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## The Intercultural Approach in the Teaching Materials in Primary Albanian Schools in Ferizaj and Serbian Schools in Shteprece

Feride Lohaj PhD\*

*College UNIVERSUM, 156 Fan Noli, Ferizaj 70000, Kosova*

*Email: fl21370@seeu.edu.mk*

### Abstract

The results of this survey determine the stages of interculturalism of the school principals, teachers and students, the attitude toward the intercultural education, and the opinion of students about giving priority to learning English language to the languages of other ethnicities in Kosova. This work would proof hypotheses that applying intercultural education in classrooms can raise learners' success in English language learning. Furthermore, intercultural education can help develop better relationship between all three ethnic groups, and finally, that English language can be a communication tool between all three ethnic groups which currently live isolated from each other. It shows to what extent prejudice of students influences English language learning; what is the attitude toward English language learning at all three communities and a stage of students' intercultural competence, and whether the intercultural education is applied in English language classes by all three communities. The study conducted using quantitative and qualitative research methodologies with the use of instruments such as a questionnaire which determined student's attitude toward English language and English speakers' culture as well as their intercultural competence, and a test which assessed current knowledge of English language. This study deals with students of the fifth grade of the three elementary schools; Serbian elementary school "Staja Marković" in Shterpce, Roma class in elementary school "Naim Frashëri" in Zaskok and Albanian elementary school "Ali Hadri" in Mirash. The participants of this research were students of three fifth grade classes. From each school, one class participated; the ages of the students were 10 to 11 years old. This is their third year of English language learning.

**Keywords:** interculturalism; Kosova; cultural differences; primary school; English language.

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\* Corresponding author.

## **1. Introduction**

People vary in their ability to recognize and accept cultural differences. This can be said for society as a whole. Bennett's developmental model of intercultural sensitivity [1] describes the stages that people go through when faced with difficulties in the encounter with other cultures. These stages were used to determine intercultural competences of Serbian, Albanian and Roma communities in Kosova. Refinement in the treatment of cultural differences developed from the stage of denying the existence of differences, i.e. End of ethnocentrism, to the stages of identifying and accepting cultural differences Bennett called *etnorelativism*. Bennett's developmental model of intercultural sensitivity distinguishes three basic stages of ethnocentrism and three stages *etnorelativism*, within each of them several development sub-stages.

### ***1.1. What is multiculturalism?***

According to the Grupa Most [2] "Multiculturalism is cultural diversity of human society, considering language, religion, values and socioeconomic circumstances." Society of Kosova is multicultural, there are Albanians, Serbs, Turkey, Roma, Bosnian, and Egyptian communities who have been habited this area for centuries. They lived together, in bad times, as in time of war or poverty, they have helped each other, but they never went as far as to mix with each other and become new nation, all these communities have kept their cultural, religious identity. After the war, in Kosova, it seems that the existing multiculturalism has not found its way to interculturalism. The ethnicities that live in Kosova mostly do not interact with each other. One of the reasons is lack of the knowledge of other ethnicity language. English language can be a "bridge" between the ethnicities, and the culture of people of USA can show the way of joint living, what can ensure stability in this area.

### ***1.2. What is interculturalism?***

According to Grupa Most [2] "Interculturalism expresses interaction of various cultures and belief that every man becomes richer through contacts with other cultures." With this study, we attempted to determine the stages of intercultural competence in the classrooms in order to develop an action plan with which we can apply in the best way interculturalism in the classrooms, and through the classrooms in the daily social life in Kosova. The level of intercultural competence was determined with aid of questionnaires and tests.

### ***1.3. Multiculturalism in a classroom***

Multiculturalism in classroom means assisting children to recognize differences, as well as similarities, among all people. Once the multiculturalism understanding is determined, there can be developed activity plans which can develop and maintain multicultural awareness in all three ethnic groups. Multiculturalism almost does not exist in our classrooms. There are very few schools with mixed communities, and there is none school where Albanian and Serbian students learn together. With the prepared questionnaire we attempted to understand at what level is the students understanding of other cultures here in Kosova and the culture of English speaking nations.

