■ INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION SENSITIVITY – A PREREQUISITE FOR DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

Natka Jankova-Alagozovska[1]
Goce Delcev University
Republic of North Macedonia
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0189-5649

Nina Daskalovska[2]
Goce Delcev University
Republic of North Macedonia
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1553-8578

Adrijana Hadji-Nikolova[3]
Goce Delcev University
Republic of North Macedonia
https://orcid.org/0009-0001-1176-3957

Ovo istraživanje ima za cilj da dokaže da nastavnicima u istočnom delu Republike Severne Makedonije još uvek nedostaje interkulturalna obuka, te da nisu razvili dva preduslova interkulturalne komunikacijske kompetencije: svest o interkulturalnoj komunikaciji i osetljivost na interkulturalnu komunikaciju. Koristeći upitnik za nastavnike koji je distribuiran u srednjim školama u Strumici (R. S. Makedonija) i poslat nastavnicima u Ruščuk (R. Bugarska) onlajn, meren je nivo interkulturalne svesti. Rezultati pokazuju da 63% učesnika ima srednji nivo interkulturalne svesti i da nema razlike u nivou interkulturalne svesti u pogledu mesta življenja, odnosno zemlje.

Ključne reči: interkulturalna komunikacija, nastava engleskog jezika, interkulturalna svest, interkulturalna osetljivost.

1. INTRODUCTION

Today's immigration around the world, and the challenges that it brings in terms of multicultural and intercultural policies justifies the reason to study and implement intercultural communication in everyday teaching and learning. Introducing the term "intercultural communication" for the first time, the scientist Edward. T. Hall,

---

1   Kontakt podaci (E-mail): natka.alagozovska@ugd.edu.mk
2   Kontakt podaci (E-mail): nina.daskalovska@ugd.edu.mk
3   Kontakt podaci (E-mail): adrijana.hadji-nikolova@ugd.edu.mk

differentiated various cultures and their communication as such, giving emphasis of the communicative competence and the cultural context (Hall 1959: 9). The essential elements of intercultural competence are the active awareness of ourselves as a complex cultural being and the effect that our culture has on the way of thinking and acting; awareness of our ability to communicate with others, and to explore the invisible opinions and beliefs that define someone's behavior and goals; the development of readiness to try different ways of thinking and doing things. Intercultural competence gives people the ability to find different perspectives on reality, which makes it more likely to develop a common understanding and collaborative action. Hammer (2015: 483), defines intercultural competence as "…the capability to shift one's cultural perspective and appropriately adapt behavior to cultural differences and commonalities". Thus, there is no separate discipline as one that is enough to grasp and explore the cognitive and behavioral dimensions of the influence of culture on interactions, nor is there a separate theory that provides guidance and approaches to address the challenges and dynamics of intercultural interactions. In order to be interculturally competent one needs to have a deeper intercultural relationship with the interlocutor i.e. they need to be persistent and determined to understand to gain an inner view of the other person's culture (Byram *et al.* 2002: 57). The development of intercultural competences includes aspects such as:

- to be aware of your own cultural identity;
- to know the dominant cultural models;
- to be able to define your own independent position, knowing that it is culturally influenced;
- to strengthen confidence in yourself and from such a position to seek a variety of interaction with others;
- to create interest and active curiosity about otherness, as well as a sense of personal enrichment;
- to maintain tolerance and equality in your interactions;
- the ability to develop and maintain relationships;
- the ability to communicate effectively and adequately with minimal loss and distortion of understanding;
- the ability to reach agreement and cooperation with others.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Chen and Starosta (1996: 7), outline three key components of intercultural communication competence: intercultural sensitivity, intercultural awareness and intercultural skills defined as verbal and nonverbal skills needed to act effectively in intercultural interactions.

D. Deardorff's model known as the Process Model of ICC goes into details of the process of becoming interculturally competent (Deardorff 2006: 245). According to this model, the main elements needed to achieve intercultural communication competence (ICC) are attitudes, knowledge, skills, internal or external outcomes.

Gudykunst is another scientist in the field of intercultural communication who introduced the terms anxiety and uncertainty when encountering strangers. Gudykunst (1993: 169), assumes that effective intercultural communication is essential for developing intercultural communication competence and the theory is named Anxiety/

Uncertainty Management Theory (AUM) whereas the desired result is not the reduced anxiety and uncertainty but effective communication. This theory focuses on encounters between cultural in-groups and strangers (Griffin 2017: 426).

