

INSIGHTS FROM EXPLORING PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ON CORE CHARACTERISTICS OF INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION

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Abstract. This research explored the impact of variables including school cultural structure, level of education, and teaching experience on primary school teachers' perceptions of the core characteristics of intercultural education. Two separate scales from Bedeković's (2011) Survey Questionnaire were administered to 217 primary school teachers in the Republic of North Macedonia. The scale's reliability coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha) was found to be 0.67 and 0.92, respectively. Statistical analyses, including T-tests and ANOVA, were conducted to examine potential differences in teachers' perceptions based on the explored variables. The findings revealed statistically significant differences in perceptions of the key definition of interculturality ($t=-4.381$, $p=.000$) as well as the objectives of intercultural education ($t=-3.532$, $p=0.001$) between teachers in multicultural and monocultural schools. Continuous professional development on cultural diversity is imperative for teachers.

Keywords: teacher training; cultural diversity; intercultural education; perceptions; multicultural schools

Introduction

Multiculturalism and interculturalism, often used interchangeably in immigration contexts, describe relations between different nations and ethnic communities. Multiculturalism emphasizes the coexistence of diverse cultures, recognizing similarities and differences (Portera 2008). In contrast, interculturalism highlights dynamic cultural interaction and exchange (Piršl 2001), promoting active dialogue, mutual respect, and new cultural syntheses (Meer & Modood 2012). While the Council of Europe views multiculturalism as cultural plurality, interculturalism is seen as an active process of social integration (Beacco 2017). Intercultural education in Europe has evolved to emphasize equitable access, cultural and

linguistic rights, and minority inclusion through human rights and democratic citizenship education, alongside the development of intercultural competencies (Jurgilè 2019). In North Macedonia, intercultural education is vital due to its ethnic diversity. The education system mirrors European trends, evolving from teacher training to intercultural curricula. Primary school teachers gain skills to foster dialogue, respect, and equality, aligning with European principles of access, cultural rights, and multicultural environments, crucial for understanding teachers' views on intercultural education.

The aim of this research is to examine how variables such as school cultural structure, gender, level of education, and teaching experience influence primary school teachers' perceptions of the core characteristics of intercultural education. The inquiry was guided by the research question: Is there a statistical difference in primary school teachers' perceptions of both the definition of interculturality and the objectives of intercultural education based on variables such as school cultural structure, gender, level of education, and teaching experience?

Literature Review

Recent migration has significantly shaped European societies, demanding a focus on mutual understanding, respect, and diversity to foster democratic citizenship. Intercultural dialogue is crucial for global peace, with schools playing a central role in preparing students for a just world (UNESCO 2006). However, this requires collaboration among students, educators, families, and communities for effective intercultural education (Aguado & Malik 2006; Jurgilè 2019; Hajisoteriou & Angelides 2017), enhancing teachers' intercultural practices (Angelides, Stylianou & Leigh 2007). Intercultural competence is attained when communication aligns with situational demands (Ting-Toomey & Chung 2005) and achieves desired outcomes (Pedersen 2010). Teachers must cultivate reflective cultural identities to engage effectively in intercultural classrooms and guide students toward becoming global citizens (Banks 2001, 2008). Recognizing and utilizing diverse students' cultural assets is crucial. Modern curricula focus on developing student competencies, particularly emphasizing teachers' intercultural skills, which require specialized training (Piršl 2001). Deardorff (2009) defines intercultural competence as a dynamic process involving communication, attitudes, self-reflection, and knowledge acquisition, extending beyond cultural knowledge to include empathy and respect. Perry and Southwell (2011) categorize these competencies into knowledge, attitudes, skills, and behaviors, emphasizing cross-cultural communication.

Interculturalism emphasizes respect, protection, and promotion of minorities and the disadvantaged, fostering awareness of interdependencies. It is relational, requiring interaction and coexistence rather than mere parallel existence (Sarmiento 2014). In Europe, interculturalism reflects global integration, involving not only

migrants but all societal members, promoting sensitivity to cultural diversity and reducing discrimination (Jurgilè 2019). Portera (2008, 2010, 2020) frames interculturalism as advancing multiculturalism, stressing tolerance, challenge readiness, and dialogue between indigenous and immigrant groups. Cantle (2015) argues that schools are central to intercultural education through projects and programs that teach students to live harmoniously with differences, enriching society. Yet, Lunneblad and Johansson (2012) caution that simply recognizing diversity is insufficient; active efforts are needed to foster intercultural relationships and dialogue. Cummins (2015) advocates for schools to redefine their roles, promoting intercultural education to build care, civic responsibility, solidarity, and awareness of the ethnic, racial, and other factors perpetuating inequality and conflict.