### ***1.4. Interculturalism in a classroom***

One premise of intercultural education is that teaching and learning are cultural processes that take place within a social context. Culture influences and shapes all that we do, including many, if not all, of the dimensions of learning and teaching processes employed in schools. Interculturalism in the schools is important because of raising a quality of life perspective, further social advance of learners and maintaining of safe and secure environment in Kosova. Together with English language learning, learning of the culture of English language speakers can have very important impact in whole social situation in Kosova. Existing multiculturalism and interculturalism in USA can be the guidance to our communities in order to establish a healthy and productive relationship based on respect, tolerance and understanding. This aim can be achieved by teaching the learners a culture of other ethnicities by giving examples from USA social life. The participants of this research were the fifth grade students, they were students from three different schools, Albanian students from elementary school "Ali Hadri" in Mirash, the fifth grade Roma students from elementary school "Naim Frashëri" in Zaskok, and the fifth grade Serbian students from elementary school "Staja Marković" in Shterpce. They were chosen for research because they have been enough old to understand cultural features of their own ethnicity, but also have been 'open' for new possibilities. This research determines the stage of interculturalism in the English language class, to what extent prejudice of students influences English language learning; furthermore, it determines the attitude toward English language learning at all three communities and whether the culture of English speaking nations is taught in the schools. Also, it examines what approaches to EFL have all three ethnic groups, it investigates how do that approach affect EFL learning and analyzes the behavior of students toward EFL. Previous studies and research There are many researches of multiculturalism and interculturalism around the world, but there are few which cover Kosova area. One of them is research done by Dr. Roland Tormey [3], Centre for Educational Disadvantage Research, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick published in "Intercultural Education in the Primary School." This research covers all countries from former Yugoslavia. The other one is that of Jasmina Djordjevic [4] in Intercultural Communicative English Language Teaching. The study was conducted in the south of Serbia. The participants in the study were students of different ethnicity, such as Serbian, Albanian, and Bulgarian. Dogancay – Aktuna [5] describes how information about intercultural communication that is integrated into the training methodology can encourage better awareness of socio-cultural relativity of trained teachers, and facilitates their reflection on their preconceived notions of how they make methodological decisions. Before they make any methodological decision teachers have to complete need analysis in order to determine level of the actual intercultural competence of the learners and what are the needs of that particular class, as a result of diversity, there are different approaches in different classes even if they are in the same school. Due to this, teachers conduct their classes equipped with approaches and techniques they assume to be proper for successful language learning, trying to meet learners expectations. Furthermore, it would appear that developing intercultural competence depends on learning situations and qualifications which cannot be taught, as long as school itself does not provide the learners with opportunities for participating successfully in real situations..." That experience can be provided also with help of learners' parents who can actively cooperate and with schools' management and Ministry of Education with joint classes, competitions or picnics.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1. Research Questions**

1. To what extent prejudice of students influences English language learning?
2. What is the attitude toward English language learning at all three communities?
3. Is intercultural education applied in English language classes by all three communities?

## **2.2. Research Hypotheses**

1. Prejudice toward English language natives influence largely English language learning.
2. All three communities have positive attitude toward English language learning.
3. Intercultural education is not enough applied in English language class.

## **2.3. Participants**

The participants of this study were students of the fifth grade of the three elementary schools, a Serbian elementary school “Staja Marković” in Shterpce, 23 students; a Roma class in elementary school “Naim Frashëri” in Zaskok, 28 students; Albanian elementary school “Ali Hadri” in Mirash, 39 students. The participants of this research were students of three fifth grade classes. From each school, one class participated; age of the students was 10 to 11 years old. This is their third year of English language learning. The other participants were the principals of all three schools and teachers of all three classes.