Looking into different theories and concepts about intercultural communication, Bennet's model of cultural competence looks like a very practical and profound concept that can help in achieving higher intercultural competence. Bennet (1993) defines cultural competence as a process through which people learn to value and respect different cultures. Speaking about teaching a foreign language which inevitably involves different cultures, it is crucial for teachers to develop intercultural communication competence which has two prerequisites:

- intercultural communication awareness
- intercultural communication sensitivity

Chen and Starosta (1997: 28), define intercultural awareness as "the cognitive aspect of intercultural communication competence that refers to the understanding of cultural conventions that affect how we think and behave". Thus, intercultural sensitivity is defined as "an individual's ability to develop emotion towards understanding and appreciating cultural differences that promotes appropriate and effective behavior in intercultural communication" (Chen/Starosta 1997: 5). According to Bennett's model (Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity) individuals with intercultural sensitivity tend to transform themselves from the ethnocentric stage to the ethno-relative stage. Bennett's model known as the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) consists of six stages moving from "ethnocentrism" to "ethnorelativism." The ethnocentric stages are denial, defense, and minimization. The ethnorelative stages are acceptance, adaptation, and integration. Each level describes the perception of the cultural difference which is connected to the experiences of other cultures. By identifying the certain cultural difference, predictions about behavior and attitudes can be easily made and education can be organized to facilitate development along the model.

Figure 1 shows how moving from "ethnocentrism" i.e. the feeling that your individual culture is central in reality, towards "ethnorelativism" which means that the experienced the context of other cultures by acceptance, adaptation and integration.
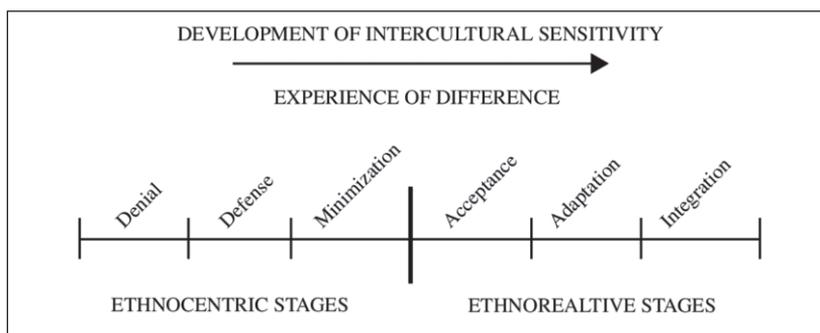

Figure 1. Bennet's model of Intercultural Sensitivity
(source: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/The-Developmental-Model-of-Intercultural-Sensit-ivity_fig1_344750735)

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As mentioned previously, this study aims to explore if teachers in R.N.Macedonia have sufficient intercultural training and developed the two prerequisites of intercultural communication competence: intercultural communication awareness and intercultural communication sensitivity. According to Bennett (2004:163), the perception of cultural difference is more complex and one's experience becomes more sophisticated when being encountered by different cultures. Having known how cultural difference is being experienced, predictions about the effectiveness of intercultural communication can be made and educational interventions can be tailored to facilitate development along the continuum". In connection to this, the Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), will be considered in this study and the following research questions and hypotheses are going to be tested using intercultural questionnaires for teachers:

1. To what extent is intercultural communication sensitivity developed by English language teachers towards students from different ethnic backgrounds? H: Those who have a higher level of intercultural communication sensitivity tend to have a lower level of ethnocentrism and appreciate the student's different cultures.

2. Which factors limit or increase the cultural awareness of teachers? H: The lack of knowledge in Intercultural Communication limits the English language teachers' awareness of other cultures.

This study aims to analyze intercultural communication cognition among all the English language teachers from the three high-schools from Strumica compared to one school in Ruse, Bulgaria. Up to now, not many studies have been done in terms of intercultural communication cognition and cultural competence of English language teachers. Most of the projects for interethnic integration are oriented towards the students only and that is the reason why the central phenomenon in this case study is the intercultural communication cognition of English language teachers towards students from different ethnic backgrounds. The cognition of English language teachers is going to be measured using intercultural questionnaires for teachers in the state municipal schools in Strumica and finally a suggestion will be proposed about how to increase intercultural awareness which can help in dealing with students from different ethnic backgrounds. The dependent variable in this study is the intercultural communication awareness and the independent variable is the level of ethnocentrism of English language teachers. The variables will be helpful in measuring and comparing the results in order to prove the null hypothesis mentioned before. The questions used in the questionnaire are provided in the appendix below.

