

GENDER AND LEVEL OF TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE ON KEY FEATURES OF INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION

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Abstract

The paper explored the level of teachers' knowledge on key features of intercultural education. The research was led by three questions: whether there is a statistically significant difference in the knowledge of female and male teachers on the meaning of notion of intercultural education, on the goals of intercultural education and on the values promoted by intercultural education. Data collection was conducted through a questionnaire applied to 217 primary school teachers in the Republic of North Macedonia. Respondents rated themselves on a 5 point Likert scale. Descriptive statistics were used to determine levels of knowledge on intercultural education. When interpreting the level of knowledge on intercultural education, the interval 1.00–1.79 was evaluated to be “very low”, 1.80–2.59 to be “low”, 2.60–3.39 to be “middling”, 3.40–4.19 to be “high”, and 4.20–5.00 to be “very high”. Differences in the level of knowledge on teachers' intercultural education were tested using *t-test* at $p = .05$. Both female and male teachers show a middling level of knowledge on the notion of intercultural ($M = 3.06$), a high level of knowledge on the goals of intercultural education ($M = 3.48$) and a high level of knowledge on the values promoted by intercultural education ($M = 3.55$), the research results show. Female teachers show a statistically lower level of knowledge on the goals of intercultural education ($M = 3.37, p < .05$) than male teachers ($M = 3.75, p < .05$).

Keywords: *gender, intercultural education, level of knowledge, teacher*

Introduction

Migration movements in recent decades have undoubtedly left their mark on European societies. In this context of social change, societies and cultures are faced with the need to find a space for mutual understanding and respect, where they will learn about the value of diversity and promote democratic citizenship. This goal can only be achieved through intercultural dialogue, which is becoming a vital concept in preserving peace and world unity (UNESCO, 2006). Schools play an essential role in this field. By promoting intercultural education, the education system seeks to enable students to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to build a more democratic and just world (UNESCO, 2006). Of course, this task should not be undertaken only by schools. Research shows that the application of the intercultural approach to education should involve the collaboration of various educational agents (students, school staff, family and community in general), through the creation of



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СОДРЖИНА / СОДЕРЖАНИЕ / CONTENT

1. Adili Bujar, Petrovska Sonja and Xhambazi Gzim - GENDER AND LEVEL OF TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE ON KEY FEATURES OF INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION.....	13
2. Ćeklić Nina S. - CONCEPTUAL POSITION AS A COMPOSITION PRINCIPLE IN REMNANTS OF THE WORLD BY IGOR MAROJEVIĆ.....	23
3. Gjorgjeva Ivana, Jankova Alagjovska Natka - ANGELA CARTER'S BLOODY CHAMBER IN RELATION TO THE SECOND WAVE FEMINISM	31
4. Пиев Крсте, Поп Зариева Наталија, Крстева Марија, Донеv Драган - THE NOTION OF BANISHMENT IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS	39
5. Ivanova Biljana, Kuzmanovska Dragana, Kirova Snezana - FOREIGN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION IN SCHOOLS.....	45
6. Јованова-Митковска Снежана- КВАЛИТАТИВНАТА МЕТОДОЛОГИЈА И НЕЈЗИНАТА ПРИМЕНА ВО ОПШТЕСТВЕНИТЕ И ХУМАНИСТИЧКИТЕ НАУКИ	49
7. Крстев Марија, Донеv Драган, Поп Зариева Наталија, Илиев Крсте HEMINGWAY IN HEMINGWAY'S GIRL.....	59
8. Kujundžić Maja, Ćeklić Nina - SOCILINGUISTIC USE OF THE PASSIVE IN TWO 19TH CENTURY BRITISH NOVELS.....	65
9. Vangelov Nikola - INTERCULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS OF DIGITAL MARKETING	75
10. Антониевски Горан, Асани Агим - КАРАКТЕРИСТИКИ НА ГАСТРОНОМИЈАТА ВО ПОЛОШКИОТ РЕГИОН.....	83
11. Аржанова Ирина- СУЩНОСТЪ ЧЕЛОВЕКА И ИДЕАЛЫ ЖИЗНИ У СЛАВЯН.....	91
12. Арязмова Ольга Витальевна - ЛИТЕРАТУРНЫЙ ТРАВЕЛОГ В ЛИНГВОКУЛЬТУРНОМ ИЗМЕРЕНИИ (на материале «Африканской книги» А. М. Стесина).....	99
13. Bangoji Salija -TEACHER COMPETENCIES FOR THE KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY	105
14. Василевская Анастасия - РАБОТА С ХУДОЖЕСТВЕННОЙ ДЕТАЛЬЮ НА УРОКАХ ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ В СРЕДНЕЙ ШКОЛЕ.....	113
15. Витанова-Рингачева Ана, Мицева Сузана ЈУРУЦИТЕ – МАКЕДОНСКИТЕ АМИШИ.....	117
16. Гальцова Дарья - СИНОНИМИЧЕСКИЕ СООТВЕТСТВИЯ В НАИМЕНОВАНИЯХ ОБРАГОВ (НА МАТЕРИАЛЕ ВОРОНЕЖСКИХ ГОВОРОВ)	123
17. Гладышева Светлана - КНИГОИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО «СЛОВО» В СОЦИОКУЛЬТУРНОМ ПРОСТРАНСТВЕ РУССКОГО ЗАРУБЕЖЬЯ.....	129
18. Голаков Костадин, Методијески Дејан - КАРАКТЕРИСТИКИ НА РУСКАТА ГАСТРОНОМИЈА.....	135
19. Грачева Жанна, Ганделидзе Диана - ЯЗЫКОВАЯ МОДА В РОССИИ НАЧАЛА XXI ВЕКА.....	143

