

## PERCEPTIONS OF PRIMARY EDUCATION TEACHERS OF INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION AND THEIR MENTAL RESILIENCE

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### Resume:

The article aims to explore and analyze primary school teachers' perceptions of intercultural education and assess their mental resilience levels. The study will focus on understanding the factors that influence their perceptions and the potential relationship between these perceptions and their mental resilience. The total number of teachers surveyed is 86, of which 62,8% are women and 37,2% are men from the total number of respondents. Overall, the findings highlight the importance of providing teachers with adequate support, resources and training to integrate intercultural education into their teaching practice effectively. Addressing the identified challenges and improving teacher preparedness and resilience can create more inclusive and culturally responsive learning environments. Moreover, ongoing efforts to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of intercultural education initiatives can help maximize their impact on student interactions and attitudes.

### Key words:

school; mental resilience; teachers; education.

### Анотація:

**Ніколова Симона, Граммену Хрисула-Марія. Сприймання вчителями початкової освіти міжкультурної освіти та їх психічна стійкість.**

Мета статті – дослідити та проаналізувати уявлення вчителів початкової школи про міжкультурну освіту та оцінити рівень їх психічної стійкості. Дослідження буде зосереджено на розумінні факторів, які впливають на їхнє сприйняття, і потенційного зв'язку між цими сприйняттями та їх психічною стійкістю. Загальна кількість опитаних педагогів – 86, з них 62,8% жінки та 37,2% чоловіки від загальної кількості респондентів. Загалом отримані результати підкреслюють важливість надання вчителям належної підтримки, ресурсів і навчання для ефективної інтеграції міжкультурної освіти у їхню педагогічну практику. Вирішення виявлених проблем і підвищення готовності та стійкості вчителів можуть створити більш інклюзивне та культурно сприйнятливий навчальний середовище. Крім того, постійні зусилля з оцінки та підвищення ефективності ініціатив міжкультурної освіти можуть допомогти максимізувати їхній вплив на взаємодію та ставлення студентів.

### Ключові слова:

школа; психічна стійкість; педагоги; виховання.

Setting of the problem. Intercultural education aims to change the attitudes, behaviors, but also the way of thinking of all the people who participate in the educational process and not only, through the constant interaction with the various cultural groups, with the ultimate goal of creating a multicultural education environment (Angelopoulou, Manesis, 2018).

A school that is part of a system that is in constant interaction and interdependence and as is known every change in a part of the system implies a change in the whole system as well (Hatzichristou, 2011). In other words, intercultural education is an education policy, which is not only related to the level of the school class and by extension the school, but also related to the macro-level of the state, taking into account the thoughts of both the authorities on such issues, as well as teachers (Hatzisotiriou, 2015).

Intercultural education was formed in order to face cultural diversity and the changes created by this diversity (Parthenis et. al., 2016). Portera (2008) states that intercultural education is a real revolution in the field of education, where the issues of identity and culture are no longer treated as something static, but as a dynamic one. In the same direction, according to UNESCO, intercultural education is a dynamic concept, which includes the interaction between different cultures in terms of equality (Gerosimos, 2013).

According to Markou (2001), intercultural education is defined as the process of transforming both the school and the wider society for the most effective adaptation to the new multicultural reality, to create equal opportunities for the expression of all

personalities both in individual, as well as on a collective level, having at the same time the required help and support of the state for personal search at the level of freedom, formation of cultural identity, but also self-fulfillment of each person. Coulby (2006) states that intercultural education is not a revision of the systems used by schools until now, but should utilize the full range of historical events through practices aimed at understanding contemporary cultural development and developing. Furthermore, intercultural education includes the concept of "culture", highlighting ways of coexistence and communication between cultures, their value systems, beliefs, and traditions (Grant, Portera, 2010).

It is worth mentioning that culture, at a first level, according to Herskovits is defined as "that part of the environment that has been created by man" (Smith et al, 2011, p. 78). On the other hand, Essinger mentions that culture is in constant mobility, which changes depending on the prevailing traditions and living conditions. New and foreign elements interact making culture not static, but evolving (Zografou, 2003). According to H. Essinger, intercultural education is based on four basic principles in order to have a peaceful coexistence between different cultures, where intercultural respect and intercultural communication will be promoted (Markou, 2010). So, these principles have to do with:

1. Education for empathy. Through the right training and guidance, the person can understand the diversity and problems of the other and place himself in the position of the other, but also in the situations that the other experiences.

