

 Research Article

Intercultural Education Values: Insights from Primary School Teachers' Views in North Macedonia

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Abstract

In an increasingly diverse educational landscape, understanding how teachers perceive the foundational values of intercultural education is critical for fostering inclusive classrooms and promoting social cohesion. This research investigated whether variables such as gender, level of education, prior intercultural education, teaching experience, and the school cultural structure affect teachers' views on the values promoted by intercultural education. To explore these relationships, a structured questionnaire was designed and pilot-tested before full deployment, ensuring clarity and relevance of all items. A 5-point Likert Scale consisting of 8 items was applied to 217 primary school teachers in the Republic of North Macedonia. The Scale's reliability (Cronbach's Alpha) coefficient was found to be 0.91. Data collection achieved a 72% response rate, allowing for robust subgroup comparisons across gender, educational attainment, and other factors. T-tests and Scheffé tests were performed to determine whether there are statistically significant differences in teachers' perceptions based on the investigated variables. Significant differences were observed based on gender, teaching experience, the cultural structure of the school, and prior intercultural education. Detailed post-hoc analyses clarified which groups differed most markedly, highlighting the impact of targeted training. Teachers believe that intercultural education, above all, promotes "tolerance towards the culturally different", "reduction of stereotypes and prejudices", and "coexistence of different cultures". Drawing on these findings, practical recommendations are offered for policymakers and school leaders. Teachers need permanent training on cultural diversity to sustain and deepen their intercultural competence and to translate these values into everyday classroom practice.

Keywords: Intercultural Education, Cultural Diversity, Values, Tolerance, Equality

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1. INTRODUCTION

Interculturalism, and therefore the concept of intercultural education, is expressed through many definitions. Advocating for the fair coexistence of various cultures, interculturalism emerged from criticisms of multiculturalism. Unlike multiculturalism's assimilationist tendencies, interculturalism encourages each culture to retain its uniqueness while fostering innovative cultural syntheses (Holm & Zilliacus, 2009). However, Portera (2020) highlights that interculturalism can unintentionally serve as the dominant group's intellectual program over cultural minorities, while also being seen as an extension of multiculturalism and a stance of tolerance towards cultural diversity. It emphasizes dynamic relationships, reciprocal influences, and the importance of dialogue between indigenous and migrant groups, requiring conducive conditions for diversity's development and influencing self-concept, emotional empathy, and self-knowledge (Fielding, 2021). Culture and education guide learning and understanding, fostering coexistence based on tolerance and respect. Educating the younger generation for life in a culturally diverse society requires equipping teachers with the necessary skills.

At the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, expanding teacher training became essential to prepare for new educational challenges (Wereszczyńska, 2018). Intercultural education fosters individual development and societal welfare by promoting cooperation and understanding across diverse identities (Dąbrowa, 2024). As Gube (2023) highlights, it cultivates a sense of belonging to both community and humanity, encouraging informed decisions and combating prejudice and discrimination. It also supports self-representation. Interculturalism extends beyond cultural coexistence to include the comparison of ideas and the reflection on various differences (Ameny-Dixon, 2004). According to Grant and Portera (2017), it facilitates communication, value exchange, and mutual respect, enriching cultural dialogue regardless of community size. In the multicultural and multiethnic settings of North Macedonia's education system, there is a critical need for primary school teachers to be prepared to identify the values of intercultural education. Teachers must develop intercultural competence and acquire the skills necessary to effectively work with culturally diverse students in diverse classrooms.

This research investigates whether variables such as gender, level of education, teaching experience, prior intercultural education, and the school cultural structure affect teachers' views on the values promoted by intercultural education. One primary research question guided the inquiry:

Is there a statistical difference in teachers' views on the values promoted by intercultural education based on variables such as gender, level of education, teaching experience, prior intercultural education, and the school's cultural structure?

1.1. Literature Review

Intercultural education, as Hendar and Tanjung (2024) emphasize, is a system of formal, non-formal, and informal programs aimed at fostering respect and mutual understanding among diverse groups. Education shapes society and plays a crucial role in developing an intercultural society. Although it cannot entirely eliminate racism or fully instill intercultural competencies, it significantly contributes to the development of intercultural skills, values, and knowledge (Stavenhagen, 2008). Developing more tolerant behaviors in daily life is essential for stimulating democracy, protecting human rights, fostering mutual understanding, and promoting peace and security (Banks et al., 2001; Jurgilė, 2019). Vavrus (2015) highlights the importance of openness to other cultures, intercultural knowledge, and valuing the unique contributions of each culture to humanity. According to Kymlicka (2017), better mutual understanding and cooperation can elevate the quality of life in society. This necessitates new approaches to teaching, curriculum development, and content selection, emphasizing intercultural education. Nieto (2015) claims that intercultural education transforms the school atmosphere and interpersonal relations, fostering a community where students, teachers, and staff cooperate based on mutual respect, support, and a shared educational vision. Byram (2009) highlights that the objectives of intercultural education include acquiring foundational knowledge, developing skills and attitudes related to interculturalism, and directly confronting discrimination, prejudice, and inequality. This approach aims to promote acceptance of differences, democratic values, and human rights. The ultimate goal is to develop intercultural competencies in individuals within a multicultural society. An interculturally competent person can understand, mediate, and interpret the relationships between different cultures critically and analytically (Byram et al., 2016).

Short (2023) urges that intercultural education should not be an additional component but should be integrated into the curriculum, school policies, and practices. According to Sample (2013), while all subjects can incorporate an intercultural approach, subjects like history, geography, languages, literature, and art are particularly effective in fostering the knowledge, attitudes, and values needed for intercultural citizenship. This approach necessitates a focus on real-world applications and the development of interpersonal and civic competence. Begić and Šulentić Begić (2021) emphasize that teaching music in general education schools presents significant opportunities for intercultural upbringing and education, as music is inherently intercultural. Due to the close connection between music and culture, music education can effectively foster cultural understanding. The three teaching areas – music performance, composition, and listening – offer numerous opportunities to appreciate interculturalism and diversity. The authors highlight, “quality student-centered teaching can develop students' sensitivity and appreciation for other cultures” (p. 855).