Intercultural education requires focus on both content and the social dynamics of the educational process, with scholars emphasizing the impact of teacher-student and peer relationships on student success and the school's socio-emotional environment (Liddicoat & Scarino 2013; Zhao & Coombs 2012; Lourenço 2018; Jokikokko 2009). Schools should serve as hubs for meaningful interaction, promoting dialogue, respect, and equality (Sykes 2017). Implicit messages within these environments influence students' attitudes toward human rights (Yuen 2010). Intercultural education combats ethnocentrism, racism, and discrimination, fostering openness to cultural diversity and valuing each culture's contributions (Coulby 2006). Holliday (2018) suggests integrating intercultural education into curricula through clear goals, competencies, and teacher-principal collaboration, encouraging reflection on intercultural competencies (Salter & Maxwell 2018). De Leo (2010) identifies four key areas: cultural diversity, civil rights, equality, and peace. Pullin (2015) stresses collaborative curriculum design, achieving outcomes such as recognizing cultural differences, combating racism, understanding global interdependence, and respecting diverse values¹). Schat, van der Knaap, and de Graaff (2023) highlight the need to integrate these elements, fostering knowledge, skills, and moral growth through intercultural understanding and respect.

Methodology

Participants

The study involved a sample of 217 primary school teachers from multiethnic regions in North Macedonia. A significant proportion of the teachers had a bachelor's degree, accounting for 85.7% of the sample. Those with a master's degree made up 10.6% and a small percentage, 3.7% held a doctorate. In terms of teaching experience, 70% of the participants had less than 20 years of experience, while the remaining 30% had 20 years or more. Regarding the cultural structure of the schools where these teachers worked, 71% were from monocultural schools, and 29% were from multicultural schools.

Instrument

Two separate scales from Bedeković's (2011) Survey Questionnaire, the Interculturality Definition Scale (IDS) and the Intercultural Education Objectives Scale (IEOS), were completed by 217 primary school teachers in multicultural regions in the Republic of North Macedonia. The Interculturality Definition Scale contains six items that serve as indicators of the definition of interculturality. The Intercultural Education Objectives Scale includes eleven items that indicate the objectives of intercultural education. The reliability coefficients (Cronbach's Alpha) for the scales were found to be 0.67 and 0.92, respectively, indicating "reasonable" internal consistency for the IDS and "strong" internal consistency for the IEOS (Taber 2018). Bedeković (2011) reported " $\alpha=0.571$ " (p.199) for the IDS and " $\alpha=0.880$ " (p.219) for the IEOS.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

In collaboration with school principals, a structured questionnaire was disseminated online to a sample of 300 primary school teachers. A total of 217 fully completed responses were obtained, resulting in a valid response rate of 72.33%. Respondents self-assessed their perceptions of the core characteristics of intercultural education using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). These responses were subsequently utilized to interpret teachers' intercultural competence levels, classified into predefined intervals: very low (1.00 – 1.79), low (1.80 – 2.59), middling (2.60 – 3.39), high (3.40–4.19), and very high (4.20 – 5.00), as informed by Polat & Oğay Barka (2014). The data were processed using SPSS v. 25, with Cronbach's Alpha confirming the instrument's reliability and the Shapiro-Wilk test assessing distribution normality. Descriptive statistics, t-tests, and ANOVA compared means, with significance tested at $p<0.05$.

Results

Participants' understanding of "Interculturality" was assessed using a six-item scale, with responses rated on a five-point Likert scale, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Teachers' Perceptions of Interculturality

To what extent does each of these expressions best define the notion of "Interculturality"?			
IDS	N	M	SD
The existence of different cultures in a territory	217	3.17	.928
Tolerating diversity	217	3.44	1.066
Active cooperation of two or more cultures in all areas of life	217	3.73	1.019
Respect and acceptance of diversity	217	3.69	1.090

Adapting the majority culture to the minority culture	217	2.39	1.186
Assimilation of the minority culture into the majority culture	217	1.80	.998
Overall	217	3.04	.536

The survey results reveal a diverse understanding of “Interculturality” among respondents. The highest mean score of 3.73 is attributed to “Active cooperation of two or more cultures in all areas of life,” indicating a strong association with ongoing cultural cooperation. “Respect and acceptance of diversity” also scored high at 3.69, highlighting the significance of mutual respect. “Tolerating diversity” received a mean score of 3.44, suggesting that while valued, it may not fully capture Interculturality’s essence. “The existence of different cultures” scored 3.17, indicating that mere coexistence is seen as a basic characteristic. On the lower end, “Adapting the majority culture to the minority culture” received 2.39, suggesting it is less central to Interculturality, while “Assimilation of the minority culture” had the lowest score of 1.80, indicating strong disagreement with its defining role. With a mean score of 3.04, teachers exhibit a middling level of intercultural competence on the scale, demonstrating basic knowledge of key aspects like cooperation and respect, while indicating a need for further development and an evolving awareness of cultural integrity over assimilation.

The following graph presents a breakdown of responses to various expressions that define the notion of “Interculturality,” with percentages indicating levels of agreement across the scale.

