



Multilingualism and Cultural Diversity Among Young People in Tetovo

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Abstract: The relevance of educational reforms for the quality learning of foreign languages in higher education in the Balkan countries, where multilingualism and diversity are increasingly present in classrooms, is also the purpose of this research, which analyzes the impact of multilingualism on cultural diversity in the teaching of foreign languages. Having this objective, the research was carried out with 250 students from different ethnicities who attended foreign language classes. The questionnaire was composed of the main pedagogical and methodical educational components and indicators for foreign language teaching in higher education in the Republic of North Macedonia. Based on that, the questionnaire data indicate the level of acceptance of cultural diversity in learning a foreign language based on the perception that in this educational environment multilingualism is set as a standard. The results of the research indicate that multilingualism is the main bridge for getting to know cultural diversity, but still, as a psycho-social concept, it is not the main motive for easier learning of a foreign language among students.

Keywords: Cultural Diversity; Multilingualism; Foreign Language Teaching

1. Introduction

We can come into contact with other cultures at different times of our lives, both in the classroom, as teachers and students, and at work, during international collaborations and as tourists. Situations where we should take care to minimize or even avoid culture shock are represented by moving to live in another culture, going

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for work or as students. Having accurate information about the different cultures as well as understanding the differences can help with adaptation, either in the long or short term, depending on our attitude. Language is an important part of any culture and, moreover, it exists along with culture, “*that is, from the collection of inherited social practices and beliefs that determines the structure of our lives*” (Sapir, 1921, as cited in Xiangyang, 2016).

Salzmann (1998) describes the relationship between language and culture by defining language as a key to the cultural past of a society which serves as a key to understanding the social reality that surrounds us.

Thus, language is a tool to reflect a culture and its mindset, but also to influence it and create it: “*The structure of a language determines the way the speakers of that language see the world or, as a picture weaker, the structure. it does not determine the worldview, but it is still extremely influential in predisposing the speakers of a language toward adopting their worldview*” (Wardhaugh, 2002, p. 88).

On the other side, “*Multiculturalism represents ways of behaving and thinking, as well as learning styles, but also communication styles. Multilingualism can be understood as a style of communication, but also as an influence on the way of thinking and values*” (Cutler, 2005, p. 41).

Multilingualism increases awareness of cultural differences and feelings of empathy for these differences at the level of linguistics (especially pragmatics) and at the level of values and thoughts. Anyone who is multilingual is aware of the different ways of communication and the diversity of cultures. Cultural awareness skills can be strengthened through multilingualism, which, in turn, can help students learn another foreign language more easily because they already have knowledge of possible differences (Baciu, 2013).

So, the main purpose of this research is to prove the impact of multilingualism in increasing awareness of cultural differences in communication.

2. Literature Review

Multilingualism and multiculturalism has been the subject of research for many researchers for many decades now, especially with the increase of the number who speak more than one language.

Karpova and Kaourani (2024) conducted a study on multilingualism, multiculturalism and cultural diversity among young learners in Cyprus. Their objective was to see if the fact that young learners are multilingual affects their acceptance of cultural diversity and multiculturalism. They used language portraits (LPs) as a very efficient technique to develop students' critical thinking skills. The results of the study showed that students' perceptions and attitudes towards multilingualism and multiculturalism were positive. Most of them were bilinguals, but there were also speakers of more than two languages too. Those students who were able to speak three languages, Greek, Cypriot and English, showed even higher acceptance of cultural diversity.

On the other hand, Drobot (2021) discussed the different circumstances of why people are multilingual and its role in foreign language learning. She states that ultimately multilingualism has been promoted a lot by the European commission. However, aside from being seen and promoted and trend, research shows that not all multilingual people are such because of the same reasons. Some of them live in countries where you are expected to speak more than your native language, whereas others are just willing to learn more languages because they need them for their career. Nonetheless, there are young individuals who learn languages easily nowadays, and according to Drobot (2021), these are all different groups of multilingual people. When it comes to their ability to accept diversity in or outside the classroom, all the background conditions should be studied. If learners are multilingual because they had to learn 2-3 languages because of political developments in their country, they are not as culturally diverse as those who learned more languages for totally different reasons, such as personal preferences.

Fatima & Atta (2024) conducted a study on the role of multilingualism in the classroom, especially on the cognitive abilities in EFL classrooms. They used in-depth interviews, focus groups and classroom observations to collect data from teachers, parents and students. Their results showed that multilingual young individuals were more likely to be better at problem solving activities, memory games and also attention. Furthermore, their study showed that multilingual students were better at grasping grammar and vocabulary. Overall, the results of this study shed light on the profound impact of multilingualism on overall cognitive abilities of learners in the EFL classroom.