The values promoted through intercultural education are fundamental to creating a more inclusive and equitable society. Intercultural education, as a dimension of global education alongside education for

peace, human rights, sustainable development, and environmental respect and protection, promotes the following values: “Intercultural values: tolerance, pluralism, accountability, and openness to others; Openness to the world: solidarity, cooperation, and commitment; Democracy: equality, peace, freedom, and justice” (Panciu, 2015, p. 1). Similarly, Bedekovic (2011) considers the values of intercultural education to be: “Reduction of stereotypes and prejudices; coexistence of different cultures; the fight against ethnocentrism and nationalism; the rule of law; tolerance towards culturally different people; equality of all people; the fight against any form of discrimination, including racism; suppression of xenophobic attitudes” (p. 241). Torkos and Egerău (2022) state that the values derived from intercultural education are as follows: “tolerance, freedom, openness, acceptance of differences, understanding of diversity, pluralism, cooperation” (p. 90). Magsanay et al. (2024) found that a failure to recognize the necessity of being sensitive to others’ cultures can have far-reaching implications for the school community. Confusion and lack of acceptance contribute to further inequality and marginalization. Their research demonstrated that 98.01% of students with the lowest level of intercultural sensitivity considered their own culture the most important.

Teachers play a pivotal role in educational projects, being instrumental in driving positive changes in education. As Lundgren (2009) points out, solutions lie in redefining the role and responsibilities of teachers. This ensures that students acquire not only the knowledge and skills essential for intercultural engagement but also the ability to interact equitably with diverse cultural minorities, appreciating and respecting their cultures and customs. The aim of intercultural education is to foster relationships among bearers of different cultures rather than merely teaching about them (Grant & Sleeter, 2012). Teaching equips individuals with intercultural competencies necessary to meet societal needs, with teachers exemplifying interculturality (Sleeter & Carmona, 2017). As Convery (2008) highlights, support for teachers in such projects is crucial to enhance their intercultural sensitivity and competencies, enabling them to recognize the value in students, diverse groups, local languages, and cultural products as essential resources for teaching and learning about both others and one’s own community through the integration of different cultural heritages. Educational institutions emphasize linguistic diversity as an asset to the school community and foster an intercultural environment by incorporating multilingual signs and inscriptions reflecting the students’ languages (Dervin & Gross, 2016). Furthermore, intercultural education extends into the local community and society at large, best achieved by integrating school activities with social and extracurricular initiatives.

Teacher training in intercultural learning is essential. Deardorff (2009) identifies two key dimensions for professional development programs: awareness, where teachers enhance their cultural understanding and personal awareness through insights from diverse individuals, and relational, where educators gain diverse perspectives, personal experiences, and develop interaction and communication skills. Intercultural education should be integral to both the curriculum and the school environment, fostering individuals capable of enhancing their social context despite cultural differences. This approach requires the involvement of educators, students, and cultural institutions within the local and broader community. Research conducted in North Macedonia (Adili et al., 2023, 2024) highlights the urgent need for professional development initiatives in the field of intercultural education for teachers. The findings further indicate that schools must be designed as inclusive spaces open to diversity. Moreover, prior intercultural training significantly influences the levels of ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism among teachers.

2. METHODS

2.1. Design

This study employed a cross-sectional survey design to capture a snapshot of primary school teachers’ perceptions of the values promoted by intercultural education at a single point in time (Creswell, 2014). Such a design was appropriate because it facilitated direct comparison of subgroups—by gender, level of education, prior intercultural training, teaching experience, and school cultural structure—without the need for longitudinal follow-up.

2.2. Participants

The research involved a sample of 217 primary school teachers from multiethnic regions in the Republic of North Macedonia. Participants were selected through convenience sampling in collaboration with school administrators: head teachers distributed an online invitation via email and internal communication channels during April-May 2024. To ensure voluntary participation, the invitation explained the study's purpose, emphasized anonymity, and required electronic informed consent before accessing the questionnaire. Two reminder notices were sent at two-week intervals, resulting in a 72% response rate. The demographic characteristics of this sample are detailed in the following table.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variable		N	f	%
Gender	Female	217	158	72.8
	Male	217	59	27.2
Level of Education	Bachelor	217	186	85.7
	Master	217	23	10.6
	Doctorate	217	8	3.7
Teaching Experience	Less than 20 years	217	152	70.0
	20 years or more	217	65	30.0
Prior Intercultural Education	Prior Intercultural Education	217	174	80.2
	No Prior Intercultural Education	217	43	19.8
School Cultural Structure	Monocultural	217	154	71.0
	Multicultural	217	63	29.0

Analysis of the sample revealed that 28.1% of teachers received fundamental intercultural education during their initial training for working in multicultural settings. Additionally, 15.2% underwent supplementary training for managing culturally diverse classrooms, while 13.4% pursued independent studies in intercultural topics. Moreover, 23.5% engaged in a combination of formal education, in-service training, and independent study. In contrast, 19.8% reported no prior intercultural education. To simplify interpretation, teachers were classified into two groups: those with prior intercultural education (80.2%) and those without (19.8%). This classification aimed to streamline the analysis and compare how intercultural education influences teachers' perceptions of its promoted values.