## **2.4. Research instruments: in this research, as instruments were used**

The research study was done with the following instruments:

Interviews with the English, Albanian and Serbian language teachers and principals served me to gather relevant information from English language teachers from Serbian and Albanian community, and the principals about the interculturalism in their teaching and school managing process. The questions for interviews are adopted and adapted from the research work ‘Exploring interculturally competent teaching in social sciences classrooms’ [6]. The maximum points were 25, and the points supposed for each intercultural level of competence are as followed:

Integration	25
Adaption	20-24
Acceptance	16-19
Minimizing	11-15
Defense	6-10

Denial 5

Anonymous Questionnaire helped me to gather information about the students. The questionnaire was given to the students and contained different questions related to intercultural competence that students have; questions about their English teachers in Albanian, Serbian and Roma classes and about applying of interculturalism in their classes. The maximum points were 30, and the points supposed for each intercultural level of competence are as followed:

Integration	30
Adaption	25-29
Acceptance	21-24
Minimizing	16-20
Defense	11-15
Denial	10

English language test helped us to understand and compare what level of English language are students from all three groups. There are 20 questions and maximum points are 20.

Grading was as followed:

Grade 5 (the highest grade)	18-20
Grade 4	14-17
Grade 3	10-13
Grade 2	6-9
Grade 1(failure)	0-5 points

### **3. Findings**

The data collected in this research has provided us with specific information about interculturalism in English language classes in Albanian, Serbian and Roma classes. The teachers' and principals' interview, the students' questionnaire and the test results are presented below separately. According to Bennett [7] there are different stages of intercultural competence which are specified with the different levels which are explained below:

#### **3.1. Principals' Interview**

Principals' interviews gave us the opportunity to be more familiar about the intercultural competence in the schools in general. The attitude of the Serbian and Albanian school principals toward the interculturalism was in a high level, while the Roma principal was in the stage of Acceptance. The interview with all three principals showed that there is similarity between them toward the interculturalism at schools. The replies on the first statement "I am truly open to those from different cultural, socio-economic and religious backgrounds at my school." showed that all three principals pointed out that they are very open, and moreover they support these kinds of diversity. The reply on the second statement "I do not prejudice students or situations and do not make quick assumptions about a student", showed that all three principals stated that they try not to prejudice students and situations. The reply on the third question "I do not measure a student's behavior based on my own culturally conditioned expectations and I try to understand a student's behavior based on his or her own culturally conditioned background?", showed that all three principals measure students behavior based on students' culturally conditioned background. The reply on the fourth question "I value those from different backgrounds even when I may disagree with their beliefs and opinions", showed that there is a lack of tolerance toward diversity of beliefs and opinions. The reply on the fifth question "I am eager to learn about my students' backgrounds and experiences?" showed that principals in Serbian and Albanian schools are eager to learn about their students' background, while the Principal of Roma class thought that it is not necessary.

### ***3.2. Teachers' Interviews***

Teachers' interviews gave us opportunity to be more familiar with intercultural competence in the classes. They showed us that though the teachers claimed to have intercultural competence they did not apply it enough in their classes. The replies on the first statement "I know a lot about cultural backgrounds of the other ethnicities which live in Kosova" showed that there is a limited knowledge of cultural background of other ethnicities. The replies on the second statement "I incorporate Albanian, Serbian or Roma cultural features in the other two ethnicity classes." showed that there is no incorporation of other ethnicity cultural features in the class. The replies on the third statement "I incorporate English speakers' culture features in the class." showed that the culture of English native speakers is incorporated in course books and taught as a part of lessons. The replies on the fourth statement "I organize joint classes with other ethnicity members." showed that there is no interaction between those three ethnicities at the schools. The replies on the fifth statement "I adapt course books in order to incorporate the other ethnicities cultural features in the class." showed that there is no attempt to adapt course books in order to incorporate the other ethnicity cultural features by none of the teachers.

