels, thereby affecting their intercultural sensitivity. Explicitly, teachers who have undergone intercultural education before demonstrate a middling level of intercultural sensitivity on the ethnocentrism scale of the ISI, while those without such education exhibit a low level of intercultural sensitivity. Notably, both groups of teachers are positioned at the Minimization stage.

**Table 4**

*Impact of Intercultural Education on Teachers' Ethnocentrism Levels*

STAGE	Teachers with Intercultural Education (N = 174)		Teachers without Intercultural Education (N = 43)		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Denial	2.61	.958	3.59	1.278	-5.585	.000*
Defense	2.16	.947	3.27	1.435	-6.124	.000*
Minimization	3.25	1.066	4.17	.957	-5.174	.000*
<b>ETHNOCENTRISM</b>	2.67	.800	3.68	1.053	-6.873	.000*

\* $p < .05$

The ISI's ethnorelativism scale comprises 11 items (acceptance – 4 items, adaptation – 4 items, integration – 3 items). The internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach Alpha) of the ethnorelativism self-assessment scale for teachers was determined to be 0.914, indicating strong internal consistency of this scale (Taber, 2018). It is important to note that in the ethnorelativism scale, the highest possible mean across all three stages signifies a higher level of intercultural sensitivity. The results of teachers' self-evaluation regarding their levels of ethnorelativism are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5**  
*Teachers' Self-Assessed Ethnorelativism Levels*

STAGE	N	M	SD
Acceptance	217	3.82	1.033
Adaptation	217	3.31	1.079
Integration	217	3.17	1.016
<b>ETHNORELATIVISM</b>	217	3.44	.908

Descriptive statistics indicate that teachers attained the highest mean ( $M = 3.82$ ,  $SD = 1.033$ ) at the Acceptance stage, followed by the Adaptation stage ( $M = 3.31$ ,  $SD = 1.079$ ), and the lowest mean ( $M = 3.17$ ,  $SD = 1.016$ ) at the Integration stage. The overall mean score on the Ethnorelativism scale of the ISI was ( $M = 3.44$ ,  $SD = .743$ ). Based on these scores, it can be inferred that teachers demonstrated a high level of ethnorelativism or intercultural sensitivity at the Acceptance stage, while displaying a middling level of ethnorelativism or intercultural sensitivity at both the Adaptation and Integration stages. These results suggest that teachers in North Macedonia exhibit a high level of ethnorelativism and are positioned at the Acceptance stage, which follows the Minimization stage in the ethnocentrism stage of the ISI. Consequently, the level of intercultural sensitivity of teachers on the Ethnorelativism scale of the ISI was determined to be high ( $M = 3.44$ ,  $SD = .743$ ).

The results of the t-test (Table 6) revealed a statistically significant difference in the level of intercultural sensitivity between teachers on the ISI's ethnorelativism scale. Specifically, teachers who had undergone intercultural education exhibited a higher level of intercultural sensitivity ( $M = 3.56$ ,  $SD = .786$ ,  $p < .05$ ) compared to those who had not received intercultural education ( $M = 2.94$ ,  $SD = 1.174$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

**Table 6**  
*Impact of Intercultural Education on Teachers' Ethnorelativism Levels*

STAGE	Teachers with Intercultural Education (N = 174)		Teachers without Intercultural Education (N = 43)		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Acceptance	3.99	.832	3.12	1.416	5.294	.000*
Adaptation	3.40	.991	2.97	1.338	2.357	.019*
Integration	3.28	.970	2.73	1.089	3.277	.001*
<b>ETHNORELATIVISM</b>	3.56	.786	2.94	1.174	4.161	.000*

\* $p < .05$

Teachers who have undergone intercultural education exhibit a statistically higher level of intercultural sensitivity across all three stages of the ISI's ethnorelativism scale – Acceptance, Adaptation, and Integration ( $M = 3.99, SD = .832, p < .05$ ;  $M = 3.40, SD = .991, p < .05$ ;  $M = 3.28, SD = .970, p < .05$ ) compared to teachers without intercultural education ( $M = 3.12, SD = 1.416, p < .05$ ;  $M = 2.97, SD = 1.338, p < .05$ ;  $M = 2.73, SD = 1.089, p < .05$ ). These findings suggest that intercultural education positively influences teachers' intercultural sensitivity levels. Teachers who have undergone intercultural education demonstrate a high level of intercultural sensitivity in the stage of ethnorelativism, whereas teachers without prior intercultural education exhibit a middling level of intercultural sensitivity. Notably, the two teacher groups, regardless of their intercultural education background, are positioned at the Acceptance stage in the ISI's Ethnorelativism scale.