2.3. Instruments

A separate scale from Bedeković's (2011) Survey Questionnaire, consisting of eight items on a 5-point Likert scale, was administered to 217 primary school teachers in multiethnic regions of the Republic of North Macedonia. The items on the scale are indicators of values promoted by intercultural education and include the reduction of stereotypes and prejudices, the coexistence of different cultures, the fight against ethnocentrism and nationalism, the rule of law, tolerance of diversity, equality, the fight against any form of discrimination, and the elimination of xenophobic attitudes. Item wording and response options were pilot-tested with 20 primary teachers to establish face validity, and two intercultural education experts reviewed the instrument for content validity. The final scale demonstrated strong internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.913$; Taber, 2018). For comparison, Bedeković (2011) reported a reliability coefficient of $\alpha = 0.875$ (p. 241), which, according to Taber (2018), also reflects acceptable internal consistency.

2.4. Data Analysis

In collaboration with school heads, a questionnaire link was distributed online to 300 primary school teachers. Of these, 217 completed responses were collected, resulting in a valid response rate of 72.33%. Participants rated each item on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), and these ratings were used to interpret teachers' intercultural competence levels, with arithmetic means classified as 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). The data were then entered into SPSS v. 25 for analysis. The reliability of the scale was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, while the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to evaluate the normality of variable

distributions. Descriptive statistics were used to determine data characteristics, and mean differences were analyzed using the t-test and ANOVA. Statistical significance of mean differences was evaluated at a significance level of $p < 0.05$.

3. RESULTS

The assessment of knowledge of the values promoted by intercultural education was examined using a scale consisting of 8 items. Responses to the items were measured using a five-point Likert scale: “strongly disagree”, “disagree”, “undecided”, “agree”, and “strongly agree”. Descriptive parameters of the values promoted by intercultural education are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Parameters of Values Promoted by Intercultural Education

Intercultural education promotes:				
Item	N	M	SD	
1. Reduction of Stereotypes and Prejudices	217	3.73	1.229	
2. Coexistence of Different Cultures	217	3.70	1.044	
3. Defiance of Ethnocentrism and Nationalism	217	3.64	1.135	
4. Rule of Law	217	3.36	1.126	
5. Tolerance Towards the Culturally Different	217	3.93	1.023	
6. Equality of all people	217	3.59	1.310	
7. Defiance of All Forms of Discrimination, Including Racism	217	3.68	1.100	
8. Elimination of Xenophobic Attitudes	217	3.36	1.195	
Overall	217	3.62	.905	

The results indicate that the highest mean values are observed for the items suggesting that intercultural education promotes “Tolerance towards Culturally Different” ($M=3.93$, $SD=1.023$), “Reduction of Stereotypes and Prejudices” ($M=3.73$, $SD=1.229$), “Coexistence of Different Cultures” ($M=3.70$, $SD=1.044$), and “Defiance of All Forms of Discrimination, Including Racism” ($M=3.68$, $SD=1.100$). Following these, the mean values for “Defiance of Ethnocentrism and Nationalism” ($M=3.64$, $SD=1.135$) and “Equality of All People” ($M=3.59$, $SD=1.310$) are slightly lower. The lowest mean values are found for the items, indicating that intercultural education promotes “Elimination of Xenophobic Attitudes” ($M=3.36$, $SD=1.195$) and “Adherence to the Rule of Law” ($M=3.36$, $SD=1.126$).

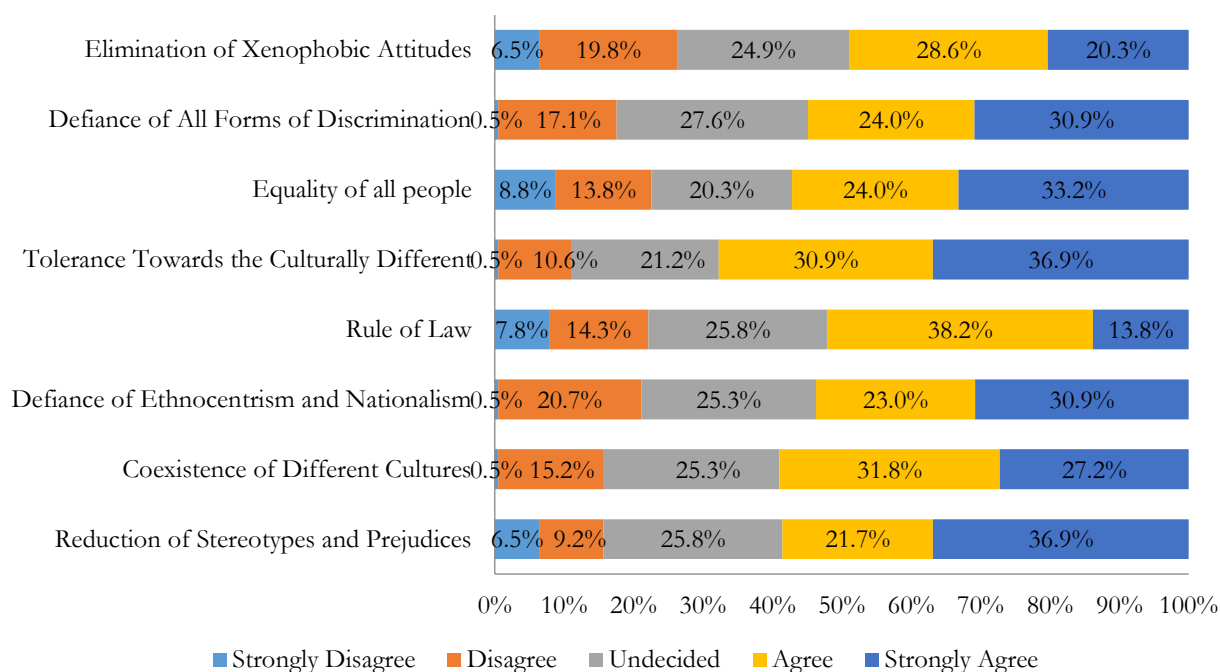


Figure 1. Values Promoted by Intercultural Education

The results indicate that the highest combined percentages of “Agree” and “Strongly Agree” are observed for the items suggesting that intercultural education promotes “Tolerance Towards the Culturally Different” (67.8%), “Rule of Law” (64.0%), “Coexistence of Different Cultures” (59.0%), and “Reduction of Stereotypes and Prejudices” (58.6%). Following these, the combined percentages for “Defiance of All Forms of Discrimination” (58.5%) and “Equality of All People” (57.2%) are slightly lower. The lowest combined percentages are found for the items, indicating that intercultural education promotes “Defiance of Ethnocentrism and Nationalism” (56.2%) and “Elimination of Xenophobic Attitudes” (53.5%).

