

# INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION: ANALYSIS OF THE PRIMARY SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

---

Dr. Elena Achkovska-Leshkovska, Institute of Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy,  
Ss Cyril and Methodius University –Skopje, Republic of Macedonia  
E-mail: [eleskovska@yahoo.com](mailto:eleskovska@yahoo.com)

Dr. Vladimir Davchev, Institute of Gender Studies, Faculty of Philosophy,  
Ss Cyril and Methodius University –Skopje, Republic of Macedonia  
E-mail: [vladimir@fzf.ukim.edu.mk](mailto:vladimir@fzf.ukim.edu.mk)

UDK: 371.671;  
316.722:37

**Abstract:** The intercultural education is most explicitly accomplished through textbook contents which encourage interaction, exchange, desegregation, interdependency and solidarity among people belonging to different cultural groups living in the same territory. The main goal of the research was to determine the quantity and quality of content that point to intercultural education in the textbooks used in elementary schools in the Republic of Macedonia, where the medium of teaching is in Macedonian. The analysis includes 44 textbooks. The research involved both quantitative and qualitative research methods, the latter involved using deductive defining of categories. Nine categories, important for intercultural education were distinguished: identity, cooperation and friendship, respect, tolerance, cultural relativism, stereotype, prejudice, oppression and labeling. The results showed that the highest percent of contents promoting intercultural is found in textbooks for Civic education and History, while the lowest one in Nature and Geography. From the analyzed categories, identity is highly present, followed by cooperation, friendship and respect of the other. Themes regarding the categories such as: stereotype, prejudice, labeling and oppression are least represented and are not even mentioned as negative examples of behaviors which are not to be practiced. As a conclusion, we can say that it is very positive that depreciation and discrimination of other cultures, ethnicities or religious groups are not present. However, there is demand and need to enrich textbooks and syllabuses with large number of contents concerning above mentioned positive categories, in order to promote one set of values which are essential to build an intercultural society.

**Keywords:** intercultural education, primary education, textbooks analysis, Republic of Macedonia.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Globalization, the process of European unification, migration, the increase of professional mobility in Europe, cultural exchange over the Internet and the continuous presence of different cultural lifestyles, do not only affect traditional concepts such as cultural and national identity, state or autonomy, but they also raise the question regarding cultural diversity in the modern society. Despite segregation and differences, the democratic model of approaching differences is one of the foundations of the right to having differences and equal participation of all entities within the society.

The colloquial language does not always show clearly the difference between the terms “multiculture” and “interculture”, which refer to a mutual coexistence of entities from different ethnic backgrounds. *Multiculture* refers to a natural state of a diversified society i.e. a society that is multilingual, multiethnic, multiconfessional, etc. Such society shows a comparative dimension i.e. a parallel coexistence of different entities that are recognizable as such within the society (Birzea, C., 2004). A multicultural society includes cohabitation of several ethnic groups that maintain their cultural differences and express their specific cultural identities. Within such society, the interaction among the groups is not of utmost importance.

Being different or belonging to a different ethnic group is sometimes considered to be a negative trait and as such might be a reason for discrimination; minorities are treated in a passive way, and sometimes might not be recognized or respected (Gherga, E., 2007). On the other hand, *interculture* is a dynamic process that involves establishing and building relations among different ethnic groups. The term is usually defined as “existence and interaction of different cultures, with the possibility of sharing different cultural aspects of the ethnicity through dialogue and mutual respect” (*UNESCO Guidelines on Intercultural Education* (2006). This means that intercultural involves interaction, exchange, desegregation, reciprocity, interdependence and solidarity. An intercultural society is a society in which different cultures and ethnic groups live in the same area, have mutual relations, exchange ideas and recognize each other by respecting each other's values and lifestyle. Such notion leads to preserving and developing each specific cultural identity and intercultural communication. The concept of coexistence within an intercultural society is not something that is obvious. Therefore, the Council of Europe defines intercultural education as a concept which involves ‘to learn how to coexist together’ (Batelaan, P., 2004).