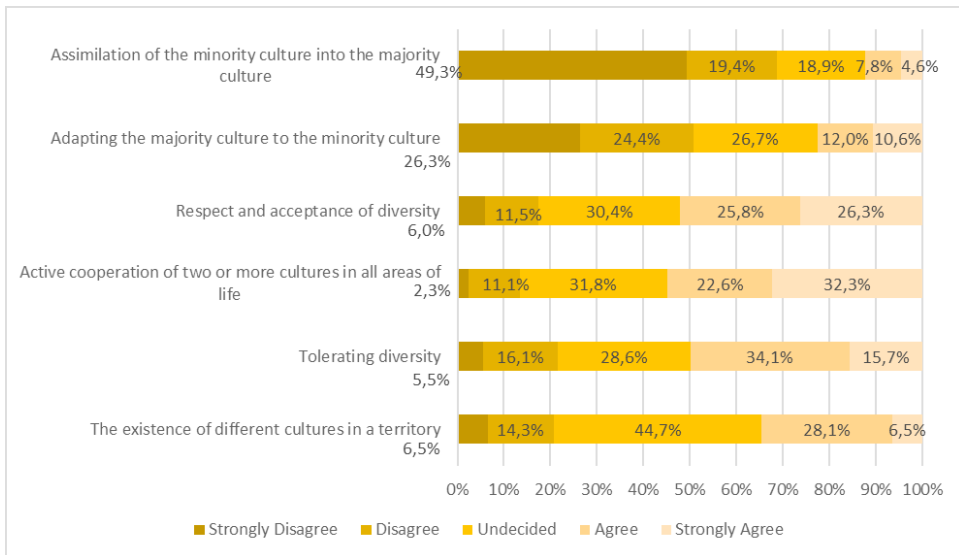


Figure 1. Teachers’ Perceptions of Interculturality

The item “Active cooperation of two or more cultures in all areas of life” received the highest agreement (54.9%), indicating strong support for interculturality as active cultural collaboration, while “Respect and acceptance of diversity” also garnered significant support (52.2%). In contrast, concepts such as “Assimilation of the minority culture into the majority culture” (27.7%) and “Adapting the majority culture to the minority culture” (38.3%) were less favored, reflecting a broader endorsement of interculturality focused on cooperation and respect rather than assimilation or unilateral adaptation.

Comparing percentage and mean rankings reveals teachers’ nuanced perceptions of Interculturality. The highest mean score of 3.73 for “Active cooperation of two or more cultures in all areas of life” indicates that teachers strongly associate Interculturality with ongoing cultural cooperation, a view echoed by high agreement rates among participants. “Respect and acceptance of diversity” also scored well, with a mean of 3.69, emphasizing its significance in teachers’ definitions of Interculturality. In contrast, “Tolerating diversity” scored 3.44, suggesting it is valued but insufficient to encompass the essence of Interculturality, as reflected in the 49.8% agreement rate. Furthermore, “The existence of different cultures in a territory” scored 3.17, showing that mere coexistence is viewed as a basic characteristic. On the lower end, “Adapting the majority culture to the minority culture” scored 2.39, indicating that adaptation is not seen as central, while “Assimilation of the minority culture into the majority culture” had the lowest mean score of 1.80, demonstrating strong disagreement with its role as a defining feature of Interculturality.

The high percentages of undecided responses (18.9% to 44.7%) indicate significant uncertainty among participants regarding the definitions of Interculturality, suggesting that teachers lack a fully formed understanding of these concepts and highlighting the need for clearer definitions and targeted professional development in intercultural education.

This research aims to understand how variables influence teachers’ perceptions of Interculturality, leading to a one-way ANOVA test to assess statistically significant differences based on their level of education.

Table 2. Influence of Teachers’ Level of Education
on Perceptions of Interculturality

To what extent does each of these expressions best define the notion of “Interculturality”?								
IDS	BA (N=186)		MA (N=23)		PhD (N=8)		F	p
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
The existence of different cultures in a territory	3.13	.923	3.26	.864	3.63	1.188	1.209	.301

Tolerating diversity	3.43	.952	3.78	1.445	2.75	1.909	2.921	.056
Active cooperation of two or more cultures in all areas of life	3.66	1.018	3.96	.928	4.75	.707	5.187	.006*
Respect and acceptance of diversity	3.65	1.082	3.87	1.058	4.13	1.356	1.106	.333
Adapting the majority culture to the minority culture	2.41	1.237	2.39	.891	1.88	.354	.791	.455
Assimilation of the minority culture into the majority culture	1.80	.998	2.00	1.087	1.25	.463	1.689	.187
Overall	3.01	.506	3.21	.689	3.06	.690	1.394	.250