2. Education for solidarity and equal opportunities, with the main goal of eliminating social discrimination, fighting injustice and social inequalities.

3. Education for intercultural respect, which can be realized by 'opening' towards other cultures and by equal interaction between cultures.

4. Education against the nationalist way of thinking, with the aim of eliminating prejudices and stereotypical perceptions towards the different (Karagiannis, 2017; Nikolaou, 2011; Paleologu et. al., 2011).

The diverse character of the student population of modern school classes has led to a new school reality, which, as it has been seen, makes it difficult for many students due to a series of different needs that they present both at a psycho-emotional level, as well as at a learning, socio-economic and cultural level (Walker, 2010). At the same time, it is a challenge for many teachers mainly due to their insufficient training on intercultural education issues (Damanakis, 2004; Zeichner, 2012).

An important role in promoting the mental health of students is played by the teacher himself, in order to create a suitable and supportive environment for his students (Hatzichristou, 2015). In order to influence his students and promote their mental resilience, the teacher himself should possess similar qualities (Gu et. al., 2007). Mental resilience in teachers is related to their well-being and not to the simple practice of the profession (Beltman et. al., 2011). The teaching profession in the 21st century is considered one of the most stressful professions.

The teacher is faced with many situations that generate conflicts and stress, which if not managed

properly can have a negative effect on his or her physical health and mental well-being, affecting his or her self-confidence and the satisfaction he/she receives from work (Bobek, 2002; Gu, et. al., 2007). To face adversity, the teacher needs to have high self-efficacy. Successfully dealing with difficulties can strengthen the sense of self-efficacy and by extension, increase his or her mental resilience.

Methodology. The methodology is a quantitative study. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was applied to check for internal consistency to ensure the reliability and validity of the questionnaire.

Table 1. Cronbach's a

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0,566	15

The table shows that most respondents are female, accounting for 62,8%, and male respondents comprise 37,2%. The most significant proportion of respondents, 46,5%, had a Bachelor's degree, 36,0% had a Master's degree, and 17,4% had a Doctoral degree, signifying a smaller but still notable proportion of highly educated individuals in the sample. 48,8% of the total have been teaching in the primary education sector for 5-10 years, 29,1% had 5 years of teaching experience, 16,3% have been teaching for 10-15 years, and only 5.8% reported having more than 15 years of teaching experience.

Additionally, ANOVA was tested in order to see if there is a relation between age of the sample and the question, with post hoc LSD test. The questions that showed  $Sig < 0,05$  were related and are presented in Table 3.

Table 2. Gender, age, education and experience

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Gender</b>					
Valid	Male	32	37,2	37,2	37,2
	Female	54	62,8	62,8	100,0
	Total	86	100,0	100,0	
<b>Age</b>					
Valid	25-34	8	9,3	9,3	9,3
	35-44	12	14,0	14,0	23,3
	45-54	47	54,7	54,7	77,9
	55-64	11	12,8	12,8	90,7
	65 or older	8	9,3	9,3	100,0
	Total	86	100,0	100,0	
<b>Education level</b>					
Valid	Bachelor's degree	40	46,5	46,5	46,5
	Master's degree	31	36,0	36,0	82,6
	Doctoral degree	15	17,4	17,4	100,0
<b>Years experience</b>					
Valid	Less than 5 years	25	29,1	29,1	29,1
	5-10 years	42	48,8	48,8	77,9
	10-15 years	14	16,3	16,3	94,2
	More than 15 years	5	5,8	5,8	100,0

Table 3. ANOVA Age

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
How would you rate your understanding of intercultural education concepts?	Between Groups	31,639	4	7,910	14,423	,000
	Within Groups	44,420	81	,548		
	Total	76,058	85			
How prepared do you feel to handle the challenges of intercultural education?	Between Groups	35,303	4	8,826	8,728	,000
	Within Groups	81,906	81	1,011		
	Total	117,209	85			
How much support do you feel you receive from your school administration in implementing intercultural education and managing related stress?	Between Groups	23,144	4	5,786	9,807	,000
	Within Groups	47,786	81	,590		
	Total	70,930	85			

Table 4. ANOVA Post Hoc - Education level

**Multiple Comparisons**

Dependent Variable: How often do you face stressful situations when dealing with intercultural issues in your classroom?