20. Гркова-Беадер Марија - ПРАВОПИСОТ ВО НАСТАВАТА ПО МАКЕДОНСКИ ЈАЗИК ВО ОСНОВНОТО ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ	155
21. Денкова Јованка - БЕГСТВО ВО/ОД ВИРТУЕЛНАТА РЕАЛНОСТ НА СОНИШТАТА	165
22. Ђуричковић Милутин - РУСКА ДРАМА ЗА ДЕЦУ И МЛАДЕ НА СРПСКОМ ЈЕЗИКУ	175
23. Донев Драган, Поп Зариева Наталија, Костова Кристина, Илиев Крсте ИГИТАЛНИТЕ НОМАДИ КАКО КУЛТУРОЛОШКИ ФЕНОМЕН ВО СОВРЕМЕНОТО ОПШТЕСТВО.....	185
24. Иљина Татьяна, Моу Шужань - ОСОБЕННОСТИ ДИСТАНЦИОННОГО ОБУЧЕНИЯ В РОССИИ И КИТАЕ.....	191
25. Иванов Стефан, Мартиновска Банде Цвета, Ивановска Билјана ОБРАБОТКА НА ПРИРОДЕН ЈАЗИК СО ТЕХНИКИ НА МАШИНСКО УЧЕЊЕ	197
26. Ивановска Билјана, Џафери Гзим - ГОВОРНИТЕ ЧИНОВИ И НИВНАТА ПОВРЗАНОСТ СО УЧТИВОСТА ВО ВРЕМЕ НА КОРОНА КРИЗАТА	203
27. Карначук Ирина - КЛАССИЧЕСКАЯ ЛИТЕРАТУРА КАК СПОСОБ СОХРАНЕНИЯ НРАВСТВЕННОСТИ НА УРОКАХ ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ В СРЕДНЕЙ ШКОЛЕ	209
28. Ковилоски Славчо - ЗА ПОСТОЕЊЕТО НА МАКЕДОНСКАТА КНИЖЕВНА КРИТИКА ВО XIX ВЕК.....	213
29. Косяков Сергей - ИСТОРИЯ ПОПЕЧИТЕЛЬСТВА О СЛЕПЫХ И БИБЛИОТЕЧНОГО ОБСЛУЖИВАНИЯ НЕЗРЯЧИХ В ВОРОНЕЖСКОЙ ОБЛАСТИ	221
30. Котев Иван - ПРАВДАТА И НЕПРАВДАТА ВО ФОЛКЛОРОТ (Во македонските народни песни, приказни и кратките жанри)	227
31. Мелкадзе Нанули - ЗАСТОЛЪЕ КАК ФРАГМЕНТ ГРУЗИНСКОЙ ЯЗЫКОВОЙ КАРТИНЫ МИРА	237
32. Младеновска-Ристовска Катерина - КУЛТОТ НА ВОДАТА ВО РЕЛИГИЈАТА НА АНТИЧКИТЕ МАКЕДОНЦИ.....	245
33. Нагина Ксения - ОБ УЧЕБНЫХ ПОСОБИЯХ В ВЫСШЕЙ ШКОЛЕ: ПРОБЛЕМЫ ИЗУЧЕНИЯ ТВОРЧЕСТВА Л. ТОЛСТОГО	253
34. Негриевска Надица - СИНТАКСИЧКИ ФУНКЦИИ НА ПРОСТИТЕ ПРЕДЛОЗИ ВО ИТАЛИЈАНСКИОТ ЈАЗИК И НИВНИТЕ МОЖНИ ЕКВИВАЛЕНТИ ВО МАКЕДОНСКИОТ ЈАЗИК.....	261
35. Пигунова Ксения - СПОСОБЫ ОРГАНИЗАЦИИ ПРОСТРАНСТВЕННО-ВРЕМЕННОЙ КАРТИНЫ МИРА В РОМАНЕ ЕВГЕНИЯ ВОДОЛАЗКИНА «ЛАВР».....	271
36. Попов Сергей - ДИАЛЕКТНАЯ ГЕОГРАФИЧЕСКАЯ ЛЕКСИКА В РЕГИОНАЛЬНОЙ ТОПОНИМИИ РОССИИ	279
37. Рогич Петја -БУГАРСКИОТ, МАКЕДОНСКИОТ И СРПСКИОТ ЈАЗИК – СЛИЧНОСТИ И РАЗЛИКИ.....	283
38. Сарафова Наташа - РАДИКАЛНООСЛОБОДИТЕЛНИОТ ФЕМИНИЗАМ ВО ДЕЛАТА НА АНГЕЛА КАРТЕР	291
39. Саздова Викторија, Ивановска Билјана - ЈАЗИЧНИТЕ ЕДИНИЦИ СО ПОЗИТИВЕН ЕМОЦИОНАЛЕН ПРИЗНАК ВО ЈАЗИЧНИОТ ПАР ГЕРМАНСКИ-МАКЕДОНСКИ	299