When comparing the percentage rankings with the mean rankings:

1. Tolerance Towards the Culturally Different: Both the percentage ranking (67.8%) and mean ranking ($M=3.93$, $SD=1.023$) place this item as the highest, indicating a strong consensus on its importance.
2. Rule of Law: The percentage ranking (64.0%) places this item second, which contrasts with its lower mean ranking ($M=3.36$, $SD=1.126$). This suggests that while many respondents agree with the value, the intensity of their agreement may vary.
3. Coexistence of Different Cultures: This item ranks third in percentage (59.0%) and also appears high in the mean ranking ($M=3.70$, $SD=1.044$), showing consistent recognition of its importance.
4. Reduction of Stereotypes and Prejudices: The percentage ranking (58.6%) aligns with its high mean ranking ($M=3.73$, $SD=1.229$), indicating strong support for this value.
5. Defiance of All Forms of Discrimination: The percentage ranking (58.5%) is high, similar to its mean ranking ($M=3.68$, $SD=1.100$), reflecting general agreement on its significance.
6. Equality of All People: The percentage ranking (57.2%) is somewhat higher than its mean ranking ($M=3.59$, $SD=1.310$), suggesting broad but potentially less intense agreement.
7. Defiance of Ethnocentrism and Nationalism: The percentage ranking (56.2%) is higher than its mean ranking ($M=3.64$, $SD=1.135$), indicating significant support but possibly more varied opinions.
8. Elimination of Xenophobic Attitudes: The lowest percentage ranking (53.5%) aligns with its lower mean ranking ($M=3.36$, $SD=1.195$), showing it is less emphasized compared to other values.

Overall, while there are some differences, the percentage rankings generally align with the mean rankings, reflecting consistent patterns of importance across both measures.

Table 3. Gender Differences in Perceptions of Intercultural Education Values

Intercultural education promotes:						
Item	Female (N=158)		Male (N=59)		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
1. Reduction of Stereotypes and Prejudices	3.71	1.191	3.80	1.336	-.467	.641
2. Coexistence of Different Cultures	3.72	1.021	3.64	1.110	.485	.628
3. Defiance of Ethnocentrism and Nationalism	3.54	1.138	3.90	1.094	-2.097	.037*
4. Rule of Law	3.18	1.204	3.83	.699	-3.886	.000*
5. Tolerance Towards the Culturally Different	3.77	1.021	4.36	.905	-3.859	.000*
6. Equality of all people	3.48	1.240	3.88	1.451	-2.018	.045*
7. Defiance of All Forms of Discrimination, Including Racism	3.57	1.055	3.97	1.174	-2.388	.018*
8. Elimination of Xenophobic Attitudes	3.41	1.173	3.25	1.254	.827	.409
Overall	3.55	.935	3.83	.791	-2.050	.042*

* $p < 0.05$

As seen in Figure 1, respondents have shown above 20% uncertainty (“Undecided”) in all items. This significant level of uncertainty across all evaluated values suggests several potential implications. Respondents might not fully understand the values promoted by intercultural education or how these values are applied in practice. This lack of clarity could lead to hesitation in expressing strong agreement or disagreement. The varying personal experiences of respondents with intercultural education may contribute to uncertainty. Those with limited exposure or negative experiences may be less confident in their evaluations, reflecting a broader spectrum of opinions. Respondents from different cultural or educational backgrounds might interpret the values differently, resulting in mixed responses. This could indicate that intercultural education needs to be tailored to diverse contexts to ensure a more consistent understanding and agreement. The high level of uncertainty might indicate a need for more effective communication and training regarding the values of intercultural education. Educators and policymakers might need to focus on better explaining these values and demonstrating their importance and implementation in educational

settings. Intercultural competence involves complex, multifaceted skills and attitudes. The uncertainty could reflect the inherent challenges in achieving and assessing these competencies comprehensively.

Based on the t-test results for teachers' perceptions of values promoted by intercultural education by gender, several statistically significant differences were observed:

For the item "Defiance of Ethnocentrism and Nationalism," male teachers ($M=3.90$, $SD=1.094$) reported significantly higher agreement than female teachers ($M=3.54$, $SD=1.138$), $t(215)=-2.097$, $p=.037$. Regarding "Rule of Law," male teachers ($M=3.83$, $SD=.699$) again reported significantly higher agreement compared to female teachers ($M=3.18$, $SD=1.204$), $t(215)=-3.886$, $p<.001$. For "Tolerance Towards the Culturally Different," male teachers ($M=4.36$, $SD=.905$) showed significantly higher agreement than female teachers ($M=3.77$, $SD=1.021$), $t(215)=-3.859$, $p<.001$. In the case of "Equality of all people," male teachers ($M=3.88$, $SD=1.451$) also reported higher agreement compared to female teachers ($M=3.48$, $SD=1.240$), $t(215)=-2.018$, $p=.045$. For the item "Defiance of All Forms of Discrimination, Including Racism," male teachers ($M=3.97$, $SD=1.174$) rated significantly higher than female teachers ($M=3.57$, $SD=1.055$), $t(215)=-2.388$, $p=.018$.