* $p < 0.05$

The ANOVA test results reveal no significant differences in teachers' perceptions of interculturality based on education level. Notably, there is a statistically significant difference in views on "Active Cooperation of Two or More Cultures in All Areas of Life," with PhD holders rating it higher ($F=5.187$, $p=.006$) than both BA and MA holders. While "Tolerating Diversity" approached significance ($F=2.921$, $p=.056$), MA holders valued this aspect more than PhD holders. No significant differences were found for "The Existence of Different Cultures in a Territory" ($F=1.209$, $p=.301$), "Respect and Acceptance of Diversity" ($F=1.106$, $p=.333$), "Adapting the Majority Culture to the Minority Culture" ($F=.791$, $p=.455$), or "Assimilation of the Minority Culture into the Majority Culture" ($F=1.689$, $p=.187$), indicating a general consensus across education levels on these aspects. Overall, while specific perceptions differ, the overall views on interculturality remain consistent regardless of education level ($F=1.394$, $p=.250$).

A t-test was conducted to assess whether there is a statistically significant difference in teachers' perceptions between those working in multicultural and monocultural schools.

Table 3. Influence of School Structure on Teachers' Perceptions of "Interculturality"

To what extent does each of these expressions best define the notion of "Interculturality"?						
IDS	Monocultural (N=154)		Multicultural (N=63)		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
The existence of different cultures in a territory	3.21	.878	3.05	1.038	1.202	.231
Tolerating diversity	3.32	.907	3.73	1.347	-2.576	.011*

Active cooperation of two or more cultures in all areas of life	3.54	.971	4.21	.986	-4.575	.000*
Respect and acceptance of diversity	3.51	1.024	4.11	1.138	-3.780	.000*
Adapting the majority culture to the minority culture	2.34	1.145	2.51	1.281	-.923	.357
Assimilation of the minority culture into the majority culture	1.91	1.099	1.52	.618	2.616	.010*
Overall	3.51	.857	3.91	.960	-3.066	.002*

* $p < 0.05$

The t-test results reveal significant differences in how teachers in monocultural versus multicultural schools perceive “Interculturality.” Teachers in multicultural schools consistently show higher mean scores for key expressions like “tolerating diversity” ($M=3.73$), “cooperation of cultures” ($M=4.21$), and “respect and acceptance of diversity” ($M=4.11$). In contrast, teachers in monocultural schools had lower mean scores of 3.32, 3.54, and 3.51, respectively. These results suggest that teachers in multicultural environments are more likely to embrace a proactive understanding of interculturality, emphasizing collaboration and mutual respect among cultures. Teachers in monocultural schools showed significantly higher agreement with the notion of “assimilation of the minority culture into the majority culture” ($M=1.91$) compared to those in multicultural schools ($M=1.52$), suggesting a more traditional and less inclusive view of interculturality. This may reflect the homogenous environment in which these teachers work, where intercultural interaction is less common. Overall, the analysis highlights how the cultural structure of schools significantly impacts teachers’ perceptions, with those in multicultural settings more likely to embrace diversity and cultural cooperation.

Table 4. Teaching Experience Differences in Perceptions of Interculturality

To what extent does each of these expressions best define the notion of “Interculturality”?						
IDS	Less than 20 (N=152)		20 or more (N=65)		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
The existence of different cultures in a territory	3.20	.830	3.09	1.128	.763	.446
Tolerating diversity	3.46	1.060	3.40	1.087	.382	.703
Active cooperation of two or more cultures in all areas of life	3.78	1.009	3.62	1.041	1.109	.269
Respect and acceptance of diversity	3.64	1.160	3.80	.905	-1.002	.318

Adapting the majority culture to the minority culture	2.27	1.003	2.68	1.501	-2.341	.020*
Assimilation of the minority culture into the majority culture	1.86	.959	1.66	1.079	1.312	.191
Overall	3.03	.541	3.04	.529	-.088	.930

*p<0.05

The t-test results indicate notable differences in how teachers with fewer than 20 years of experience versus those with 20 or more years perceive the notion of “Interculturality.” Teachers with 20 or more years of experience had higher mean scores for the expression “adapting the majority culture to the minority culture” (M=2.68) compared to those with less experience (M=2.27). This result, with a statistically significant p-value of .020, suggests that more experienced teachers are more likely to view adapting the majority culture to the minority culture as an important aspect of interculturality. This could reflect a deeper understanding or greater openness to cultural adaptation gained through years of experience. However, there were no significant differences between the two groups for other expressions of interculturality, such as “the existence of different cultures in a territory,” “tolerating diversity,” “active cooperation of two or more cultures in all areas of life,” “respect and acceptance of diversity,” and “assimilation of the minority culture into the majority culture.” For these items, mean scores were relatively similar across experience levels, suggesting that perceptions of these aspects of interculturality are consistent regardless of the number of years of teaching experience. Overall, while experience appears to influence certain views on intercultural adaptation, it does not drastically alter perceptions of other key dimensions of interculturality.