LSD

(I) What is your highest level of education?	(J) What is your highest level of education?	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Bachelor's degree	Master's degree	-,396	,217	,072	-,83	,04
	Doctoral degree	,408	,275	,141	-,14	,95
Master's degree	Bachelor's degree	,396	,217	,072	-,04	,83
	Doctoral degree	,804*	,286	,006	,24	1,37
Doctoral degree	Bachelor's degree	-,408	,275	,141	-,95	,14
	Master's degree	-,804*	,286	,006	-1,37	-,24

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

Table 5. ANOVA – Questions

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Have you ever received formal training in intercultural education?	Between Groups	2,328	3	,776	3,352	,023
	Within Groups	18,986	82	,232		
	Total	21,314	85			
Have you observed a change in student interactions or attitudes as a result of your efforts in intercultural education?	Between Groups	38,923	3	12,974	10,652	,000
	Within Groups	99,879	82	1,218		
	Total	138,802	85			
How much support do you feel you receive from your school administration in implementing intercultural education and managing related stress?	Between Groups	6,857	3	2,286	2,925	,039
	Within Groups	64,073	82	,781		
	Total	70,930	85			

After that the education level was tested with ANOVA. The question that was related to education level is presented in Table 4.

Finally, the years of teaching was tested and the questions that were related are presented in Table 5.

Discussion. Resilience in teachers depends on the interplay of intra-individual factors such as self-concept, motivation to teach, past experiences and coping strategies, family factors such as positive

family climate, and professional factors such as workload, good, supportive interpersonal relationships between colleagues and the positive learning environment, which affect their life and work and affect their professional commitment. Reference to mental resilience in teachers is made in relation to stress, burnout, self-efficacy and commitment to educational practice (Beltman, et. al., 2011; Bobek, 2002; Gu, Day, 2007).

### Appendix. Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Have you ever received formal training in intercultural education?	Equal variances assumed	,701	,405	-,661	84	,510	-,074	,112	-,297	,149
	Equal variances not assumed			-,658	64,304	,513	-,074	,113	-,299	,151
How would you rate your understanding of intercultural education concepts?	Equal variances assumed	,000	,988	,387	84	,699	,082	,212	-,340	,504
	Equal variances not assumed			,387	64,932	,700	,082	,212	-,342	,506
Have you implemented intercultural education in your teaching?	Equal variances assumed	,010	,920	,051	84	,959	,006	,113	-,218	,230
	Equal variances not assumed			,051	64,844	,959	,006	,113	-,220	,231
Do you believe intercultural education is essential in today's diverse classrooms?	Equal variances assumed	,756	,387	-,172	84	,864	-,042	,243	-,525	,441
	Equal variances not assumed			-,179	73,774	,858	-,042	,233	-,506	,422
How prepared do you feel to handle the challenges of intercultural education?	Equal variances assumed	,440	,509	-,215	84	,830	-,057	,263	-,581	,467
	Equal variances not assumed			-,217	66,705	,829	-,057	,262	-,579	,465
How do you rate your level of resilience in managing the pressures of implementing intercultural education?	Equal variances assumed	,107	,744	1,032	84	,305	,212	,205	-,196	,620
	Equal variances not assumed			1,017	62,140	,313	,212	,208	-,205	,628