4. DEMOGRAPHIC PARAMETERS OF THE SAMPLE – TEACHERS

In Table 1 below are shown the participants of this study i.e. the teachers who agreed to fill in a questionnaire about intercultural communication competence. The table below (Table 1) shows that 19 participants are teachers in Macedonia, and 8 teachers from Bulgaria were surveyed whereas the total number of teachers who have participated in this research is 27.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Macedonia	19	70.4	70.4	70.4
	Bulgaria	8	29.6	29.6	100.0
	Total	27	100.0	100.0	

Table 1. Responded by country

Of all the respondents who are teachers, 18 of them have gained a university level diploma (VII degree) and 9 teachers have gained the title master.

|		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	University degree	18	66.7	66.7	66.7
	Master degree	9	33.3	33.3	100.0
	Total	27	100.0	100.0	

Table 2. Responded by education level

According to the results in table 3 it can be concluded that the relevance and objectivity is on a research level whereas 82% from the surveyed teachers have experience with students from different ethnic backgrounds.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	5	18.5	18.5	18.5
	Yes	22	81.5	81.5	100.0
	Total	27	100.0	100.0	

Table 3. Do you teach students from different ethnic backgrounds?

In order to summarize the answers from the teachers questionnaires, the results will be divided on three needed levels when the general frequencies occur and the level of intercultural awareness of teachers is as follows: 63% from the participants - the teachers have enough or medium level of intercultural awareness, 22% show higher level of intercultural awareness and 15% show lower level of intercultural awareness. These frequencies are shown in graph 2 below:
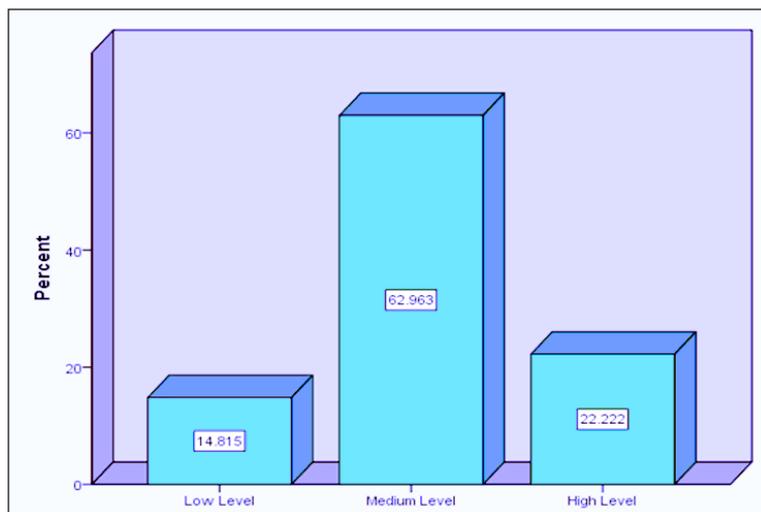
Graph 2. Level of intercultural awareness of teachers

In terms of the demographic information from the participants in this case the teachers, for the aim of this research the main question is raised considering the level of intercultural sensitivity of English language teachers in the two countries. In Table 4 in the fourth column are shown the mean differences of the intercultural awareness level of teachers according to the country of living and Table 5 shows the coefficient of significant differences:

	Place	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Points Total Teachers	Macedonia	19	36.26	4.318	.991
	Bulgaria	8	36.88	3.182	1.125

Table 4. Difference between mean according to country

	t-test for Equality of Means						
	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
Points Total Teachers	-.360	25	.722	-.612	1.700	-4.112	2.889
	-.408	17.884	.688	-.612	1.499	-3.763	2.539

Table 5. Significance for mean difference - Independent Samples Test

According to the coefficient of significance which is bigger from the second limit of possibility (0.722>0.05), it can be stated that there is no significant difference of the level of intercultural awareness in the two countries i.e. the level of intercultural awareness is not related to the country of living of the teachers in this research. Moreover, the differences of interculturalism of the teachers is not related or determined by the educational level, according to the coefficient of significance in Table 6 column four (0.265>0.05) i.e. the intercultural awareness level is not determined by the education level of the teachers in the two countries.

	t-test for Equality of Means						
	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
Points Total Teachers	-1.139	25	.265	-1.833	1.609	-5.148	1.481
	-1.475	24.171	.153	-1.833	1.243	-4.398	.732

Table 6. Significance for mean difference – Independent Samples Test

However, using t-test with ANOVA, the mean frequencies of the level of intercultural awareness according to the age of the teachers in the two countries was found and according to the two coefficients of significance there is a significant difference only in Macedonia (0.014<0.05) significant for the second limit of possibility by 0.05 or in order words 95% of the sample shows statistical difference of the level of intercultural awareness particularly in Macedonia i.e. the group aged 60 and above and after this group follows behind the group aged 30-39 etc. In Bulgaria, the situation is different because of the different coefficient of significance which is (0.567>0.05), and this means that there is a big difference between the teachers in the two countries when speaking about the level of intercultural awareness in this research.