The Council of Europe adopted the strategy of multiculturalism and multicultural pedagogy in the 1970s. As Portera highlighted “In 1970, the Conference of Ministers passed its first resolution (no. 35), focusing on the entry age of migrant worker children into schools of the member states. A so-called ‘double track strategy’ was established to promote both the integration of these children within host country schools and also maintain cultural and linguistic links to the country of origin, so as to facilitate possible school reintegration.” (Portera, A., 2008).

On a Council of Europe's request, and with the purpose of reconstructing the European educational systems (of EU

countries) and promoting intercultural education, three main aims were determined:

a) At a competency and skills level, the educational system should develop communication skills, stimulate and establish relations between the man and the community, while at the same time, indicate the importance of the critical view on the separate identities (religious, national, ethnical) and their relativization in relation to the universal (human rights and dignity) and their specific historical development.

b) At a knowledge-transfer level, the importance of diminishing the ethnocentricity, the critical view on prejudices and the recognition of different civilizations and cultures are especially recognized. Primarily, this group contains subjects such as history and geography, as well as other social sciences and humanities and subjects connected to the understanding of culture, socialization processes and political and ideological consequences of the power differences between cultures

c) At an educational and cultural models level, the Council of Europe experts express the importance of cooperation of all educational sources (school, parents, local community, media, higher education), suggesting a coherent policy in the boundaries of economic, political and social factors which will enable equal opportunities both for the individual and the cultural communities.

Republic of Macedonia, as a multi-ethnic and multiconfessional country, with clear objectives of becoming a fully recognized EU member, needs to adjust and align the educational system in terms of intercultural education. Content, topic and activities promoting and implementing intercultural education need to be included in the creation and modelling of educational policies. As already mentioned, there is no clearly defined educational discipline or a separate subject, such as Intercultural education, and EU countries apply different modalities in the implementation of intercultural education. The efficacy of the educational system will be impaired by

additional burdening on the wide-ranging primary and secondary curriculum's. For this reason, interculturality should be incorporated in the already existing subjects and teaching methods in the education system of Republic of Macedonia. "Intercultural education happens naturally through the 'hidden curriculum' of the social and visual world within which the child lives." (*Intercultural Education in the Primary School*, 2005). In addition, preparing textbooks and workbooks which will incorporate a higher number of topics and themes, clearly expressing the basic interculturality principles is of high and principal importance. Without a doubt, the choice of these textbooks and workbooks in terms of quality, content, illustrations and knowledge-transfer methods will have an enormous role in students' perceptions of the world and the society they live in. Research demonstrates that words and illustrations in textbooks do not simply express certain ideas and facts, but are strongly influencing students' formation of opinions. For example, the manner of representing minority groups in a textbook (by words or illustrations) has an enormous influence on the formation of opinions and values for those minority groups (with the people who do not belong to those minority groups). If textbooks contain less negative examples and more positive examples with a clear purpose of building an intercultural/multicultural society and express the basic principles of interculturality, the conditions for forming positive opinions and behaviors towards the others are met.

Taking into account the current situation in the Republic of Macedonia, the purpose of this research was to analyze elementary school textbooks in order to see how much of the content relates to intercultural education.

The main goal of the research is to determine the quantity and quality of content (themes, terms, illustrations, symbols, etc.) that point to intercultural education in the textbooks used in elementary schools in the Republic of Macedonia, where the

medium of teaching is in Macedonian. The research also involved these objectives:

1. to make a comparison between textbooks for different subjects in order to see how much of the content is related to interculture;

2. to do a detailed analysis of content related to interculture in textbooks used for the same subject, but for a different age group (different grades);

3. to make a comparison between different textbooks for the same subjects that are meant to be used for the same grade in order to see how much of the content is related to interculture.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research involved analyzing 44 textbooks used in elementary education, written according to the curricula from first to eight grades, as well as textbooks written in compliance with the new curriculum that involves a nine-grade elementary school education. Types of textbooks that were analysed involved textbooks that contain themes relating to understanding society and its structure, national and cultural identity, understanding yourself and others, intercultural interaction and developing critical thinking skills regarding these issues. The sample that was analysed involved: 15 textbooks used in *Macedonian language and literature* subject, 3 reading manuals (in Macedonian), 1 grammar book (for *Macedonian language*), 3 textbooks for the subject *My environment/society*, 3 textbooks for *Learning about the environment/society*, 1 textbook about the society, 1 textbook about natural sciences, 3 textbooks about civil society and culture, 6 geography textbooks and 7 history textbooks.