Teachers’ perceptions of the objectives of intercultural education (OIE) are presented with descriptive statistics summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for Teachers’ Perceptions of OIE

The objective of intercultural education is	N	M	SD
IEOS			
Knowledge and understanding of the fundamental characteristics of the culture of the “other” (norms, customs, values, language, symbols...)	217	3.49	1.159
Developing the ability to understand & accept cultural differences as values	217	3.61	1.040
Developing the ability to communicate with culturally different people	217	3.51	.982

Awareness of stereotypes and prejudices about the culturally different	217	3.61	1.008
Developing the ability of critical self-observation in meeting the other	217	3.37	1.090
Non-violent conflict resolution	217	3.52	1.085
Respect and preservation of the national cultural heritage	217	3.51	1.019
Respect and preservation of European and world cultural heritage	217	3.25	1.055
Cultivating a sense of solidarity towards the culturally different	217	3.59	.987
Developing an open, multicultural identity	217	3.52	1.093
Promotion of sustainable development	217	3.25	1.196
Overall	217	3.48	.813

The survey results show diverse views on the objectives of intercultural education. With an overall mean score of 3.48, teachers' perceptions fall within the "middling" to "high" range, indicating a moderate to good understanding of key objectives. The highest scores were for understanding and accepting cultural differences, along with awareness of stereotypes (3.61), highlighting teachers' focus on these values. Solidarity with the culturally different also scored high (3.59). Other notable scores include communication with culturally different people (3.51), respect for national cultural heritage (3.51), and non-violent conflict resolution (3.52), emphasizing practical skills and heritage respect. The objectives related to developing an open, multicultural identity (3.52) suggest teachers value embracing cultural diversity. Slightly lower scores for knowledge of the culture of the "other" (3.49) and critical self-observation (3.37) indicate a solid, though less emphasized, focus on deep understanding and self-reflection. Respect for European and world cultural heritage (3.25) and promotion of sustainable development (3.25) scored the lowest, implying these areas are viewed as less central to intercultural education. Overall, while teachers have a strong grasp of key objectives like understanding cultural differences and addressing stereotypes, areas like global heritage and sustainability may require greater focus in educational practices.

The following graph presents teachers' perceptions of the objectives of intercultural education, highlighting varying levels of agreement across different categories.