40. Стојановска-Стефанова Анета, Рунчева-Тасев Христина, Магдинчева Шопова Марија - КОМУНИКАЦИСКИ ПРЕДИЗВИЦИ ВО МУЛТИКУЛТУРНИТЕ ОПШТЕСТВА.....	307
41. Тасевска Марица - ОНЛАЈН НАСТАВАТА ПО ГЕРМАНСКИ ЈАЗИК ВО ВРЕМЕ НА ПАНДЕМИЈА. ИСКУСТВА И ПРЕДИЗВИЦИ.....	315
42. Тернова Татјана, Фролова Анна - РЕПРЕЗЕНТАЦИЈА ПАМЈАТИ В ПОЕЗИИ ОКСАНЫ ВАСЈАКИНОЙ	321
43. Ткаченко Дмитрий - ИНКЛУЗИВНОЕ ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ В РОССИИ В КОНТЕКСТЕ ЕВРОПЕЙСКОГО ОПЫТА	327
44. Ткаченко Татјана - ОПЫТ ОБРАЩЕНИЯ К СЛАВЯНСКИМ ЯЗЫКАМ НА ЗАНЯТИЯХ ПО РУССКОМУ ЯЗЫКУ В СПОРТИВНОМ ВУЗЕ	333
45. Тодорова Марија, Уланска Татјана - ПЕРЦЕПЦИЈАТА НА СТУДЕНТИТЕ ЗА ОНЛАЈН НАСТАВАТА ПО ШПАНСКИ И АНГЛИСКИ ЈАЗИК ВО УСЛОВИ НА ПАНДЕМИЈА	339
46. Урумова-Марковска Славица - ТЕХНОЛОГИЈАТА ВО ОБРАЗОВАНИЕТО КАКО ПРЕДИЗВИК ЗА ЗДРАВ ДЕТСКИ РАЗВОЈ	347
47. Цацков Оливер - МОРАВСКАТА МИСИЈА НА КИРИЛ И МЕТОДИЈА ЗНАЧАЕН ФАКТОР ЗА СЛОВЕНСКАТА ПИСМЕНОСТ.....	355
48. Шутаров Васко - СПЕЦИФИКИ НА МАКЕДОНСКАТА КУЛТУРНА ДИПЛОМАТИЈА	363