Place		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Macedonia	22-29	1	34.00	.	.	.	.
	30-39	11	37.09	2.386	.719	35.49	38.69
	40-49	3	38.00	3.606	2.082	29.04	46.96
	50-59	2	27.50	7.778	5.500	-42.38	97.38
	60 and above	2	39.00	1.414	1.000	26.29	51.71
	Total	19	36.26	4.318	.991	34.18	38.34
Bulgaria	22-29	1	40.00	.	.	.	.
	30-39	2	37.50	.707	.500	31.15	43.85
	40-49	5	36.00	3.742	1.673	31.35	40.65
	Total	8	36.88	3.182	1.125	34.21	39.54

Table 7. Difference between mean according to age

5. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

- 63% of the participants – teachers have medium level of intercultural awareness, 22% show high level of intercultural awareness and 15% show low level of intercultural awareness.
- There is no significant statistical difference of the level of intercultural awareness of teachers in the two countries i.e. the level of intercultural awareness is not connected to the country of living in this research when speaking about the teachers.
- The level of intercultural awareness of teachers is not determined by gender in this research speaking about the two countries.
- The level of intercultural awareness is not determined by the education level of the teachers in the two countries.
- There is a significant statistical difference of the two countries when speaking about the country R. Macedonia where the teacher's age determines the level of intercultural awareness in this research. Teachers aged 50-59 have a lower level of intercultural communication compared to the teachers aged 60 and above which is a very peculiar result. The reason that teachers aged 50-59 show a very low intercultural awareness result is probably the fact that during their teaching experience they did not have enough intercultural training and experience with students from different cultures. This proves the hypothesis that lack of knowledge in Intercultural Communication limits teacher's perceptions of other cultures.
- There is no significant statistical difference of the level of intercultural awareness according to the teachers' experience with students from different ethnic backgrounds. The intercultural level is higher in Republic of Bulgaria if compared to the teachers from Republic of Macedonia in this research where the participants are teachers from Republic of Bulgaria (city Ruse) and Republic of Macedonia (city Strumica) in this research.

In connection to the final remark, it should be noted that the reason why the level of intercultural awareness in R. Bulgaria is higher compared to the intercultural awareness of the Macedonian participants is because of the fact that R.Bulgaria is part of the European Union; teachers have easier access to European projects and they are willing to participate in them. The teachers who participated in this study have experience with students from different ethnic backgrounds, more precisely with students from Turkish and Armenian origin. According to the ethnic composition of Bulgaria i.e. the city Ruse, there are students and residents from Turkish, Armenian, Jewish, Romanian and Greek origin which confirms the ethnic diversity of this municipality (National Statistical Institute, 2011).

Some of the project in which teachers and students from the high-school "Geo Milev" from Ruse have participated are: "YEPS – Young Europeans Propose Solutions" (2014-2016), "GROWW – Get Ready for the Opportunities of World of Work" (2016 – 2018). Those projects were oriented towards identification of local and global challenges of the young people today and how to find solutions for them. Through these projects the students and the teachers had the chance to improve their social and cultural competence, their cooperative skills for solving problems in groups. One of the biggest benefits they

acquired from this project were the cooperating between the school teams and the creation of the final innovative products. Another activity which happened abroad was the transnational YEPS meeting which happened in Lappeenranta, Finland where all six partner schools from Portugal, Turkey, Romania, Italy and Germany came together to work on the final activities on the project. During the project all partner schools worked on the final product of the project – a portfolio of files presenting the project's development and activities. The experiences the teachers have shared expressed the feelings of satisfaction due to the fact that they have learned a lot about the educational systems in other countries such as the fact that students in Turkey express their problems and feelings with their teachers and most of the school subjects are optional and not obligatory.

Through these projects Bulgarian students and teachers have the chance to find out what are the differences and similarities between the European countries and cooperating with international groups develops their intercultural competence and other strategies and skills that will prepare them for their future careers and the international market.

Apart from the European projects in R. Bulgaria, in R. N. Macedonia there are projects for improving the inter-ethnic relations entitled "Inter-ethnic Integration" covered by USAID. The ethnical diversity in terms of students in Strumica is similar to the ethnical diversity of the city Ruse. According to the Official Cenzus (Makstat database, 2021), in Strumica municipality there are residents from Turkish, Roma, Serbian and Albanian origin. More precisely, high schools in Strumica are ethnically diverse and have students from Turkish and Roma origin. Thus, teachers have to be trained to deal with students from different ethnic backgrounds. The above-mentioned project train teachers in the field of intercultural communication that later is disseminated to both the teachers and the students. The teachers take formal intercultural training while the students do workshops and after some time, they must come up with a final project which can be a portfolio of culture or a performance connected to the traditions of their closest surrounding. Intercultural trainings are rarely offered from universities and not all universities include this course in their curricula.