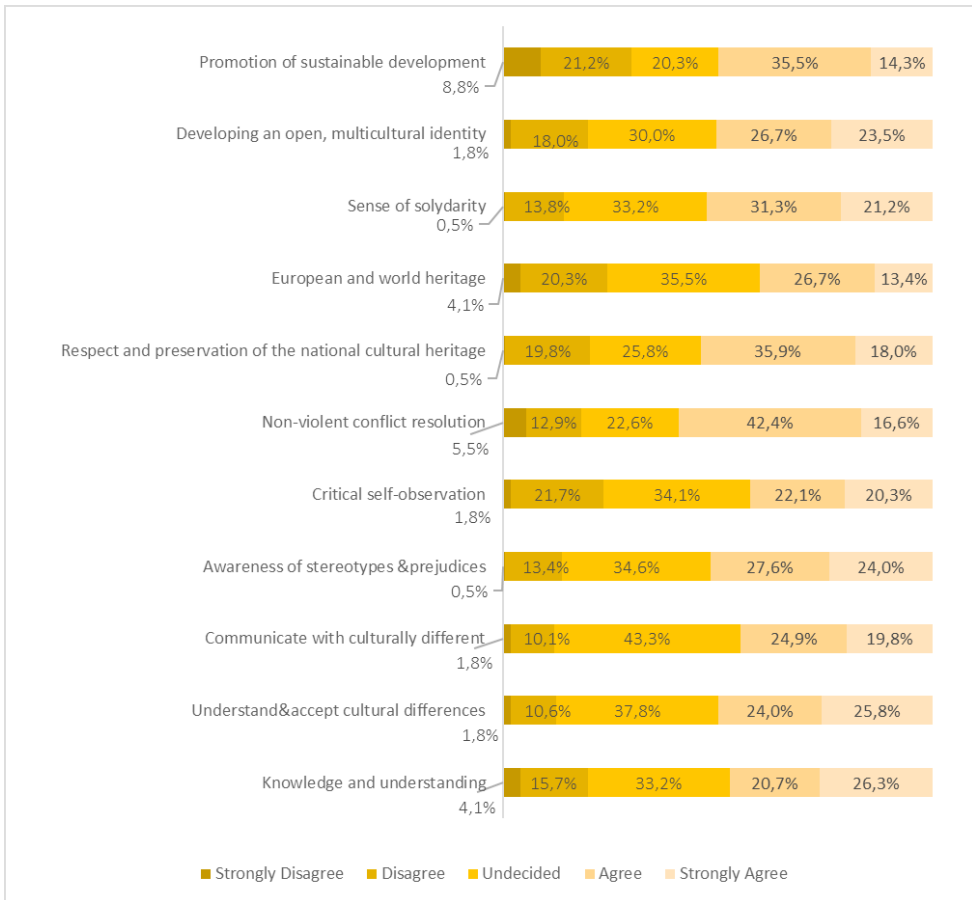


Figure 2. Teachers' Perceptions of OIE

The highest combined percentages of “Agree” and “Strongly Agree” were for “Non-violent conflict resolution” (58.0%), indicating that teachers prioritize peaceful conflict resolution in intercultural education. “Respect and preservation of national cultural heritage” (53.7%) and “Awareness of stereotypes and prejudices” (51.3%) also received strong support, emphasizing the importance of preserving heritage and addressing biases. Other important objectives included “Understanding and accepting cultural differences” (50.2%) and “Cultivating solidarity” (52.4%), with “Developing an open, multicultural identity” (49.9%) close behind. However, there was noticeable uncertainty among respondents, particularly regarding “Critical self-observation” (34.1%) and “Awareness of

stereotypes" (34.6%), suggesting some teachers lack confidence in these areas. Lower agreement percentages for "Respect and preservation of European and world cultural heritage" (44.1%) and "Promotion of sustainable development" (49.8%) indicate these objectives may be less emphasized in current practices. Overall, teachers strongly support objectives related to conflict resolution and cultural acceptance, but express uncertainty about broader global and sustainable aspects.

Examining the alignment between mean and percentage rankings reveals insights into teachers' perceptions of intercultural education objectives. "Awareness of stereotypes and prejudices" and "Understanding and accepting cultural differences" both received high mean scores of 3.61, reflecting strong agreement among teachers, which aligns closely with percentage rankings and indicates consistency in valuing these objectives. "Non-violent conflict resolution" (3.52) also ranked highly, highlighting its importance, while "Communicating with culturally different people" and "Respecting national cultural heritage" scored 3.51, emphasizing communication skills and cultural preservation. In contrast, "Respect and preservation of European and world cultural heritage" and "Promotion of sustainable development" received lower mean scores of 3.25, suggesting they are viewed as less central to intercultural education. Meanwhile, "Critical self-observation" scored moderately at 3.37, reflecting a lower emphasis compared to other objectives.

The ANOVA test results (Table 6) reveal significant differences in perceptions of intercultural education objectives based on teachers' education levels (BA, MA, PhD). Notably, PhD holders rated the importance of understanding the culture of the "other" ($M=4.63$) significantly higher than BA ($M=3.31$) and MA holders ($M=4.57$), with an F-value of 18.507 ($p<.001$). PhD holders ($M=4.63$) also rated the ability to understand and accept cultural differences higher than both MA ($M=4.04$) and BA holders ($M=3.52$), with an F-value of 6.929 ($p=.001$). This suggests that advanced education correlates with a deeper appreciation for these aspects of intercultural education. However, PhD holders rated non-violent conflict resolution ($M=2.50$) and sustainable development ($M=1.50$) lower than BA ($M=3.51$ and $M=3.31$, respectively) and MA holders ($M=3.91$ and $M=3.43$, respectively), with F-values of 5.250 ($p=.006$) and 9.777 ($p<.001$). This indicates that while PhD holders emphasize understanding cultural differences, they may downplay practical aspects like conflict resolution and sustainability. Additionally, MA holders ($M=3.96$) rated the respect and preservation of national cultural heritage higher than BA ($M=3.48$) and PhD holders ($M=3.00$), with an F-value of 3.372 ($p=.036$). Similarly, MA ($M=3.78$) and BA holders ($M=3.23$) rated the respect for European and world cultural heritage higher than PhD holders ($M=2.13$), with an F-value of 7.990 ($p<.001$), suggesting that advanced education may correlate with lower emphasis on preserving cultural heritage.

Table 6. Influence of Teachers' Level of Education on Perceptions of OIE

The objective of intercultural education is								
IEOS	BA (N=186)		MA (N=23)		PhD (N=8)		F	p
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Knowledge and understanding of the fundamental characteristics of the culture of the "other"	3.31	1.100	4.57	.843	4.63	1.061	18.507	.000*
Developing the ability to understand & accept cultural differences as values	3.52	.999	4.04	1.107	4.63	1.061	6.929	.001*
Developing the ability to communicate with culturally different people	3.46	.864	3.48	1.534	4.63	1.061	5.618	.004*
Awareness of stereotypes and prejudices about the culturally different	3.50	.954	4.17	1.072	4.63	1.061	9.446	.000*
Developing the ability and skills of critical self-observation in meeting the culturally different	3.30	1.068	3.78	1.126	3.88	1.246	2.927	.056
Non-violent conflict resolution	3.51	1.092	3.91	.949	2.50	.535	5.250	.006*
Respect and preservation of the national cultural heritage	3.48	1.041	3.96	.878	3.00	.000	3.372	.036*
Respect and preservation of European and world cultural heritage	3.23	1.027	3.78	1.126	2.13	.354	7.990	.000*
Cultivating a sense of solidarity towards the culturally different	3.60	.983	3.61	1.158	3.38	.518	.197	.822
Developing an open, multicultural identity	3.59	1.016	3.26	1.544	2.75	1.035	3.025	.051
Promotion of sustainable development	3.31	1.166	3.43	1.161	1.50	.535	9.777	.000*
Overall	3.44	.787	3.82	1.040	3.42	.448	2.301	.103