Descriptive statistics unveiled that the overall global competence of teachers was middling ( $M = 3.36, SD = .762$ ). The t-test showed no statistically significant difference in global competence levels between the two groups of teachers. However, it is noteworthy that teachers without intercultural education displayed slightly higher levels of substantive knowledge and perceptual understanding in comparison to teachers with prior intercultural education. With regard to intercultural communication, teachers with intercultural education demonstrated a higher level of competence compared to their counterparts.

**Table 7**

*Impact of Intercultural Education on Teachers' Global Competence Levels*

Dimension	Teachers with Intercultural Education (N = 174)		Teachers without Intercultural Education (N = 43)		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
	Substantive Knowledge	3.42	.951	3.57		
Perceptual Understanding	3.17	.851	3.28	.882	-.717	.474
Intercultural Communication	3.47	.844	3.33	1.280	.853	.395
Global Competence	3.35	.711	3.39	.949	.293	.769

## Discussion and Conclusion

The research findings indicated that the level of intercultural sensitivity among teachers in North Macedonia is middling, which aligns with the survey results of Polat & Ogay Barka (2014), showing middling levels of intercultural competence among pre-service teachers from Switzerland and Turkey. The Olson and Kroeger (2001) study

also revealed a middling level of intercultural sensitivity among university teachers in the USA (see Table I, p. 125). North Macedonian teachers in the Denial stage demonstrated a middling level of intercultural sensitivity, while those in the Defense stage exhibited a low level, and those in the stage of Minimization displayed a high level of intercultural sensitivity. Arithmetic calculations of the three ethnocentric stages revealed that teachers on the ethnocentrism side of the scale demonstrate a middling level of intercultural sensitivity and are positioned at the stage of Minimization. Similarly, Mahon's (2006) research positioned teachers at the Minimization stage, whereas Grossman and Yuen's (2006) study indicated that 55% of school teachers were at the lowest stages on the ethnocentrism side of the scale (Denial or Defense), and 43% were at the Minimization stage. In the Olson and Kroeger (2001) study, the teachers' overall score on the ethnocentrism scale was found to be low ( $M = 2.1$ ), indicating a high level of intercultural sensitivity. Regarding the Ethnorelativism side of the scale, teachers at the Acceptance stage demonstrated a high level of intercultural sensitivity, while those in the Adaptation and Integration stages exhibited a middling level. Teachers at the ethnorelativism stage demonstrate a high level of intercultural sensitivity and are positioned at the Acceptance stage. These positions suggest that North Macedonian teachers are progressing towards the stage of Ethnorelativism. Olson & Kroeger's (2001) research results showed that 69% of teachers self-assessed with 4 or 5 in the Acceptance stage, and 44% self-assessed with 4 or 5 at the Integration stage. Notably, no respondents rated themselves highly in the Denial or Defense stages, and only 10% rated themselves highly in the Minimization stage, indicating that teachers are positioned at the Acceptance stage of the ISI's ethnorelativism scale.

Findings also indicated that the intercultural education received by teachers during initial education, professional development, and independent intercultural studies affects their level of intercultural sensitivity. Teachers who have undergone intercultural education demonstrated a lower level of ethnocentrism in all three stages – Denial, Defense, and Minimization – compared to those who have not received intercultural education. The analysis of the results showed that teachers with prior intercultural education in the ethnocentrism stage of ISI exhibit a middling level of intercultural sensitivity, while those without such education demonstrate a low level of intercultural sensitivity. Conversely, teachers with intercultural education display a statistically higher level of ethnorelativism in all three stages – Acceptance, Adaptation, and Integration compared to teachers without intercultural education. Additionally, the analysis revealed that teachers with prior intercultural education in the ethnorelativism stage of ISI exhibit a high level of intercultural sensitivity, while those without such education demonstrate a middling level of intercultural sensitivity. In support of this, Penbek et al.'s (2012) study suggested that “students who had a previous international experience are more open-minded and respectful to behaviors of different cultures” (p. 10), with university students who had such experiences showing a higher

level of intercultural sensitivity compared to those who did not. Moreover, Anderson et al. (2006) found that participation in international educational programs, such as attending four weeks of seminars, positively impacts the intercultural sensitivity of university students. However, Pappamihel's (2004) research indicated that even after taking a course on intercultural education, university students exhibited low levels of intercultural sensitivity.