working communities (Aguado & Malik, 2006). Within these communities, teachers can improve their intercultural practices through dialogue and exchange of ideas (Angelides, Stylianou, & Leigh, 2007). In this way, the development of partnership projects involving various educational agents, promoters of dialogue and plural citizenship, gains significant importance in the current educational and social context.

Given the fact that the level of adequacy of interactions in intercultural situations is achieved when the activities of the communicator meet the expectations and demands of the situation (Straub, 2007 according to Hiller & Wozniak, 2009) as well as the fact that the effectiveness of intercultural interaction is observed in situations when the participants in the interaction manage to realize the desired personal outcomes (Wiseman, 2002 according to Hiller & Wozniak, 2009), the inclusion of the criterion of effectiveness and adequacy in the concept of intercultural competencies facilitates their determination in direct practice. According to Banks (2001), teachers must develop their reflective cultural, national, and global identities in order to act effectively in intercultural classrooms and help students become caring, reflective citizens in the intercultural world. Teachers must appreciate and take advantage of the cultural benefits that students from different groups bring to school (Banks, 2008).

Modern national curricula in many European countries, but also worldwide, as the main goals of educational policies highlight the competencies that students should acquire in school. The development of those competencies depends first of all on the competencies of the teacher, and “intercultural education requires specially trained and qualified teachers ...” (Piršl, 2001, p. 82) while Deardorff (2009) describes intercultural competence as a teaching spiral. She points out that “concrete interactions, the adoption of communication strategies, the development of attitudes and positioning, as well as self-reflection and the acquisition of knowledge go hand in hand” (Deardorff, 2009, p. 211). Intercultural understanding includes knowledge of other cultures, but also positive attitudes towards other cultures, such as empathy, curiosity and respect. Competences can be divided into four dimensions: knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviors, and one of the definitions offered is the ability to communicate effectively and “in the right way” with people from other cultures (Perry & Southwell, 2011).

Key features of intercultural education

Interculture refers to the philosophy of respect and promotion, protection of minorities, the socially disadvantaged, but also the understanding of different interdependencies. Interculture is in its essence rational because it can only happen between people, and thus the realized interculture implies existence with others, and not only beside them (Zapata-Barrero, 2015). Portera (2020) states that interculture in terms of value can be understood as the promotion, ie upgrading of multiculturalism, but also as a state of tolerance of different cultures, and if problems arise, provides readiness to face them. The interactive aspect of interculture is emphasized by dynamic interrelationships and mutual influence. Also, a very important feature of interculture is that it seeks to enable dialogue between indigenous and immigrant groups regardless of whether they are minority or majority (Portera, 2008). In order to achieve a tolerant relationship between two individuals, ie groups, one must first establish a connection with one’s own, original culture, after which the individual becomes capable of being culturally open to the different (Portera, 2011). Encouraging that intercultural dialogue is necessary, but at the same time complex.

Marsh (2009) argues that intercultural education through projects, forms and programs most often occurs in school. The author suggests that schools should provide students with education and upbringing that will help them grow and live with differences that, if properly understood, do not divide but enrich and connect people. Lunneblad and Johansson (2012) warn that knowing and appreciating differences is not enough to know them. It is necessary to work on establishing and promoting intercultural relations, cooperation and dialogue. Therefore, according to Kuramoto et al. (2017), schools as representatives of upbringing and education receive redefined tasks and functions. The authors claim that in the Japanese school, as in all other schools, intercultural education encourages the understanding of the basic principles and ways of functioning of the culturally plural community, e.g. care, strengthening civic responsibility, solidarity, critical awareness of ethnic, racial, gender, religious and other factors that cause inequality, discrimination, and conflict.