Gender does not influence teachers' perceptions of certain values promoted by intercultural education, as no significant differences were found in the items related to the reduction of stereotypes and prejudices, coexistence of different cultures, and elimination of xenophobic attitudes. Overall, male teachers ($M=3.83$, $SD=.791$) demonstrated significantly higher levels of intercultural competence, as indicated by their perception of values promoted by intercultural education, compared to female teachers ($M=3.55$, $SD=.935$), $t(215)=-2.050$, $p=.042$. These results indicate that male teachers generally perceive a stronger promotion of certain values through intercultural education compared to their female counterparts.

Table 4. School Cultural Type Differences in Perceptions of Intercultural Education Values

Intercultural education promotes:						
Item	Monocultural School (N=154)		Multicultural School (N=63)		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
1. Reduction of Stereotypes and Prejudices	3.76	1.126	3.67	1.459	.505	.614
2. Coexistence of Different Cultures	3.60	.974	3.95	1.170	-2.295	.023*
3. Defiance of Ethnocentrism and Nationalism	3.42	1.142	4.17	.925	-4.683	.000*
4. Rule of Law	3.23	1.071	3.67	1.205	-2.604	.010*
5. Tolerance Towards the Culturally Different	3.72	1.000	4.44	.894	-4.985	.000*
6. Equality of all people	3.61	1.195	3.54	1.564	.360	.719
7. Defiance of All Forms of Discrimination, Including Racism	3.58	1.021	3.90	1.254	-1.960	.051
8. Elimination of Xenophobic Attitudes	3.12	1.145	3.95	1.113	-4.879	.000*
Overall	3.51	.857	3.91	.960	-3.066	.002*

* $p<0.05$

A t-test analysis of teachers' perceptions of values promoted by intercultural education based on whether they work in monocultural or multicultural schools revealed several statistically significant differences. Teachers from multicultural schools reported significantly higher perceptions of the following values:

For the item "Coexistence of Different Cultures," teachers from multicultural schools ($M=3.95$, $SD=1.170$) reported significantly higher agreement than those from monocultural schools ($M=3.60$, $SD=.974$), $t(215)=-2.295$, $p=.023$. Concerning "Defiance of Ethnocentrism and Nationalism," teachers in multicultural schools ($M=4.17$, $SD=.925$) reported significantly higher agreement compared to those in monocultural schools ($M=3.42$, $SD=1.142$), $t(215)=-4.683$, $p<.001$. For "Rule of Law," teachers from multicultural schools ($M=3.67$, $SD=1.205$) again reported significantly higher agreement than those from monocultural schools ($M=3.23$, $SD=1.071$), $t(215)=-2.604$, $p=.010$. Regarding "Tolerance Towards the Culturally Different," teachers in multicultural schools ($M=4.44$, $SD=.894$) showed significantly higher agreement compared to those in monocultural schools ($M=3.72$, $SD=1.000$), $t(215)=-4.985$, $p<.001$. In the case of "Elimination of Xenophobic Attitudes," teachers from multicultural schools ($M=3.95$, $SD=1.113$)

rated significantly higher than those from monocultural schools ($M=3.12$, $SD=1.145$), $t(215)=-4.879$, $p<.001$.

The cultural structure of the school does not affect teachers' perceptions of certain values promoted by intercultural education, as the t-test results show no statistically significant difference in the items related to the reduction of stereotypes and prejudices, equality of all people, and the defiance of all forms of discrimination, including racism. Teachers from both monocultural and multicultural schools exhibited similar levels of agreement on these items. Overall, teachers from multicultural schools ($M=3.91$, $SD=.960$) demonstrated significantly higher levels of intercultural competence, as indicated by their perception of values promoted by intercultural education, compared to teachers from monocultural schools ($M=3.51$, $SD=.857$), $t(215)=-3.066$, $p=.002$. These results suggest that teachers in multicultural school environments generally perceive a stronger promotion of certain values through intercultural education compared to those in monocultural settings.

Table 5. Teaching Experience Differences in Perceptions of Intercultural Education Values

Intercultural education promotes:						
Item	Less than 20 Years (N=152)		20 Years or More (N=65)		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
1. Reduction of Stereotypes and Prejudices	3.71	1.194	3.78	1.317	-.406	.685
2. Coexistence of Different Cultures	3.71	.994	3.68	1.161	.217	.829
3. Defiance of Ethnocentrism and Nationalism	3.58	1.182	3.77	1.012	-1.132	.259
4. Rule of Law	3.23	1.165	3.66	.973	-2.619	.009*
5. Tolerance Towards the Culturally Different	3.76	.995	4.32	.986	-3.808	.000*
6. Equality of all people	3.51	1.287	3.78	1.352	-1.436	.152
7. Defiance of All Forms of Discrimination, Including Racism	3.59	1.094	3.88	1.097	-1.755	.081
8. Elimination of Xenophobic Attitudes	3.21	1.227	3.72	1.038	-2.946	.004*
Overall	3.54	.906	3.83	.877	-2.160	.032*

* $p<0.05$

The t-test results indicate statistically significant differences only in three items. Teachers with 20 or more years of experience reported higher levels of agreement on "Rule of Law" ($M=3.66$, $SD=.973$) compared to those with less than 20 years of experience ($M=3.23$, $SD=1.165$), $t(215)=-2.619$, $p=.009$. For "Tolerance Towards the Culturally Different," more experienced teachers ($M=4.32$, $SD=.986$) also showed significantly higher agreement than their less experienced counterparts ($M=3.76$, $SD=.995$), $t(215)=-3.808$, $p<.001$. Additionally, in "Elimination of Xenophobic Attitudes," teachers with 20 or more years of experience ($M=3.72$, $SD=1.038$) rated significantly higher than those with less than 20 years of experience ($M=3.21$, $SD=1.227$), $t(215)=-2.946$, $p=.004$.