3. Methodology of Research

3.1. Research Questions

Based on the conclusions of the relevant research and on the basis of a set main goal of the research that analyzes the influence of multilingualism of young people towards more openness and acceptance of diversity and their role in the process of learning foreign languages, two research questions are asked:

1. Are students' attitudes towards accepting cultural diversity impacted by their multilingualism?
2. Are minority ethnic students (university level) language learners less tolerant of cultural diversity?

3.2. Hypotheses

Based on above mentioned research questions, we have two hypotheses as listed below:

- H1. Students' attitudes about acceptance of cultural diversity are distinguished by their multilingualism
- H2. Minority ethnic students who study languages are less tolerant of cultural diversity

3.3. Sampling

The research focuses on young individuals aged 18 to 30 in North Macedonia, mostly students at the University of Tetovo, students who have studied languages, which analyzes the impact of multilingualism on cultural diversity in the teaching of languages and foreign languages in Tetovo, representing a multi-ethnic sample of Albanians, Macedonians, Turks, Roma and other students. A total of 250 students responded to the online questionnaires.

3.4. Instruments

The survey uses an online questionnaire distributed via a Google Forms survey link. The structured questionnaire includes Likert scale questions (Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly agree) designed with indicators to assess

multilingual ability and to assess students' acceptance of cultural diversity. It consists of a total of 22 items that assess the level of acceptance of cultural diversity among students studying languages. In addition, demographic questions capture essential information about gender, ethnicity and the ability to speak more than one language - multilingualism.

4. Results

The research focuses on young individuals aged 18 to 30 in North Macedonia which analyzes the impact of multilingualism on cultural diversity in foreign language learning representing a multiethnic sample of Albanian, Macedonian, Turks, Roma and others students, where after processing the data from the questionnaire applied with Google forms, it resulted that a total of 250 students responded, of which 165 are Albanians (121 women and 44 men), 62 Macedonians (50 women and 12 men), 15 Turks (7 women and 8 men) and 8 Roma students (2 male and 6 female) (Table 1).

Table 1. Students surveyed by gender and ethnicity

		Ethnicity				Total
		Albanian	Macedonian	Turkish	Roma	
Gender	Male	44	12	8	2	66
	Female	121	50	7	6	184
	Total	165	62	15	8	250

After processing the data, it turned out that 95 of the surveyed students are non-multilingual (according to the order of Albanian, Macedonian and Turkish), then, 84 of them are average multilingual (includes speaking at least one other language) as well as 61 of them to be multilingual (more than 2 languages spoken) (Table 2).

Table 2. Students surveyed by multilingualism and ethnicity

		Multilingualism		
		Non multilingual	Average multilingual	Multilingual
Ethnicity	Albanian	46	65	54
	Macedonian	36	22	4
	Turkish	10	3	2
	Roma	3	4	1
	Total	95	84	61

Acceptance of cultural diversity is the main variable of the research, where after processing the data from the questionnaire which consisted of 22 items that assessed the level of acceptance of cultural diversity among students studying languages, it resulted in an average $M=59.96$ with $SD=8.821$ that comparing with the theoretical average ($M_t=55$) it results that the majority of students are tolerant to cultural diversity during studies with a normal distribution of this variable in this sample (according to the order of the mean, median and mode as well as the skewness and kurtosis values).

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of variable Acceptance of cultural diversity

Mean	59,96
Median	60,00
Mode	59 ^a
Std. Deviation	8,821
Skewness	(,734)
Kurtosis	,314
Minimum	17
Maximum	81

Referring to the content of the first research hypothesis that **HI. Students' attitudes about acceptance of cultural diversity are distinguished by their multilingualism**, for its interpretation, Table 4 presents the averages for acceptance of cultural diversity for the three levels of students' multilingualism. According to the value of $F=2.153$ with $sig=.034$, i.e. $p<0.05$ (significance smaller than the second confidence limit), in other words, we say that there is a significant difference in students' attitudes about acceptance of cultural diversity depending on the level of multilingualism.

Table 4. Students' acceptance for cultural diversity and their multilingualism

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval		F	Sig.	p
					Lower	Upper			
Non multil.	95	58,99	8,075	,828	57,34	60,63	2,153	,034	p<0.05
Average mult.	94	60,16	7,514	,775	58,62	61,70			
Multilingual	61	61,15	11,412	1,461	58,22	64,07			
Total	250	59,96	8,821	,558	58,86	61,05			

The difference in students' attitudes about acceptance of cultural diversity depending on their multilingualism lies between the two groups, and that, in the first group are non-multilingual students (58.99) with less positive attitudes about acceptance of cultural diversity, in contrast to the second group, where average multilingual and

multilingual students are ranked (60.16 and 61.15) with more positive attitudes toward acceptance of cultural diversity (Figure 1).