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Do you think mental resilience plays a significant role in successfully implementing intercultural education?	Equal variances assumed	,818	,368	,213	84	,831	,052	,244	-,433	,537
	Equal variances not assumed			,219	70,586	,827	,052	,238	-,422	,526
Have you ever used any techniques or resources to improve your mental resilience in relation to your teaching responsibilities?	Equal variances assumed	3,682	,058	-1,024	84	,309	-,103	,101	-,303	,097
	Equal variances not assumed			-,995	59,526	,324	-,103	,104	-,310	,104
What are the main challenges you face in integrating intercultural education into your teaching?	Equal variances assumed	,001	,972	1,531	84	,129	,332	,217	-,099	,764
	Equal variances not assumed			1,549	67,532	,126	,332	,214	-,096	,760
How effective do you believe your current teaching approach is in promoting intercultural understanding and respect among your students?	Equal variances assumed	,019	,890	,208	84	,835	,046	,222	-,395	,488
	Equal variances not assumed			,207	63,526	,837	,046	,224	-,401	,494
Have you observed a change in student interactions or attitudes as a result of your efforts in intercultural education?	Equal variances assumed	,013	,908	-,012	84	,990	-,003	,287	-,574	,567
	Equal variances not assumed			-,012	61,877	,991	-,003	,292	-,586	,579
Would you be interested in receiving additional training or resources to improve your capacity for intercultural education?	Equal variances assumed	,521	,473	,022	84	,983	,006	,263	-,518	,529
	Equal variances not assumed			,022	69,373	,982	,006	,258	-,509	,520

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
How often do you face stressful situations when dealing with intercultural issues in your classroom?	Equal variances assumed	,645	,424	-,115	84	,909	-,024	,211	-,444	,396
	Equal variances not assumed			-,112	59,314	,911	-,024	,218	-,460	,411
How do you generally cope with these stressful situations?	Equal variances assumed	1,471	,229	,961	84	,339	,218	,226	-,233	,668
	Equal variances not assumed			,928	58,447	,357	,218	,234	-,252	,687
How much support do you feel you receive from your school administration in implementing intercultural education and managing related stress?	Equal variances assumed	,901	,345	1,074	84	,286	,219	,204	-,186	,624
	Equal variances not assumed			1,022	55,578	,311	,219	,214	-,210	,648

In a mixed-methods study of 100 primary and secondary schools in England, it appeared that the composition of the student population was a key influence on teachers' sense of self-efficacy and their general well-being (Gu, Day, 2007). On the other hand, in a research conducted in America, it emerged that teachers often show an ambivalent attitude towards their immigrant students and doubt their self-efficacy when teaching students with a different cultural background than themselves (Kumar, Hamer, 2013).

In the same study, the 27 teachers who believed that minority students should be integrated into the dominant culture were more likely to have stereotypical perceptions of minorities, experience discomfort with cultural diversity, and not adapt their teaching to culture of their heterogeneous students. Regarding demographics, in a sample of undergraduate students in America, it appeared that factors such as gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic level were not predictive of attitudes toward intercultural education and self-efficacy. Conversely, students' political beliefs were associated with attitudes toward intercultural education, and more specifically, more liberal political beliefs were associated with more positive attitudes. Also, as personal experiences with multiculturalism increased there was an increase in self-efficacy (Nadelson et. al., 2012).

In a meta-analysis in relation to years of service, the results showed that teachers who had been working for four years or more reported higher self-efficacy, compared to their less experienced colleagues, up to three years of service (Beltman et. al., 2011). Also, the finding that a very small percentage of teachers are satisfied with their work is interesting (Bobek, 2002; Koustelios, 2001; Ololube, 2006). However, teachers who appeared to have high mental resilience, cared about their general well-being, were able to maintain a balance between work and personal life, watched their diet and exercised, avoided homework every night, had personal time and spending time with friends (Johnson, et. al., 2014).

The school can act as a protective factor and enhance students' mental resilience and well-being, through strategies that promote mental health, such as the development of positive interpersonal relationships, support and learning skills, crisis management, opportunities for participation as well as the sense of security (Kyriakou, 2016; Hatzichristou et. al., 2014; Hatzichristou, 2011).

Conclusions. The findings highlight the importance of providing teachers with adequate support, resources, and training to effectively integrate intercultural education into their teaching practice. Addressing the identified challenges and enhancing

teachers' preparedness and resilience can contribute to creating more inclusive and culturally responsive learning environments. Moreover, continued efforts to

evaluate and improve the effectiveness of intercultural education initiatives can help maximize their impact on student interactions and attitudes.

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