### ***3.3. Students' Questionnaire***

Additionally, the questionnaire was used to bring out information about students' level of intercultural competences. The data gave us the opportunity to analyze and compare students' answers, what mirrors real situation in our schools. According to these results it is shown that there is a low level of intercultural competence of the fifth grade students. The answers on the first question "Do I know personally any member of other ethnicity?" showed that a majority of Albanians knew somebody from other ethnicity, and all Roma students knew somebody from other ethnicity, but only 1/3 of Serbs new somebody from other ethnicity. The answers on the second question "Do I speak language of other ethnicities that live in Kosova?" showed that all

Roma students speak at least one language of other ethnicity, about 1/3 Albanian students speak at least one language of other ethnicities. Serbian students speak only their native language. The answers on the third question “Do I think I need to learn the language of other ethnicities in Kosova?” showed that most of Albanian, all Roma and small number of Serbian students think they need to learn language of other ethnicities. The answers on the fourth question “Do I prefer more learning of English language than learning other Kosova ethnicity languages?” showed that almost all students prefer more learning of English language. The answers on the fifth question “How would I communicate with other ethnicity members; in English language, in their native language or in my native language?” showed that most students prefer to communicate in English language. The answers on the sixth question “Would I like to learn other Kosova ethnicities’ languages at the school?” almost half of students of Albanian and Serbian ethnicity would like to learn language of other ethnicity, while all Roma students would like to learn other ethnicity language at school. The answers on the seventh question “Do I think that knowing English language is enough to build a relationship with other Kosova ethnicity members?”, showed that a large number of Albanian and Serbian students think that English language is enough to build a relationship with other Kosova ethnicity members, only Roma students could not decide. The answers on the eighth question “Would I go in the same school with other Kosova ethnicities?” showed that most of the students are not ready to go to the same school with other ethnicities. The Roma students were definitely positive that they do not mind going in the same school with other ethnicities. The answers on the ninth question, “Would I take part in joint English language classes with other Kosova ethnicities?” showed that about half of Albanian students and all Roma students would like to participate in joint English language classes, while Serbian students are not ready to do so. The answers on the tenth question, “Would I more prefer going to separate schools than other Kosova ethnicities and not learning anything about their cultural features?” showed that most of Albanian and all Roma students would rather go to mixed schools and learn about other ethnicities, in contrary to that, Serbian students think they should live isolated from other ethnicities.

### ***3.4. Students’ Test***

Students’ test showed the level of English language of the students. The test was appropriate for the five-grade and was borrowed from the students’ book. It had 20 multiple choice questions. The results of the test showed that in Albanian class average of grades was 3.44, in Serbian class it was 3.74, and in Roma class it was 3.36.

### ***3.5. The Comparison of Results***

At this part of the study, the comparison of the overall results is presented, beginning from the principals’ interviews, teachers’ interviews, continuing to students’ questionnaires and finally the test.

#### ***3.5.1. The Comparison of Principals’ Interviews***

There were five questions to be answered, and from the answers we can see that the stage of interculturalism which was achieved by Albanian school principal was adaption, by Serbian school principal it was adaption and by Roma School’s principal the stages were those of acceptance.

#### ***3.5.2. The Comparison of Teachers’ Interviews***

The five answers on the question determined interculturality of the teachers as followed: Albanian English language teacher was in the stages of defense, while Serbian English language teacher was in the stage of minimizing and finally, Roma English language teacher according to his answers was in the stage of minimizing.

### ***3.5.3. The Comparison of Students' Questionnaire***

The answers of students' questionnaire define the intercultural stage of the students. Albanian students were on the stage of Minimizing, Serbian students were on the stage of Minimizing and finally Roma students were on the stage of Adaption.

### ***3.5.4. The Comparison of the results of Students' Tests***

The results of the students' tests show clearly that there is a small difference between results of Albanian and Roma class while Serbian class has the best result. The questionnaires, interviews and tests gave us valuable information about current level of interculturalism which is not satisfactory at all. But it opens opportunity to react and adapt our school curriculum, lesson plans and incorporate additional activities in the classroom and outside in order to raise the intercultural level of the students in the English language class.

## **4. Conclusion**

The study was accepted very well from the participants. In general, they answered according to their opinion, and their answers were not influenced by any of other participant or somebody else.

