

## THE CONTRIBUTION OF MULTI-CULTURAL AND INTER-RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN SPIRITUAL, MORAL, AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS

**Aneta Jovkovska**

Orthodox Theological Faculty "St. Kliment Ohridski" – Skopje,  
Republic of Macedonia,  
ajovkovska@yahoo.com

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### Abstract

Cultural globalization and socio-cultural changes taking place in modern society, as well as the integration and differentiation of national cultures, have a significant influence on the actualization of the problem of multicultural education of younger generations. On the other hand, one of the key educational goals in primary, secondary and higher education is the development of the students' personality, their spiritual and moral culture, which is primarily expressed in the system of moral, spiritual, and civic values, and the ability to lead their lives in a fertile interaction with representatives of other cultures in addition to the necessity of maintaining, enhancing and extending cultural values of their own nation and simultaneously adhering to the values of other nations.

Hence, inter-ethnic and inter-religious tolerance among students is an active moral position of the person, which can be expressed in readiness to recognize, accept, understand, and respect the ethnic and religious diversity and originality in the process of interaction of subjects and in conditions of a multi-ethnic society.

Investigation of the problem of establishing inter-ethnic and inter-religious tolerance among students in the educational system stems from both the socio-cultural situation in Macedonia and the wider global community. This paper relayed the views of leading world scientists who study this phenomenon. Furthermore, it also explored and presented the differences between primary school students from Macedonian and Albanian ethnicity in terms of their expressed respect for different cultures and religions and their developed skills of tolerance, dialogue, respect, and cooperation with students from other ethnic and religious affiliation.

**Keywords:** *inter-cultural education, tolerance, respect, values, dialogue, cooperation.*

### 1. Introduction

Nowadays, like in the world, so in Macedonia, unlike the globalization processes, there is an actualization of ethnic factors leading to increasing of the influence of ethnicity on the public awareness. This causes for a growth of intolerant attitudes in society, which enables for a risk of ethnic conflicts to appear. In such manner, it represents a threat to the stability of society and the integrity of the country. Hence derives the necessity and significance for development of interethnic and interreligious tolerance – processes, which can be best achieved through education.

In the recent years, tolerance in education is presented as an active moral force, position and preparedness towards patience in the name of positive in-between interaction with other cultures, ethnicities, people of different nationality and religion. The values carry an important

role in the tolerant relation: trust, respect and good will, the responsibility for the common good, solidarity and selflessness.

In the *Declaration of principles on tolerance* is emphasized that the most efficient remedy for preventing of intolerance is education. The education in the spirit of tolerance is comprised in educating of people for their rights and freedoms, to provide these rights and to strengthen the strive for protection of the rights of others. The education for tolerance should be considered as an important and significant task. It should be in function of the fight against influences leading toward fear and exempting of others. Such education, in fact, should help the students to develop their capacities for independent opinion, critical reasoning and to give conclusions based on moral values. (Declaration of Principles on Tolerance, UNESKO, 1995)

Tolerant conduct implies the external manifesting of activities of the student, that include respect to "others"; capability to accept "others" as they are; understanding of certain characteristics, such as „manifestation of individuality"; capability to see in "another individual" a person equally worth as ourselves; emotional-will preparedness for critical dialogue with "others"; capacity for compromise and preparedness for sacrifice of personal interest, in order to overcome and stop a conflict, as to capability for critical behavior to ourselves, like toward "others" for self-improving.

The criteria, for, tolerant behavior of the student are the following: cooperation and solidarity in solving of mutual challenges; manifesting of mutual respect, generosity and tolerance toward different groups (ethnic, religious, people with disabilities, refugees etc.); securing of a possibility to follow the traditions of all cultures present in the society; use of positive vocabulary in communication with other people; respecting of the principles of equality and other. (according to Zayanchkovskaya, 2013:43)

The development of tolerance in education should be conducted through dialogue, cooperation and training for humanization of the educational process as for the students, so for the teachers; forming of ideas for cultural diversity in society and the world; education for peace, tolerance and humane international communication; building of positive attitude towards cultural differences; forming of skills for effective interaction with different cultures and creating of conditions for integration of students in cultures of other people. (Cheburakov, Romanenko, 2013:101)

The educational activities leading to strengthening of interethnic and interreligious relations among the students must be of great significance, because the further going development of intercultural tolerance and mutual cultural enriching depends on it.

In elementary schools in Macedonia, along with the range of activities conducted to increase the awareness of the students for interethnic and interreligious tolerance, since 2010 year, as subjects of choice in the curriculum for sixth grade for elementary school there are several implemented subjects such as ethics in religions, introduction to religions and classical culture in European civilization.