For interculture as an innovative approach to education on which the activities of schools are based, in addition to the dimension of teaching content, it is necessary to respect the social dimension of the teaching process. Teaching is a specific interaction-communication process. Several authors (Banks, 2006a; Bennett, 2013; Chou, 2007; Deardoff, 2009) argue that the quality of the relationships established in teaching between teacher and student, and student with student, significantly depends on student achievement, but also the socio-emotional climate in the classroom and school. The school must be aware of its role as a place of communication between peers and must enable and encourage students to talk. The school is a place not only for learning, but also for contacts and conversations, a place where those relationships will develop and experience, where group rules will be adopted. DeJaeghere and Cao (2009) note that an important precondition at all levels of education is that the educational processes are realized in a suitable environment, ambience, climate, where respect, mutual participation, individual freedom and equality is a common factor. The authors state that the unconscious messages that the child receives in school (ethical standards, disciplinary policy, dominant relationships) significantly affect the attitude towards human rights in general. According to Banks (2015), this means that the school both explicitly and implicitly influences the formation of attitudes and values.

Interculture as an innovative approach in school strengthens the common school culture of knowing and respecting the differences that are present in the school. The goals of intercultural education are to directly oppose ethnocentrism, racism, stereotypes, prejudices, inequality and discrimination in school and in society. Intercultural education in school creates openness to other cultures, cultural and intercultural knowledge, including cross-cultural experiences, and above all the uniqueness and value of each culture and its contribution to humanity. Intercultural education can be promoted through curricular activities at different levels: by defining goals, competencies, content and activities, evaluating methods, testing approaches and methods, teaching aids, priorities, teacher-principal cooperation. This will specifically include: promoting coordination and creating lessons, identifying intercultural competencies and involving them in the learning process, encouraging students to think about the components of intercultural competencies and the ways in which languages and cultures work (Beacco et al., 2016). Intercultural education contains knowledge, values and skills. The content of intercultural education can also be defined as knowledge

that needs to be included in the curriculum. De Leo (2010) divides this content into four areas: 1. Culture, language, heritage and cultural diversity; 2. Civil rights, citizenship and cultural identity; 3. Equality and human rights; and 4. Peace and harmony between different cultures.

In accordance with the stated principles, according to Aguado, and Del Olmo (2009) the design of the school curriculum becomes a process in which decisions about what, how and when to learn are consciously made in the group where the teachers work. Curriculum development should contribute to: discovering cultural differences and their positive values; critical awareness of the fight against racism and discrimination; knowledge of cultural heritage; understanding and respecting all; awareness of growing global interdependence; awareness of rights and responsibilities; awareness of cultural values; respect for different ways of thinking (UNESCO, 2006). The vision of the curriculum is to nurture all elements of life with the specific goals of understanding the world through knowledge, skills and attitudes, the development of moral values and the personal and social development of connecting with others through understanding and respect (Tormey, 2005).

According to De Leo (2010) through teaching all students will have the opportunity to get to know and express their language and heritage, to get to know and appreciate the culture of others and its contribution to society, to learn the national and foreign language, to have equal access to education, to know and express their rights and to respect the rights of others, to become tolerant with understanding and empathy, to care for others and to behave in culturally appropriate ways. Regarding the design of the curriculum, Aguado, and Del Olmo (2009) further state that it is a short written document, but above all, it is a philosophy that is adopted by the educational communities as a whole. Intercultural education should be central to all aspects of school life. This should be reflected in the hidden curriculum as well as in the school rules and practice, teaching the contents of the curriculum

Methodology

The paper explored the level of teachers' knowledge on key features of intercultural education. The research was led by three questions: whether there is a statistically significant difference in the female and male teachers' level of knowledge on the meaning of notion of interculture, on the goals of intercultural education and on the values promoted by intercultural education. Data collection was conducted through a questionnaire (Bedeković, 2011) applied to 217 primary school teachers in the Republic of North Macedonia. Respondents rated themselves on a 5 point Likert scale. Descriptive statistics were used to determine levels of knowledge on intercultural education. When interpreting the level of knowledge on intercultural education, the interval 1.00-1.79 was evaluated to be "very low", 1.80-2.59 to be "low", 2.60-3.39 to be "middling", 3.40-4.19 to be "high", and 4.20-5.00 to be "very high". Differences in the level of knowledge on teachers' intercultural education were tested using *t-test* at $p=.05$.