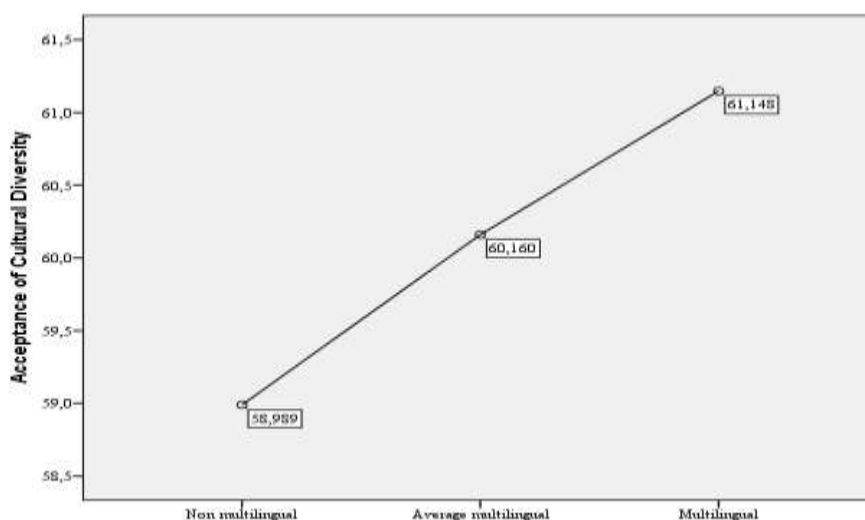


Figure 1. Multilingualism of students and acceptance of cultural diversity

The second hypothesis, which states that students who are less numerous (Macedonian, Turkish and Roma students) are less tolerant toward acceptance of cultural diversity, that is, **H2. Minority ethnic students who study languages are less tolerant of cultural diversity.** Table 5 presents the averages for acceptance of cultural diversity according to the student’s ethnicity. According to the value of $F=2.218$ with $sig=.027$, i.e. $p<0.05$ (significance smaller than the second confidence limit), in other words we say that there is a significant difference in the students’ attitudes about acceptance of cultural diversity depending on their ethnicity.

Table 5. Students acceptance for cultural diversity and their ethnicity

	N	Me an	Std. Deviati on	Std . Err or	95% Confidence Interval		F	Si g.	p
					Lower	Upp er			
Albanian	16	58,15	9,685	,754	56,66	59,63	2.218	,027	p<0.05
Macedonian	62	54,32	13,057	1,658	51,01	57,64			
Turkish	15	54,80	10,171	2,626	49,17	60,43			

Roma	8	58,88	11,507	4,068	49,25	68,50
Total	250	57,02	10,777	4,682	55,68	58,36

The difference in students' attitudes toward acceptance of cultural diversity in terms of their multilingualism lies between the two groups, and in the first group, Albanian and Roma students (58,145 and 58,875) are ranked with more positive attitudes toward acceptance of cultural diversity, contrary to the second group where the Macedonian and Turkish students are listed (54,323 and 54,8) with less positive attitudes toward acceptance of cultural diversity (Figure 2).

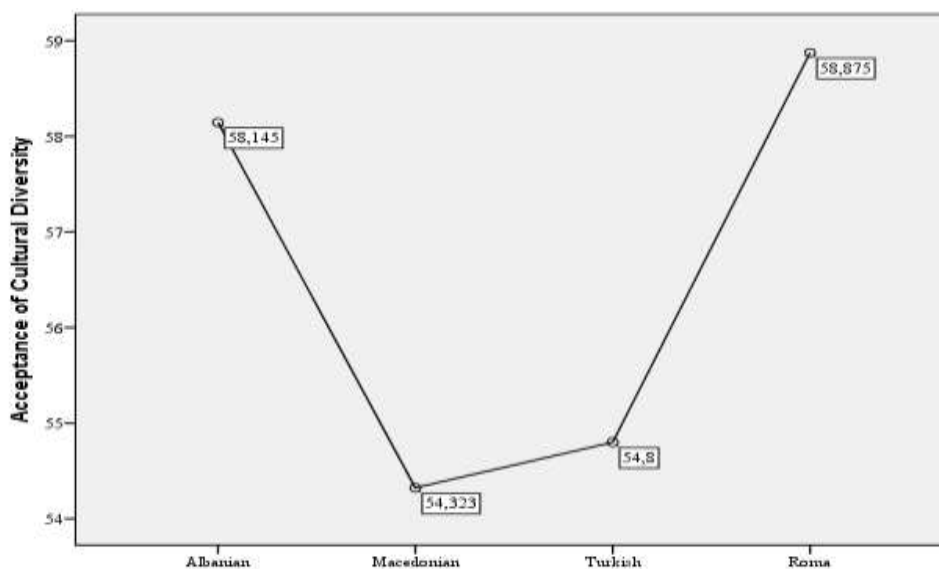


Figure 2. Acceptance of cultural diversity according to the ethnicity of the students