The subject *ethics in religions* studies ethics as science of good and moral, then, the common principles of religious studies (Christian orthodox study, Islam, Judaism, Catholic and Evangelistic – methodical study). The contents and activities of this subjects are expected to give the students an introduction of ethics and moral values of given religions; and to accept and respect humane behavior among people; to familiarize themselves with people's different religions in Macedonian society and to develop skills for tolerance, dialogue, respect and cooperation with others. (Curriculum for the subject ethnics in religions, 2010)

The curriculum for the subject *introduction to religions* enables the students to familiarize themselves with the values of larger world religions, as with the own nature of religion, the origins and the overall significance for mankind. The goals of the curriculum are: to familiarize the students with the nature and values of different religions; to learn to respect different religions; to learn the role of religions in modern world and to develop capabilities and skills to lead a dialogue and cooperate with different among themselves. (Curriculum for the subject introduction to religions, 2010)

The subject classical culture in European civilization enables the students to learn about classical culture as the source of fundamental cultural, scientific and social principles that are the foundation of modern Europe offering paradigms wanted and necessary in forming of young generations. It is considered that the representation of such contents will ease the adopting of some universal moral and civilization values and with contribute to the building of a broadened culture of young people. (Curriculum of the subject *classical culture in European civilization*, 2010)

The question is given: Will the curriculums in these subjects of choice and other curricular activities conducted in the same direction, contribute for increasing of the awareness of the students for tolerance, dialogue, respect and cooperation with students from other ethnicities and religions? This is the subject of research in this paper.

## **2. Methodology of researching (Materials and methods)**

This paper has researched the basic hypothesis, which is an assumption that the students in elementary school are usually quite tolerant regarding the ethnic and religious differences, but their level of tolerance is different. One of the dominant factors that determine this level is the ethnic and then gender factor. The influence from the student's age is of course also obvious, but in this research, this factor is controlled because all the students included are around the same age.

The hypothesis of the research is:

H: The students with same age are differentiated regarding their developed skills of tolerance, dialogue, respect and cooperation with the students from other nationality, depending on the ethnicity and gender.

Population and sample: The research is conducted in February 2014 year on a sample of 357 participants (sixth and seventh grade), in four elementary schools in Skopje: „J.H. Pestaloci” (66 students), „H.T. Karpos” (55 students), „Bratstvo” (85 students) and „Hasan Prishtina” (152 students). From the total number of participants, 149 were Macedonian (73 men and 76 girls), and 209 are Albanian (109 men and 100 girls). The average age of the participants is 11,4 years.

In this situation was used a proper sample of students present at the lessons on the conducting of the field research. The students were surveyed with the help of a scale containing 24 items prepared by the author of the research in Macedonian language for Macedonian students and in Albanian language for the Albanian students. With the help of the scale was determined the relation between the students with different to them in nationality and ethnicity: the capability for a dialogue with others, respect, cooperation and solidarity. The students encircled one of the four responses offered, such as: a) absolutely everything correct b) sometimes correct c) rarely correct and d) not correct at all. The answers were graded 5,4,2 and 1 point. Every question unanswered is considered as “I don't know” or “I'm not sure how to

respond" and was scored with 3 points. The maximum points on the scale are 120, and the minimum points are 24.

The instrument contains five subscales, and:

I *The respect to others*: scored are the points from questions 1, 12, 13 and 14.

Four questions with scoring from 4 to 20;

II *Hanging around with others*: scored are the points from questions 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 15 and 21.

Eight questions with scoring from 8 to 40;

III *Solidarity toward others*; scored are the points from questions 22, 23 and 24. Three questions with scoring from 3 to 15;

IV *Avoiding of conflict situations with others*: scored are the points from questions 3, 16 and 17. Three questions with scoring from 3 to 15;

V *Existing and respecting of universal values that are present in all religions*: scored are the points from questions 4, 5, 11, 18, 19 and 20. Six questions with scoring from 6 to 30.

The obtained results from the field research are then statistically run with the SPSS program. The frequency, arithmetic average, standard deviation and one way Analysis of variance (ANOVA) are calculated. The partial comparisons are done with the help of the Bonferroni post-hoc test.

### 3. Results

Tables 1 and 2 give the results that check the validity of the given hypothesis H, according to which the students at a same age are differentiated regarding the developed skills of tolerance, dialogue, respect and cooperation with students from other nationality and religion depending on the ethnicity and gender. According to the obtained results from the research, there is a statistically significant difference between the groups of participants at a level of 0.01 ( $p<0.01$ ), which confirms the hypothesis. The female students from Macedonian nationality, and then the Albanian females show greater skills of tolerance toward one another, than the males from Macedonian nationality and Albanian nationalities between them, where such skills are least visible regarding the other groups of participants.