The research uncovered intriguing findings regarding the three dimensions of teachers' global competence. Surprisingly, teachers without any prior intercultural education exhibited slightly higher global competence than those with previous intercultural education in the dimensions of Substantive Knowledge and Perceptual Understanding, while displaying a higher level in Intercultural Communication. Contrary to expectations, the overall global competence of teachers was found to be middling ( $M = 3.36$ ). This finding is noteworthy, particularly considering that one in five teachers had no prior intercultural education or experience. It contrasts with the study by Olson and Kroeger (2001), which reported a high overall global competence of teachers ( $M = 3.67$ ). Sokal and Parmigiani (2022) found that students' engagement with global competence increased over their program years, rather than with birth year. This suggests that students develop higher global competence from specific experiences during their teacher education program rather than solely from life experience. The authors express concern that despite spending their last two years of the B.Ed. program in pedagogy-focused courses and completing 32 full weeks of practicum placements, teachers do not show increased actions related to global competence in the later years of their programs.

The unexpected findings on teachers' global competence call for more research on educational interventions beyond traditional coursework and practicums. Longitudinal studies could show how global competence evolves over time and reveal strategies to sustain it. Investigating the role of institutional support and curriculum design in integrating intercultural sensitivity and global competence into teaching could inform policy. The research also highlights the need to include intercultural education in teacher training and encourage independent exploration of intercultural issues. Given the high reliability of the ISI ( $\alpha = .937$ ), further studies should assess intercultural sensitivity and global competence among teachers.

## Limitations

The study's limitations include the exclusion of respondents from North Macedonia's eastern region and potential misunderstandings due to the use of two languages, which may have affected the intercultural sensitivity and global competence results. In addition, while the scales utilized in this study have been tested across diverse cultural

contexts by numerous researchers, it is possible that some statements included in the scales may not align with the cultural orientations of the sampled population.

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# Tarpkultūrinio ugdymo poveikio pradinių klasių mokytojų tarpkultūrinio jautrumo lygiui tyrimas: Šiaurės Makedonijos duomenys

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## Santrauka

Šio tyrimo tikslas – ištirti tarpkultūrinio ugdymo poveikį mokytojų tarpkultūrinio jautrumo lygiui, daugiausia dėmesio skiriant dviem pagrindinėms dimensijoms: etnocentrizmui ir etnoreliatyvizmui. Buvo siekiama atsakyti į tyrimo klausimus: 1) ar egzistuoja etnocentrizmo lygio skirtumai tarp tarpkultūrinį švietimą baigusiu ir jo nebaigusiu mokytojų ir 2) ar egzistuoja etnoreliatyvizmo lygio skirtumai tarp tarpkultūrinį švietimą baigusiu ir jo nebaigusiu mokytojų. Tarpkultūrinio jautrumo indeksas (angl. *ISI*) buvo taikomas 217 pradinių mokyklų mokytojų, dirbančių daugiataučiuose Šiaurės Makedonijos Respublikos regionuose, imčiai. Dalyviai save vertino pagal Likerto skalę nuo 1 (visiškai nesutinku) iki 5 (visiškai sutinku). Siekiant įvertinti mokytojų tarpkultūrinio jautrumo lygį, buvo apskaičiuoti balų vidurkiai. Be to, statistiškai reikšmingiems skirtumams tarp abiejų mokytojų grupių palyginti naudotas t-testas. Tarpkultūrinį išsilavinimą gavę mokytojai pasižymėjo didesniu tarpkultūrinio jautrumu visuose etnocentrizmo ir etnoreliatyvizmo etapuose, palyginti su tokio išsilavinimo neturinčiais mokytojais. Pažymėtina, kad abi mokytojų grupės, nepriklausomai nuo tarpkultūrinio ugdymo patirties, buvo linkusios patekti į tarpkultūrinio jautrumo indekso (angl. *ISI*) etnocentrizmo skalės „minimizavimo“ stadiją ir į etnoreliatyvizmo skalės „priėmimo“ stadiją. Tyrimas parodė, kad švietimo įstaigos turėtų siūlyti mokytojams daugiau tarpkultūrinio ugdymo mokymų.

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**Esminiai žodžiai:** *tarpkultūrinis ugdymas, tarpkultūrinis jautrumas, etnocentrizmas, etnoreliatyvizmas, mokytojas.*

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