*p<0.05

In contrast, the perception of developing an open, multicultural identity (F=3.025, p=.051) and cultivating a sense of solidarity towards the culturally dif-

ferent ($F=.197, p=.822$) showed minimal or no significant differences across education levels. This indicates that, while specific aspects vary, the overall perception of solidarity and multicultural identity remains largely consistent with education level. Overall, significant differences exist in certain objectives of intercultural education based on education level, such as understanding other cultures and practical applications like conflict resolution; however, the general perception of objectives of intercultural education (OIE) remains stable across BA, MA, and PhD holders. This suggests that while advanced education influences the emphasis on specific aspects, it does not significantly change the overall perception of OIE.

Table 7 shows the t-test results assessing whether there is a statistically significant difference in teachers' perceptions of OIE between those working in multicultural and monocultural schools.

Table 7. Influence of Cultural Structure of the School on Perceptions of OIE

The objective of intercultural education is						
IEOS	Monocultural (N=154)		Multicultural (N=63)		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Knowledge and understanding of the fundamental characteristics of the culture of the "other"	3.48	1.086	3.52	1.330	-.249	.803
Developing the ability to understand and accept cultural differences as values	3.54	1.011	3.79	1.095	-1.644	.102
Developing the ability to communicate with culturally different people	3.39	.972	3.79	.953	-2.795	.006*
Awareness of stereotypes and prejudices about the culturally different	3.45	.991	4.00	.950	-3.724	.000*
Developing the ability and skills of critical self-observation in meeting the "other"	3.10	1.011	4.03	.999	-6.157	.000*
Non-violent conflict resolution	3.45	.970	3.68	1.318	-1.449	.149
Respect and preservation of the national cultural heritage	3.39	.959	3.81	1.105	-2.799	.006*
Respect and preservation of European and world cultural heritage	3.14	1.079	3.52	.948	-2.484	.014*
Cultivating a sense of solidarity towards the culturally different	3.44	1.003	3.95	.851	-3.552	.000*

Developing an open, multicultural identity	3.34	1.055	3.97	1.062	-3.988	.000*
Promotion of sustainable development	3.18	1.117	3.43	1.364	-1.382	.168
Overall	3.35	.761	3.77	.866	-3.532	.001*

*p<0.05

The t-test results reveal significant differences in how teachers perceive intercultural education objectives based on school type. Teachers in multicultural schools consistently score higher, indicating a more inclusive understanding of intercultural education. For example, the objective “Developing the ability to communicate with culturally different people” scores higher in multicultural schools (M=3.79) than in monocultural ones (M=3.39, $p=.006$), showing greater emphasis on cross-cultural communication. Similarly, “Awareness of stereotypes and prejudices” is notably higher in multicultural settings (M=4.00 vs. M=3.45, $p=.000$), suggesting increased awareness of cultural biases. Although some objectives, like “Respect and preservation of national cultural heritage,” also score higher in multicultural schools (M=3.81 vs. M=3.39, $p=.006$), indicating a broader appreciation for diverse heritages, teachers in monocultural schools may still hold traditional views. Overall, the cultural context significantly shapes teachers’ perceptions, with those in multicultural schools endorsing a more proactive approach to interculturality, as reflected in the mean scores (multicultural M=3.77, monocultural M=3.35, $p=.001$). The t-test results (Table 8) show significant differences in teachers’ perceptions of intercultural education (OIE) based on experience.

Table 8. Teaching Experience Differences in Perceptions of OIE

The objective of intercultural education is						
IEOS	Less than (N=152)		20 or more (N=65)		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Knowledge and understanding of the fundamental characteristics of the culture of the “other”	3.57	1.132	3.32	1.213	1.416	.158
Developing the ability to understand and accept cultural differences as values	3.70	1.060	3.40	.965	1.986	.048*
Developing the ability to communicate with culturally different people	3.41	1.058	3.72	.740	-2.138	.034*