**Table 1:** Differences between male and female students from Macedonian and Albanian nationality, regarding the developed skills of tolerance

Overall results of the survey									
Nationality	Gender	N	M	SD	Min.	Max.	F	p	
Macedonians	male	73	105.36	11.272	71	120			
	female	76	112.72	7.452	84	120			
Albanians	male	109	102.12	13.068	67	120			
	female	100	109.80	9.905	54	120			
Total:		358	107.17	11.537	54	120	17.219	*.000	

Table 2 presents the differences between male and female students from Macedonian and Albanian nationality regarding the components that comprise the survey list. Therefrom we can perceive the following results: Regarding all the components, measured with the instrument, a statistically significant difference is noticed between the groups of participants at a level 0.01

(p<0.01). It is perceived from the table that the difference for four components is more pronounced between the participants in relation to gender. The female students think more than the males that everyone should be respected whatever his capability, talent, gender, race, culture, tradition, social standing, nationality, religion etc. They care and contribute more than their fellow students for the building of positive relations with all students based on friendship; hang out with students from different ethnicity and religion; consider they must show solidarity, humanity and compassion to all people whatever their nationality or religion is, and that is good if they become part of human actions when people from a different nationality or religion need help; further, they have developed greater awareness that every religion with in its studding includes ethnic and moral principles for good behavior; that the good givers are important for everyone and are equally valued in all religions and societies. Friendship, respect and solidarity to others, as to the awareness for existing of universal values is less presented with students from Macedonian nationality, and least with students from Albanian nationality.

Regarding the component: avoiding of conflict situations with others, there are significant differences regarding the ethnical presence of students. Namely, the female and male students from Macedonian nationality avoid more conflict situations with students from different, than the students from Albanian nationality. The latter, allow themselves more to use offensive and improper words addressed to students different from them on a national or religion basis.

**Table 2:** Differences between students from Macedonian and Albanian nationality, regarding the preparedness to accept, respect, be friends, and help others

→	Nationality	Macedonians				Albanians				ANOVA	
		Gender		male		female		male			
→	Survey questions	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	F	p
1.	Respecting others	17.2	2.789	19.3	1.530	17.8	2.348	18.5	2.320	12.336	.000
2.	Friendship with others	35.2	5.062	37.8	3.046	33.0	7.042	36.7	5.092	13.716	.000
3.	Solidarity to others	13.6	1.794	14.3	1.391	13.6	2.333	14.6	.925	8.934	.000
4.	Avoiding conflict situations with others	13.2	2.273	14.1	1.660	11.8	2.953	12.2	2.862	13.974	.000
5.	There are universal values respected by all religions	25.9	3.546	27.1	2.912	24.8	4.843	27.3	3.112	10.651	.000

#### 4. Discussion

The obtained findings from this research and the given theoretical realizations show that education for tolerance is a very important segment of the educational process and mustn't be neglected. The problem though remains a present subject. Tolerance as a part of the educational process should be considered as an urgent and most important task for forming of a whole person, needed and useful for society. The educational institutions are obligated to pay attention to this question. It is necessary to form respect to other nationalities, religions and cultures among young generations, preparedness for cooperation and interaction with different from themselves. The students must learn to respect every man, regardless his nationality, culture, religion and living characteristics; the volition to meet the different cultures must be stimulated in the students; to learn to stop and creatively overcome in-between conflicts. An important task of the educational institutions is to inform the students with a certain range of knowledge for people and countries in the world, their relation of depending and inseparability of the world.

It is necessary, not only to promote the idea of tolerant relations, but to also raise the total level of cultural development of the students. The best way to establish tolerant relations are joint activities. In such manner, the creative gatherings are able to much more than the purely informative-educational activity.

## **5. Conclusions**

It is necessary to form a joint system of values and attitudes that will give equality of multiethnic and multireligious society. Modern students, as single intellectual elite in society, can become an active conductor of the ideas of multiculturalism, which will provide a stable development of society.

All this will increase the responsibility of the educational system, because the carriers of negative attitudes in interethnic and interreligious interaction can become the intellectual elite in the future, which will define the public opinion, with these interethnic relations.

The perspective area for further scientific-pedagogical research is the efficiency of curriculums that include education for tolerance and discovery of new ways for their improvement, as to concrete ways for their realization.

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