Discussion of the results

The scale for measuring the knowledge on the term interculture consists of 6 items that should define the term "interculture": 1. Existence of different cultures in a territory; 2. Tolerance of diversity; 3. Active cooperation of two or more cultures in

all areas of life; 4. Respect and acceptance of diversity; 5. Adapting the majority culture to the minority culture; 6. Assimilation of minority culture into majority culture. Level of knowledge on the term “interculture” according to gender of teachers was determined through independent-samples t-test.

Table 1. T-test results regarding the level of teachers’ knowledge on notion “interculture” according to gender variable

Definition of notion “interculture”	Female (N=158)		Male (N=59)		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Level of knowledge	3.03	.497	3.14	.557	-1.322	.188

The t-test results show that there is no statistically significant difference in the level of knowledge of teachers on the notion of “interculture” according to gender. Male teachers show a slightly higher level of knowledge on this notion (M=3.14) compared to female teachers (M=3.03). In general, both female and male teachers show a middling level of knowledge on the notion of “interculture”. The t-test results showed a statistically significant difference between female teachers (M=3.42, SD=1.212; $p<0.05$) and male teachers (M=3.88, SD=.984; $p<0.05$) only in the statement (4) that “Respect and acceptance of diversity” best defines the term “interculture”. Female respondents achieved a slightly higher mean (M=3.15, SD=.868) compared to male respondents (M=3.10, SD=1.185) in claim (1) according to which the term “interculture” best defines “The existence of different cultures in a territory”, a claim that actually refers to the term “multiculture”. However, the female respondents reached a lower mean (M=3.69, SD=1.150) compared to the male respondents (M=3.78, SD=.966) in claim (3) that the term “interculture” best defines “Active cooperation of two or more cultures in all areas of life”, a statement that most accurately defines the term “interculture”. In the last two claims (5 and 6), which do not refer to the term “interculture” at all, female teachers showed a lower level of agreement with these claims (M=2.53, SD=1.182; and M=1.99, SD=1.162) in comparison with male teachers (M=2.64, SD=1.540; and M=2.00, SD=1.273).

The scale for measuring knowledge on objectives of intercultural education consists of 11 items: 1. Knowledge and understanding of the fundamental features of the culture of the “other” (eg norms, customs, values, language, symbols); 2. Developing the ability to understand and accept cultural differences as a value; 3. Developing abilities to communicate with culturally diverse; 4. Awareness of stereotypes and prejudices about culturally different; 5. Developing abilities and skills for critical self-perception in the encounter with the culturally different; 6. Non-violent conflict resolution; 7. Respect and preservation of cultural heritage; 8. Respect and preservation of European and World cultural heritage; 9. Nurturing a sense of solidarity with the culturally different; 10. Developing an open, multicultural identity; 11. Promoting sustainable development. Differences in the level of knowledge on the objectives of intercultural education according to the gender of teachers were determined through independent-samples t-test.

Table 2. T-test results regarding the level of teachers’ knowledge on objectives of intercultural education according to gender variable

Objectives of intercultural education	Female (N=158)		Male (N=59)		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Level of knowledge	3.37	.844	3.75	.657	-3.092	.002*