6. CONCLUSION

Thus, the prime aim of this study about intercultural communication competence is to convince the people involved in the education process that intercultural communication competence is needed but should be learned and implemented in the teaching-learning process and of course previously in the curriculum but in more thorough way. The case in R.N.Macedonia is that the component culture is involved in the needed prerequisites that have to be developed and covered by the teachers, but from the observations of the lessons and the teachers shared experience, it was revealed that they lack more attention to the cultural content. This can be further proved with in-depth analysis and lesson observations, but it is very difficult to achieve this due to the lack of interest and cooperation of the teachers.

The final factors for attitude formation of the students and the teachers are the textbooks. There are still components that must be improved such as teacher training programs, improving the school curricula in every school subject and finally the monoculture school policies which still occur in N. Macedonia. Finally, the English

language teachers who want to raise their intercultural competence should consider the following tips:

√   Follow the recent trends of intercultural communication of teachers all the time

√   They as teachers should make the students become aware that stereotypes should disappear, and the system of values will have some potential of making the students understand that this world can be a peaceful place to live in

√   Improvement of the inter-ethnic relations but firstly with education of the parents, then the students and of course more trainings for the teachers

√   Skillful teachers are crucial for the achievement of this proposed framework of intercultural competence

Finally, it can be summed up that it is essential to emphasize that the improvement of the current situation in the Republic of Macedonia regarding the implementation of intercultural communication competence in the process of learning and teaching English language is vital. Therefore, it is not acceptable for teachers to avoid the culture component for any reason. Teachers have an important and responsible task to influence the building of the personality of the young people they teach. They should encourage awareness among their students, above all, of their own culture so that they can then understand the foreign culture and learn to appreciate both the similarities, but also the differences between their own culture and other cultures as well.

REFERENCES

Byram, M., B. Gribkova, B. and H. Starkey. 2002. *Developing the Intercultural Dimension in Language Teaching. A Practical Introduction for Teachers*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Census of Population and Dwellings of the Republic of Bulgaria. 2011. Ruse County, Population by Mother Tongue and Ethnic Group. National Statistical Institute. [Internet]. Available at: https://censusresults.nsi.bg/Census/Reports/2/2/R9.aspx?OBL=RSE [20.12.2023].

Chen, G. M. and W. J. Starosta. 1997. A Review of the Concept of Intercultural Sensitivity. *Human Communication 1*, 1–16.

Chen, G. M. and W. J. Starosta. 1996. Intercultural Communication Competence: A Synthesis. In B. Burleson (ed.) *Communication Yearbook 19*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 353–383.

Deardorff, D. K. 2006. Identification and Assessment of Intercultural Competence as a Student Outcome of Internationalization. *Journal of Studies in International Education 10(3),* 241–266.

Griffin, C. and J. Bone. 2017. *Invitation to Human Communication*. Boston, MA: Cengage Learning.

Gudykunst, W. B. 1993. Toward a Theory of Effective Interpersonal and Intergroup Communication: An Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) Perspective. In R. L. Wiseman and J. Koester (eds.) *Intercultural Communication Theory*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 33–71.

Hall, E. T. 1959. *The Silent Language*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc.

Hammer, M. R. 2015. *Intercultural Competence Development.* In J. M. Bennett (ed.) *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Intercultural Competence.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publishing, Inc., 483–486.

Mak Stat Database. 2021. Total Resident Population in The Republic of North Macedonia by Ethnic Affiliation and Sex, by Municipalities. Official Census Reports. [Internet]. Available at: https://www.stat.gov.mk/pdf/2022/2.1.22.10-mk.pdf [20.12.2023].

SUMMARY

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION SENSITIVITY – A PREREQUSISITE FOR DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

This study aims to prove that teachers in the Eastern part of the Republic of North Macedonia are still lacking intercultural training and have not developed the two prerequisites of intercultural communication competence: intercultural communication awareness and intercultural communication sensitivity. Using a questionnaire for teachers which was distributed in high-schools in Strumica (R. N. Macedonia) and sent to teachers in Ruse (R. Bulgaria) online, the level of intercultural awareness was measured. The results reveal that 63% of the participants have medium level of Intercultural awareness and there is no difference of the level of intercultural awareness in terms of the place of living i.e., the country.

KEYWORDS: intercultural communication, English language teaching, intercultural awareness, intercultural sensitivity.