And as a final analysis, if we combine these above results according to the attitude toward acceptance of cultural diversity according to multilingualism and ethnicity, it follows as follows in Figure 3:

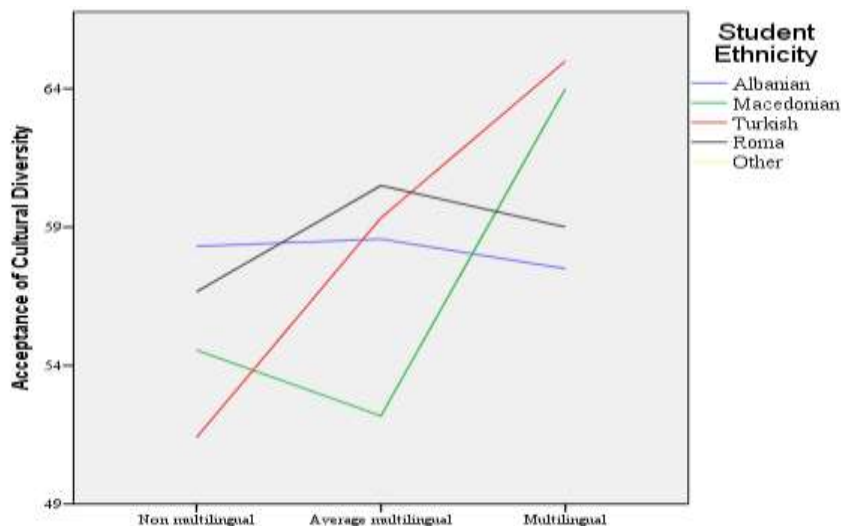


Figure 3. Ethnicity, Multilinguality of students and their level of acceptance of cultural diversity

So, it is clearly seen that Albanian and Roma students who study languages have an almost unique attitude toward acceptance of cultural diversity at all three levels of multilingualism, while Macedonian and Turkish students have less positive attitudes toward acceptance of cultural diversity than non and average multilingualism in spite of those multilingual individuals who have very positive attitudes toward acceptance of cultural diversity. So, multilingualism determines positive attitudes toward acceptance of cultural diversity.

5. Discussions

So, referring to the above statistical analysis, we see that there is a significant difference in the attitudes of language students for the acceptance of cultural diversity depending on their level of multilingualism. The non-multilingual students show less positive attitudes for the acceptance of cultural diversity, contrary to average multilingual and multilingual students with more positive attitudes toward accepting cultural diversity.

On the other hand, results show that there is a big difference in students' attitudes toward the acceptance of cultural diversity depending on their ethnicity, even that, Albanian and Roma students show more positive attitudes toward the acceptance of cultural diversity, in contrast to Macedonian and Turkish students with less positive attitudes toward the acceptance of cultural diversity.

As well as the general conclusion, that Albanian and Roma students who study languages have an almost unique attitude toward the acceptance of cultural diversity at all three levels of multilingualism, while Macedonian and Turkish students have less positive attitudes toward the acceptance of cultural diversity only those students who are non-multilingual or average multilingual but not even those who are multilingual who have very positive attitudes toward the acceptance of cultural diversity. Thus, multilingualism determines positive attitudes toward the acceptance of cultural diversity, especially among minority students.

4. Conclusions

The results indicated that there are differences in terms of cultural diversity acceptance by multilingual students. This is in line with what Drobot (2021) said related to the circumstances where the multilingual students live or have been raised. In addition, the answer to the second research question is that ethnicity also plays a role in their acceptance of cultural diversity. In this case, the result that Albanians and Roma multilingual students appeared to be more accepting of cultural diversity may be related to the fact that the study was conducted in Tetovo only, with a majority of Albanian population. This is also a limitation of the study, and in other circumstances, to have broader and clearer views on young people's acceptance of cultural diversity and ambiguity, based on their multilingualism; a bigger sample of population should be included.

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Ethical Considerations

Regarding the ethical considerations, I hereby confirm that the participants in the survey were provided with information before they accepted to take part in it. The study follows ethical standards, making sure the anonymity and privacy of the participants is respected. The results were shown following rigorous statistical analysis and were discussed carefully and qualitatively.