For the remaining five items—"Reduction of Stereotypes and Prejudices," "Coexistence of Different Cultures," "Defiance of Ethnocentrism and Nationalism," "Equality of All People," and "Defiance of All Forms of Discrimination, Including Racism"—the results indicate no statistically significant differences. However, more experienced teachers exhibited slightly higher scores in 4 of the 5 items compared to their less experienced counterparts.

Teachers with 20 or more years of experience exhibited significantly higher intercultural competence compared to those with less than 20 years of experience, as indicated by their higher overall score on the Scale of Values Promoted by Intercultural Education ($M=3.83$, $SD=.877$ vs. $M=3.54$, $SD=.906$), $t(215)=-2.160$, $p=.032$. This finding suggests that more experienced teachers perceive the values promoted by intercultural education more strongly than their less experienced counterparts.

The ANOVA test results revealed several statistically significant differences in perceptions of intercultural education values based on the level of education. PhD holders exhibited significantly higher agreement on the items "Coexistence of Different Cultures" and "Defiance of Ethnocentrism and Nationalism" compared to Bachelor's degree holders. Conversely, PhD holders reported lower agreement on "Rule of Law" and "Equality of All People" compared to both Bachelor's degree and MA holders. Additionally, PhD holders also demonstrated significantly higher agreement on "Tolerance Towards the Culturally Different" compared to Bachelor degree holders, while MA holders showed significantly higher

agreement on “Defiance of All Forms of Discrimination, Including Racism” compared to Bachelor degree holders.

Table 6. Education Level Differences in Perceptions of Intercultural Education Values

Intercultural education promotes:								
Item	BA (N=186)		MA (N=23)		PhD (N=8)		F	p
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
1. Reduction of Stereotypes and Prejudices	3.72	1.193	3.52	1.473	4.63	1.061	2.489	.085
2. Coexistence of Different Cultures	3.67	1.032	3.61	1.033	4.63	1.061	3.365	.036*
3. Defiance of Ethnocentrism and Nationalism	3.57	1.124	3.78	1.166	4.75	.707	4.502	.012*
4. Rule of Law	3.44	1.105	3.09	1.203	2.25	.707	5.239	.006*
5. Tolerance Towards the Culturally Different	3.94	.965	3.61	1.340	4.63	1.061	3.049	.049*
6. Equality of all people	3.67	1.238	3.43	1.590	2.25	1.488	4.833	.009*
7. Defiance of All Forms of Discrimination	3.68	1.106	3.96	.928	2.75	1.035	3.674	.027*
8. Elimination of Xenophobic Attitudes	3.38	1.143	3.43	1.590	2.75	1.035	1.119	.329
Overall	3.63	.872	3.55	1.198	3.58	.807	.090	.914

* $p < 0.05$

Table 7. Differences in Perceptions of Intercultural Education Values Based on Prior Intercultural Education

Intercultural education promotes:												
Item	1		2		3		4		5		F	p
	(N=61)		(N=33)		(N=29)		(N=51)		(N=43)			
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
1. Reduction of Stereotypes and Prejudices	3.51	1.324	4.48	.939	4.24	.951	2.88	1.194	4.14	.743	15.328	.000*
2. Coexistence of Different Cultures	3.56	.922	4.30	.770	4.31	.850	2.94	.904	3.93	1.078	16.412	.000*
3. Defiance of Ethnocentrism and Nationalism	3.56	1.118	4.27	.761	4.14	1.125	3.02	.860	3.65	1.307	9.015	.000*
4. Rule of Law	3.10	1.248	3.73	1.039	3.69	.761	3.12	1.243	3.51	.935	3.236	.013*
5. Tolerance Towards the Culturally Different	3.36	1.065	4.42	.792	4.14	.953	3.86	.980	4.30	.832	9.806	.000*
6. Equality of all people	3.23	1.383	4.42	.792	4.28	.841	2.96	1.280	3.74	1.274	11.435	.000*
7. Defiance of All Forms of Discrimination, Including Racism	3.54	1.163	4.64	.783	4.10	.772	3.06	1.085	3.58	.823	14.665	.000*
8. Elimination of Xenophobic Attitudes	2.97	1.449	4.09	1.071	3.55	1.152	3.18	.910	3.47	.935	5.777	.000*
Overall	3.35	.947	4.30	.782	4.06	.730	3.13	.775	3.79	.689	14.778	.000*

* $p < 0.05$

Note: 1 – Intercultural education gained in initial education; 2 – Additional training for work in a multicultural classroom; 3 – Self-directed study of interculturality; 4 – Combined; 5 – No prior intercultural education.

On the other hand, the analysis did not reveal significant differences in perceptions related to “Reduction of Stereotypes and Prejudices,” “Elimination of Xenophobic Attitudes,” and overall perceptions of intercultural education values among different education levels. Bachelor’s, MA, and PhD

holders reported similar levels of agreement on these items, indicating that the level of education does not significantly impact perceptions in these areas.

The ANOVA test for the overall scale indicated no statistically significant differences in perceptions of intercultural education values among the different education levels ($F=0.090$, $p=.914$). This suggests that, despite differences in specific items, education level does not significantly influence teachers' overall perceptions of intercultural education values.

The ANOVA results indicate significant differences in perceptions of intercultural education values based on prior intercultural education received. Specifically, teachers who had additional training for work in a multicultural classroom (Group 2) scored highest in most categories, including "Reduction of Stereotypes and Prejudices," "Coexistence of Different Cultures," "Tolerance Towards the Culturally Different," "Equality of All People," "Defiance of All Forms of Discrimination, Including Racism," and "Elimination of Xenophobic Attitudes."