The study involved both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The qualitative analysis was based on deductive defining of categories (Кениг, Н., 2008). Taking the terms multicultural and

interculture as a basis of this research, 9 categories for analysis were identified. The purpose of this method was to examine explicit or implicit presence of these terms. This was done by reading the texts and analyzing the illustrations in each textbook. The nine categories used in this research are explained below:

1. **IDENTITY** is a set of characteristics that makes someone recognizable. Basically, this refers to the image that someone has about himself/herself.

Personal identity refers to characteristics related to one person only. This identity involves several specific characteristics which have been determined or stem from the culture or the society this person belongs to.

Social/cultural identity is identity that has been formed under the influence of the group/ the society/ the culture someone belongs to (aspects of tradition, history, customs, national and religious identity, social role, etc.)

2. **COOPERATION AND SOCIALISING** involves social interaction between two or among several people in order to have fun, enjoyment, mutual work, mutual help and alliance. In a multicultural society this shows integration and coexistence of different cultures and ethnicities.

3. **RESPECT** refers to showing care and having positive feelings and respect towards others without having violent or negative feelings. In a multicultural/intercultural societies, this can be seen through a behavior that is one level higher than just simply tolerating the fact that other people are different.

4. **TOLERANCE** means the ability to accept other people's ideas, opinions, standpoints and actions and to show understanding and patience towards those who are different from us in some respect.

5. **CULTURAL RELATIVISM** relates to the notion that there is no unique true code of behavior, but that the ethnic behavior has been determined by the cultural context. As a result, the values and the norms of a specific culture cannot be

taken as a basis for evaluating other cultures.

6. A **STEREOTYPE** is a simplified generalization of the characteristics of different groups in the society (categorized according to race, ethnicity, gender, profession, etc.) based without having enough information and without critical thinking. This usually has offensive connotation.

7. **PREJUDICE** is a constant, strong, baseless attitude towards a particular group of people, objects or situations. This is an attitude towards the others, which is based on incomplete information or partially true, but twisted information about reality.

8. **OPPRESSION** involves systematic devaluation of a group of people that leads to their discrimination and marginalization.

9. **LABELING** refers assigning certain positive or negative, true or false characteristics to individuals or groups which have a great effect upon the identity of the labeled person and upon the relationship/s that other people have towards him/her/them.

The first five categories (1-5) have a positive connotation i.e. it is preferable that they are implemented because they lead to students understanding their meaning and manifesting such behaviors in their everyday lives. The other four categories (6-9) have a negative connotation. This means that students need to learn not to accept the standpoints and the behaviors described in these categories. However, students need to be aware of these behaviors so that they can recognize them in real life, try to avoid their manifestation or to point to others about the negative aspects of such behaviors in case they notice them being manifested in others.

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Considering that displaying all results from analysis of the textbooks by frequencies and percentages exceeds the limits of this report, we will focus only on the