### ***4.1. Conclusions from the Principals interview***

In the answers of the principals it can be seen that the principals are on the different stage of intercultural competence. The principal from Albanian school showed more attitudes toward multi-cultural view of the world; he respects other cultures and is curious to learn more about other ethnicities who live in Kosova. His level of interculturalism is adaptation what shows that he is ready to accept differences and to adapt his behavior in order to fit the new situation if needed. The principal from the Serbian school had strong attitude toward finding the way for communication with other ethnicities, but he showed limited interest in customizing the behavior of other cultures, he also preferred intentionally separation from other cultures in order to maintain the value of their own culture. The principal of the Roma school, who is Albanian, felt belittled and thought that Roma students have not had the opportunity to be in contact with other cultures. Since his intercultural level is on the level of acceptance, in the way of behavioral relativism; he accepts the differences in the behavioral-level. His behavior changes in order to fit his students' cultural context.

### ***4.2. Conclusion from the Teachers interview***

Contrary to the principal of his school, the teacher from Albanian school showed low stage of intercultural competence, precisely on the level of defense in the way of disdain; he treat other cultures as inferior, using



quite insulting language in their description and apply negative stereotypes of the other cultural groups. Both, the teacher from the Serbian and Roma schools were on the stage of minimizing, presenting the view of transcendental universalism, which means that all people are the same, thanks to the spiritual, political and other similarities. Furthermore, Serbian teacher had strong attitude toward the position of his ethnicity in society, claiming that his students have not had the opportunity to be in contact with other cultures. Finally, the teacher from Roma school had readiness to communicate with other ethnicity, but has found himself in inferior position toward other ethnicities.

#### ***4.3. Conclusion from the Students questionnaire***

According to the questionnaire, Albanian and Serbian students were on the stage of Minimizing, while Roma students were on the stage of adaption. Furthermore, though Albanian and Roma students showed high willingness of integration, and acceptance, Serbian students showed less interest on that, they preferred separation explaining it, actually as forced isolation.

#### ***4.4. Conclusion from the students test***

Since the curricula of all schools are similar, Albanian and Serbian classes showed similar results though the Serbian class showed the best results, while Roma students showed lower level of language knowledge. Regarding the first hypothesis, by analyzing the questionnaire, it is not proven that prejudice toward English language natives influence largely English language learning. Though Albanian students adore Americans, while Serbian students do not have such positive feelings toward them, both groups of students are in similar level of English language proficiency, on the other side, the Roma students like Americans a lot; however, they are on lower level of English language proficiency than Serbian students. Regarding the second hypothesis, test and questionnaire showed that the students from all three ethnicities have had similar interest in learning English language in order to use it by communication with other ethnicities that live in Kosova and for the future contacts with foreigners. Regarding the third hypothesis, there are some cultural elements included in lessons, but only of English speaking native's culture; except some Albanian and Serbian names there is nothing about cultures of ethnicities that live in Kosova. There are various cultural stereotypes of American and English culture in general, but very few typical of Albanian or Serbian ethnicity and none of Roma ethnicity. Regarding the first research question, according to the students' answers on questionnaire and results of the test, the prejudice of the students does not affect their learning and their learning outcomes. Regarding the second research question, the students of all three communities showed more willingness for learning English language than the languages of other communities that live here in Kosova. Regarding the third research question, the teachers' answers showed that they do not have enough knowledge about other ethnicities, so they are not able to make lesson plans which will incorporate interculturalism in their classes.

### **5. Recommendations**

Information from this study to be used in Kosova and Serbian Curricula in order to fill communication gap between the ethnicities that live in Kosova. The Serbian and Kosova ministries of education should create a

joint group of English language teachers, psychologists and sociologists from Serb and Albanian community who will design the new English Language textbooks that contain many features of cultures of ethnicities that live in Kosova, in order to increase intercultural level of them. Those textbooks will be additional to already existing textbooks. They can be designed using the facts from this study. Since the school year contains 9 months and Improving English, English Language for 1st year, English Language for the 3rd and 4th year contained 9 units; ESL textbooks should contain 9 Units. Average number of reading and listening tasks per unit should be around 6. Category of the culture should be source culture, but texts should be written in EL. Type of the culture and themes should be justified to current types of the culture and themes, but with elements of source cultures. Moreover, the joint themes should be matter of discussion, but other themes presented in only one of the EL textbooks should be used for presentation, in addition at the end of the Unit should be a quiz or questionnaire which would stimulate students to learn about source cultures presented in that unit.

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