In contrast, those who engaged in self-directed study of interculturality (Group 3) also achieved high scores, particularly in "Defiance of Ethnocentrism and Nationalism" and "Tolerance Towards the Culturally Different." Teachers who received intercultural education as part of their initial education (Group 1) and those with no prior intercultural education (Group 5) generally scored lower across these items.

The "Rule of Law" item showed that Group 2 had the highest score, surpassing Groups 1 and 5. The overall scale also revealed that Group 2 exhibited the highest perceptions of intercultural education values compared to other groups. Further analysis with the Scheffé test will clarify which specific groups differ significantly.

Table 8. Scheffé Post Hoc Test for Multiple Comparisons of Mean Differences

Multiple Comparisons			
Dependent Variable: Mean Score on the Scale of Values Promoted by Intercultural Education (IE)			
Scheffé			
(I) Respondents' Prior IE	(J) Respondents' Prior IE	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.
IE gained in initial education	Additional training	-.943*	.000
	Self-directed study of interculturality	-.704*	.006
	Combined	.225	.707
	No prior IE	-.438	.119
Additional training	IE gained in initial education	.943*	.000
	Self-directed study of interculturality	.239	.851
	Combined	1.168*	.000
	No prior IE	.505	.126
Self-directed study of interculturality	IE gained in initial education	.704*	.006
	Additional training	-.239	.851
	Combined	.929*	.000
	No prior intercultural education	.265	.760
Combined	IE gained in initial education	-.225	.707
	Additional training	-1.168*	.000
	Self-directed study of interculturality	-.929*	.000
	No prior IE	-.663*	.004
No prior IE	IE gained in initial education	.438	.119
	Additional training	-.505	.126
	Self-directed study of interculturality	-.265	.760
	Combined	.663*	.004

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

The post hoc Scheffé test results reveal statistically significant differences in the mean scores on the Scale of Values Promoted by Intercultural Education among groups with different prior intercultural education experiences. Teachers who received intercultural education during their initial education scored significantly lower than those who had additional training (Mean Difference=-.943, Sig.=.000) and those who engaged in self-directed study (Mean Difference=-.704, Sig.=.006). Additionally, teachers with additional training scored significantly higher than those who received combined training (Mean Difference=1.168, Sig.=.000).

Furthermore, teachers who engaged in self-directed study scored significantly higher than those who received combined training (Mean Difference=.929, Sig=.000). Conversely, teachers with no prior intercultural education scored significantly lower than those who received combined training (Mean Difference=-.663, Sig=.004). These results suggest that additional training and self-directed study are correlated with higher perceived values promoted by intercultural education, compared to other forms of prior intercultural education.

4. DISCUSSION

The research findings indicated that the level of intercultural competence among North Macedonian primary school teachers, as measured by the Scale of Values Promoted by Intercultural Education ($M=3.62$), falls within the “high” range (3.40–4.19), reflecting a positive endorsement of the values promoted by intercultural education. In comparison, Bedekovic (2011) reported a slightly higher level of intercultural competence among teachers from Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Slovakia, and Czechia, with a mean score of $M=3.88$. Both studies show that the most highly rated items are remarkably similar, with both placing strong emphasis on “Tolerance towards Culturally Different,” “Reduction of Stereotypes and Prejudices,” “Coexistence of Different Cultures,” and “Defiance of All Forms of Discrimination, Including Racism.” However, the mean values from Bedekovic’s study are notably higher, indicating a stronger perception of these values among the teachers surveyed. For instance, “Tolerance towards Culturally Different” scores a mean of 4.18 in Bedekovic’s study compared to 3.93 in the current research, and similarly higher values are seen for “Reduction of Stereotypes and Prejudices” (4.00 vs. 3.73), “Coexistence of Different Cultures” (4.10 vs. 3.70), and “Defiance of All Forms of Discrimination, Including Racism” (4.06 vs. 3.68). This disparity may suggest differences in cultural contexts, educational policies, or the effectiveness of intercultural education programs between the regions studied. In this context, Saidi and Hussein (2024) found that EFL teachers perceive intercultural competence development positively, through which Sri Lankan student teachers improved their understanding of intercultural competence, identifying key themes of cultural knowledge, communication, and tolerance (Tennekoon, 2023). Despite positive attitudes, their knowledge and practical skills in intercultural education are limited (Hariyadi & Rodiyah, 2023). Teachers emphasize diversity and peaceful coexistence, though they may lack awareness of current intercultural education discussions (Nishimura-Sahi et al., 2017).

Comparing the ranking of the four highly rated items between the two studies reveals interesting similarities and differences. In the current research, the highest combined percentages of “Agree” and “Strongly Agree” are observed for “Tolerance Towards the Culturally Different” (67.8%), “Rule of Law” (64.0%), “Coexistence of Different Cultures” (59.0%), and “Reduction of Stereotypes and Prejudices” (58.6%). Bedekovic (2011) reports the highest agreement for “tolerance towards culturally different” (83.7%), “coexistence of different cultures” (81.2%), “reduction of stereotypes and prejudices” (77.3%), “the fight against all forms of discrimination, including racism” (75.7%), and “equality of all people” (72%). While both studies rank “Tolerance Towards the Culturally Different” and “Coexistence of Different Cultures” highly, Bedekovic’s study shows a stronger agreement across all items. Additionally, the current research highlights “Rule of Law,” which is not explicitly emphasized in Bedekovic’s study. This variation may reflect differing educational priorities or cultural contexts between the regions. Similarly, Piršl (2011) highlights important values promoted by intercultural education, including tolerance towards culturally different people, coexistence of different cultures, equality of all people, and the fight against ethnocentrism and nationalism. Both studies emphasize the suppression of xenophobic attitudes and the reduction of stereotypes and prejudices. Likewise, Zotou (2017) found that Greek early childhood teachers are positive about intercultural education, knowledgeable about the curriculum, engage in diversity-promoting activities, and communicate well with diverse parents, while Tunisian EFL teachers are aware of cultural aspects, promote intercultural competence, and engage with local and global cultures (Smaoui, 2020). However, actual teaching practices often fall short (Chau & Truong, 2019) because, as Senyshyn (n.d.) emphasizes, intercultural education and culturally responsive practices prioritize social justice, inclusion, and equity in teacher education rather than practical implementation strategies.