*p<0.05

The t-test results show that there is statistically significant difference in the level of knowledge of teachers on the objectives of intercultural education according to gender. Male teachers show significantly higher level of knowledge on objectives of intercultural education (M=3.75, p<.05) than female teachers (M=3.37, p<.05). According to established criterion (see the methodology section) the male teacher level of knowledge on objectives of intercultural education was found to be high and the female teacher level of knowledge on this dimension was found to be middling. The t-test showed statistically significant differences between teachers by gender in 5 out of 11 claims. Male teachers achieved statistically significantly higher arithmetic mean (M=3.81, SD=1.181, p<.05; M=3.95, SD=1.007, p<.05; M=4.03, SD=.909, p<.05; M=4.37, SD=.692, p<.05; M=3.64, SD=1.228, p<.05) compared to female teachers (M=3.21, SD=1.010, p<.05; M=3.35, SD=.977, p<.05; M=3.42, SD=.966, p<.05; M=3.20, SD=1.045, p<.05; M=3.11, SD=1.154, p<.05) in the claims: “developing abilities and skills for critical self-perception in the encounter with the culturally different”; “Respect and preservation of cultural heritage”; “Nurturing a sense of solidarity with the culturally different”; “Developing an open, multicultural identity”; and “promoting sustainable development.” Although without a statistically significant difference, male teachers show a higher degree of average agreement (M=3.63; M=3.75; M=3.75) compared to female teachers (M=3.46; M=3.56; M=3.43) in other three offered claims also, in claims 3, 4 and 6 while female teachers show a higher level of agreement (M=3.52; M=3.65) compared to male teachers (M=3.42; M=3.51) in only two claims, 1st and 2nd claim.

The scale for measuring knowledge on values promoted by intercultural education consists of 8 items: 1. Reducing stereotypes and prejudices; 2. Coexistence of different cultures; 3. Struggle against ethnocentrism and nationalism; 4. Rule of Law; 5. Tolerance for culturally diverse; 6. Equality of all people; 7. Combating all forms of discrimination, including racism; 8 Suppression of xenophobic attitudes. Differences in levels of knowledge on values promoted by intercultural education according to gender of teachers were determined through t-test.

Table 3. T-test results regarding the level of teachers’ knowledge on values promoted by intercultural education according to gender variable

Values promoted by intercultural education	Female (N=158)		Male (N=59)		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Level of knowledge	3.48	.999	3.73	.912	-1.652	.100

The t-test results show no statistically significant difference in the level of knowledge of teachers on values promoted by intercultural education according to gender. Male teachers show a slightly higher level of knowledge on this scale ($M=3.73$) compared to female teachers ($M=3.48$). In general, both female and male teachers show a high level of knowledge on values promoted by intercultural education. The t-test showed statistically significant differences between teachers according to gender in only 2 of 8 claims. Male teachers achieved statistically significantly higher mean ($M=3.75$, $SD=.822$, $p<.05$; $M=4.27$, $SD=1.031$, $p<.05$) compared to female teachers ($M=3.22$, $SD=1.248$, $p<.05$; $M=3.67$, $SD=1.108$, $p<.05$) in the claims: “rule of law” and “tolerance towards culturally diverse”. The t-test results show showed a (non-significant) higher degree of average agreement of male teachers ($M=3.69$; $M=3.78$; $M=3.76$; $M=3.85$) compared to female teachers ($M=3.59$; $M=3.43$; $M=3.51$; $M=3.56$) in other 4 claims that determine the values promoted by intercultural education (1, 3, 6 and 7). Female teachers showed a higher degree of agreement ($M = 3.59$; $M = 3.30$) compared to male teachers ($M = 3.54$; $M = 3.20$) in only two statements (2 and 8).

Conclusion

Based on the research questions we came to the conclusion that there is no statistically significant difference in the teachers' level of knowledge on the notion of “interculture” according to gender. The research results showed a slightly higher level of knowledge of male teachers on this notion ($M=3.14$) compared to female teachers ($M=3.03$). Both female and male teachers show a middling level of knowledge on the notion of “interculture”. There is statistically significant difference in the teachers' level of knowledge on the objectives of intercultural education according to gender, the t-test results show. Male teachers show significantly higher level of knowledge on objectives of intercultural education ($M=3.75$, $p<.05$) than female teachers ($M=3.37$, $p<.05$). The male teacher level of knowledge on objectives of intercultural education was found to be high while the female teacher level of knowledge was found to be middling. The *t-test* results showed that there is no statistically significant difference in the teachers' level of knowledge on values promoted by intercultural education according to gender. Male teachers show a slightly higher level of knowledge on this dimension ($M=3.73$) compared to female teachers ($M=3.48$). In general, both female and male teachers show a high level of knowledge on values promoted by intercultural education. Teachers in general but especially female teachers need training in the field of intercultural education. There is a need for further research on why the level of knowledge of female teachers on key features of intercultural education is lower compared to male teachers.

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