Awareness of stereotypes and prejudices about the culturally different	3.48	1.036	3.92	.872	-3.019	.003*
Developing the ability and skills of critical self-observation in meeting the culturally different	3.21	1.125	3.75	.902	-3.446	.001*
Non-violent conflict resolution	3.48	.990	3.60	1.285	-.744	.458
Respect and preservation of the national cultural heritage	3.43	.981	3.71	1.086	-1.865	.063
Respect and preservation of European and world cultural heritage	3.18	1.106	3.40	.915	-1.383	.168
Cultivating a sense of solidarity towards the culturally different	3.48	1.055	3.85	.755	-2.532	.012*
Developing an open, multicultural identity	3.31	1.135	4.02	.800	-4.553	.000*
Promotion of sustainable development	3.21	1.166	3.35	1.268	-.808	.420
Overall	3.41	.851	3.64	.697	-1.958	.052

* $p < 0.05$

Teachers with 20 or more years demonstrate higher mean scores for objectives like “Developing the ability to communicate with culturally different people” ($M=3.72$ vs. $M=3.41$, $p=.034$) and “Awareness of stereotypes and prejudices” ($M=3.92$ vs. $M=3.48$, $p=.003$), indicating greater awareness in experienced teachers. In contrast, less experienced teachers score higher on “Understanding and accepting cultural differences as values” ($M=3.70$ vs. $M=3.40$, $p=.048$), suggesting a focus on valuing diversity. Other objectives, like “Non-violent conflict resolution” and “Respect for national cultural heritage,” show no significant differences. Overall, while experience influences specific perceptions, foundational views on intercultural education are similar, with experienced teachers slightly higher ($M=3.64$) than their less experienced counterparts ($M=3.41$, nearing significance at .052).

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings show that North Macedonian primary school teachers' intercultural competence, measured by the Interculturality Definition Scale ($M=3.04$) and Intercultural Education Objectives Scale ($M=3.48$), falls within the “middling” and “high” ranges. In contrast, Bedeković (2011) reported higher levels among teachers from Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Slovakia, and Czechia, with means of 3.48 and 3.85. Both studies emphasize items like “Active Cooperation of Cultures,”

“Respect and Acceptance of Diversity,” and “Tolerating Diversity,” though Bedeković’s study shows stronger perceptions. For instance, “Active Cooperation” scored 4.11 in Bedeković’s research, versus 3.73 in this study. Differences may be due to cultural or educational factors. Similarly, Wereszczyńska (2018) ranked education promoting tolerance and respect as the top priority, followed by teaching languages and cultures, and fostering peaceful coexistence through dialogue, while specific education for different nationalities was least important. The ANOVA results show that PhD holders rated “Active Cooperation of Two or More Cultures” higher than BA and MA holders, indicating they see it as a more crucial aspect of interculturality. While MA holders tended to value “Tolerating Diversity” more than PhD holders, the difference was not significant. No significant differences were found in perceptions of “Existence of Different Cultures,” “Respect and Acceptance of Diversity,” “Adapting the Majority Culture,” or “Assimilation,” suggesting agreement across education levels. Similarly, Bedeković (2011) reported that MA/PhD holders showed stronger agreement on interculturality-related aspects.

The research shows that teachers in multicultural schools score higher on “tolerating diversity,” “active cooperation among cultures,” and “respect and acceptance of diversity,” reflecting a more collaborative and inclusive view of interculturality. In contrast, teachers in monocultural schools favor “assimilation of the minority culture into the majority culture,” indicating a more traditional approach. Teachers with 20+ years of experience scored higher on “adapting the majority culture to the minority culture,” suggesting that experience fosters a deeper appreciation of cultural adaptation. However, no significant differences were found in other aspects of interculturality. Bedeković (2011) found that students over 21 prioritized tolerance and collaboration, while younger ones leaned toward assimilation, emphasizing understanding cultural differences and fostering solidarity. While both studies value national cultural heritage, the current research highlights awareness of stereotypes and biases, whereas Bedeković stresses understanding other cultures and nurturing a multicultural identity. Wereszczyńska (2018) similarly found that promoting tolerance and teaching foreign cultures were top priorities.

The study reveals that PhD holders prioritize understanding other cultures and accepting differences, similar to Bedeković (2011), where advanced degree holders also focused on these aspects. However, PhD holders in the current study place less emphasis on conflict resolution and sustainable development, which undergraduate students rated higher in Bedeković’s research. Both studies link advanced education with a deeper appreciation of cultural understanding, while less advanced education emphasizes practical objectives. Teachers in multicultural schools show a more inclusive understanding, focusing on cross-cultural communication and addressing stereotypes, while those in monocultural settings tend to hold more traditional views. The research shows that teachers with 20+ years of experience prioritize communication with culturally different individuals and awareness of stereotypes,

while less experienced teachers focus more on understanding and accepting cultural differences, indicating a shift in recent training. Bedeković (2011) similarly found that older students were more confident in intercultural education objectives like understanding cultural differences and addressing stereotypes, paralleling the emphasis of experienced teachers. The findings suggest North Macedonian teachers need to strengthen their intercultural education by deepening their understanding of cultural differences, improving communication skills, and increasing awareness of stereotypes, aligning with more developed contexts like those in Bedeković's study.

NOTES

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