general findings regarding the main objectives of the study. First, based on the analysis, the highest percentage of themes that involve interculture was found in the textbooks related to the subject *Civil society and culture* (62.67%) and *History* (57.39%). The lowest percentage was found in the textbooks related to *Natural science* (0%) and *Geography* (3.82%). Regarding the categories that were analyzed, the highest percentage relates to the category IDENTITY, which means that the national identity i.e. the identity of ethnic Macedonians is the one that the textbooks pay the most attention to. Some textbooks have made the effort to promote the identity of other ethnicities that live in the Republic of Macedonia, especially with regard to the ethnic Albanians (this is especially true for the History textbooks for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade). In general, most textbooks lack themes that promote social interaction among members of different cultures and ethnicities explicitly. There are themes that refer to COOPERATION, SOCIALISING, HELP AND RESPECT towards other people, but the illustrations and the words used in the textbooks do not show that these people belong to different ethnic or religious groups. Only a small number of themes explicitly point to the need for co-existence, equality, tolerance and respect no matter what the differences are. Hence, it can be concluded that the textbooks imply multiculturalism more rather than interculturalism. Themes such as STEREOTYPE, PREJUDICE, LABELING and OPPRESSION are themes with the least percentage in the textbooks. One of the good aspects of the textbooks is the fact that the textbooks do not contain disrespect and discrimination of different cultures, ethnicities or religious groups. However, it would be advisable if the textbooks were to have themes that deal with such negative social aspects which are part of a society that involves coexistence of different ethnicities so that students can recognize them and refrain from them.

The comparison among textbooks

that are used for the same subject, but in a different grade shows improvement when it comes to quantity and quality of themes that promote interculture in these subjects: *My environment/society*, *Introduction to Society*, *Society and History*. The comparison among different textbooks used for the same subject and the same grade shows that some textbook writers paid attention to including themes that promote interculture. This can especially be seen in some textbooks used in the old curriculum (8-grade system of elementary education) as opposed to some textbooks used in the new curriculum (9-grade system of elementary education). The more recent textbooks contain more themes that relate to intercultural education. One of the positive aspects of these textbooks is the fact that writers included different practical tasks especially with younger students at lower levels in order to see how much they have understood from direct teaching and theory.

In order to improve the quality of implementing intercultural education, teachers should follow contemporary good practices and guidelines that suggest exemplars for classroom activities to support the development of intercultural awareness and competence (Салимовска, С., at al., 2007). Furthermore, it is necessary during the process of textbook writing to pay more attention to incorporate conceptually and contextually clear themes so that students can have a clear concept and form the values that constitute the basic needs of an intercultural society. When selecting themes for textbooks, it is necessary to make sure to have balance between themes that emphasize the national and personal identity on one hand, and those that promote interaction among members of different cultures without stereotypes, labeling and prejudice on the other hand. The content of textbooks and manuals needs to reflect the reality of the society we live in. It also needs to promote building interculturalism within the subject these textbooks are used for. The illustrations in all textbooks, especially in those used with younger students,

need to show anthropological features or the traditional dress of different ethnic groups that live in the Republic of Macedonia. It is very important to pay attention to questions and examples that illustrate intercultural, especially during practical tasks. In order to achieve this, the textbooks need to involve activities and tasks that allow students to understand gradually the culture code of the society they live in so that they can grow and develop into autonomous individuals that will have faith in an intercultural society.

*UNESCO Guidelines on Intercultural Education* (2006). Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001478/147878e.pdf>

## REFERENCES

- Batelaan, P. (2004). Interkulturalni odgoj i obrazovanje u 21. stoljeću: Naučite živjeti zajedno, *Zbornik radova Međunarodne naučne konferencije Interkulturalne perspektive*, Zagreb: IGI, 5-13.
- Birzea, C. (2004). Obrazovanje za demokraciju: obrazovne politike u Vijeću Europe, *Zbornik radova Međunarodne naučne konferencije Interkulturalne perspektive*, Zagreb: IGI, 15-22.
- Gherga, E. (2007). *Obuka profesora nacionalnih manjina u interkulturalnoj perspektivi*. Retrieved from <http://www.susedski2007.cdcs.org.rs/Publikacije/10publikacije.pdf>
- Intercultural Education in the Primary School* (2005). Retrieved from <http://www.ncca.ie/uploadedfiles/Publications/Intercultural.pdf>
- Кениг, Н. (2008). *Квалитативни методи на истражување*. Скопје: Филозофски факултет.
- Portera, A. (2008). Intercultural education in Europe: epistemological and semantic aspects. *Intercultural Education*, 19 (6), 481–491.
- Салимовска, С., et al., (2007). *Интеркултурно образование (прирачник за наставници)*. Скопје: ФОСИМ.