The t-test results revealed significant gender differences in teachers’ perceptions of intercultural education values. Male teachers consistently reported higher agreement on items such as “Defiance of Ethnocentrism and Nationalism,” “Rule of Law,” “Tolerance Towards the Culturally Different,” “Equality

of All People,” and “Defiance of All Forms of Discrimination, Including Racism” compared to female teachers. In contrast, Bedekovic (2011) found that female teachers showed a higher average level of agreement with statements on tolerance towards culturally different people and equality of all people. Overall, female teachers demonstrated higher agreement on 5 out of 8 items. These results suggest that gender influences teachers’ views on intercultural education values, with male and female teachers potentially prioritizing different aspects of these values. The research results indicate that teachers in multicultural school environments perceive a stronger promotion of intercultural education values compared to those in monocultural settings. The research results show statistically significant differences in items such as “Rule of Law,” “Tolerance Towards the Culturally Different,” and “Elimination of Xenophobic Attitudes,” with teachers having 20 or more years of experience reporting higher agreement. For the remaining five items, no significant differences were found, though more experienced teachers generally scored slightly higher. Similarly, Bedekovic (2011) found that respondents aged 31 to 51 scored higher on all statements related to the values promoted by intercultural education. Hariyadi and Rodiyah (2023) found that teachers’ lack of experience or training in intercultural education has contributed to their inability to conceptualize ideas about how to apply them.

Regarding teachers’ education level, PhD holders scored higher on “Coexistence of Different Cultures,” “Defiance of Ethnocentrism and Nationalism,” and “Tolerance Towards the Culturally Different” compared to Bachelor’s degree holders. However, they scored lower on “Rule of Law” and “Equality of All People” compared to both Bachelor and MA holders. MA holders also scored higher on “Defiance of All Forms of Discrimination, Including Racism” compared to Bachelor’s degree holders. In comparison, Bedekovic (2011) found that postgraduate students (MA and PhD candidates) had the highest scores on most values promoted by intercultural education, except for “Equality of All People,” where undergraduate students showed the highest scores. These results indicate that education level influences teachers’ perceptions of intercultural education values, with PhD holders scoring higher on certain values due to their extensive study and exposure to diverse perspectives. Differences in curriculum and professional experiences at various educational levels may also account for the varying scores on specific intercultural values.

Regarding the prior intercultural education received, teachers who had additional training for work in a multicultural classroom scored highest in most categories. In contrast, those who engaged in self-directed study of interculturality also achieved high scores, particularly in “Defiance of Ethnocentrism and Nationalism” and “Tolerance Towards the Culturally Different.” Teachers with no prior intercultural education generally scored lower across these items. Chau and Truong (2019) found that among the factors of graduate education, coursebook teaching, and foreign experience, only teachers’ education had a meaningful impact on their teaching practices, while none of these factors affected their beliefs and perceived practices. They emphasized the value of teacher education in intercultural teaching over coursebook teaching and foreign visits, noting that the impact of teacher training surpassed that of international experience. Lázár (2007) specifically confirmed that even a 90-minute training session on intercultural teaching pedagogy could considerably improve teachers’ practices of intercultural integration. Roiha and Sommier (2021) emphasize the need for continuous training to boost teachers’ confidence and intercultural education practices. However, they also highlight the challenge of providing training that is effective both in theory and in practice. Figueredo-Canosa et al. (2020) argue that promoting intercultural competences should go beyond specific modules or subjects focused on cultural diversity. They contend that relying solely on these subjects can be contradictory, as it approaches intercultural education from a deficit perspective, treating cultural differences as problems to be addressed.

5. CONCLUSION

The study highlights the need for continuous, effective training to enhance teachers’ confidence and practical skills in intercultural education, suggesting that teacher education significantly impacts intercultural teaching practices. These findings underscore the importance of integrating comprehensive intercultural training within the North Macedonian education system to better prepare teachers for diverse classroom environments. Further research is recommended to explore the long-term effects of such training and to identify additional factors that influence teachers’ intercultural competence. Moreover, by identifying how gender, experience, prior training, and school cultural mix shape perceptions, this study offers new insights

into the nuanced ways teacher characteristics influence the adoption of intercultural values, addressing a notable gap in empirical research within North Macedonia. Theoretically, the results extend existing intercultural education frameworks by highlighting the role of teacher beliefs in mediating pedagogical approaches that foster tolerance, stereotype reduction, and cultural coexistence. Practically, these findings can guide the development of targeted professional development programmes and curriculum resources that embed intercultural content, ensuring that teacher training emphasizes cultural competence tailored to specific teacher profiles. School administrators and policymakers may use this evidence to implement policies that mandate ongoing intercultural training and support inclusive practices across different school contexts. Ultimately, by translating these insights into concrete strategies, the study paves the way for more cohesive and equitable classroom environments that reflect and celebrate cultural diversity.

6. LIMITATIONS

The study acknowledges several limitations in data collection and analysis. The exclusion of respondents from the eastern region of the Republic of North Macedonia may impact the representativeness of the findings. Furthermore, the research may be constrained by a lack of research in the field of values promoted by intercultural education, which complicates the comparison of results.

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Research Ethics. The study was conducted through an online questionnaire with prior approval from school principals. Teachers provided informed consent and were assured of anonymity.

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