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Editors:

**Dr. Wayne B. James**

**Dr. Cihan Cobanoglu**

**Dr. Muhittin Cavusoglu**



## ***Co-Editors***

***Dr. Wayne James***, University of South Florida, USA

***Dr. Cihan Cobanoglu***, University of South Florida, USA

***Dr. Muhittin Cavusoglu***, Northern Arizona University, USA

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## The Opinions of Primary School Teachers on Multiculturalism

Erhan Görmez

Faculty of Education  
Van Yüzüncü Yıl University, Turkey

### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to reveal opinions of the primary school teachers on multiculturalism. Within the scope of the study, the opinions of 10 primary school teachers working in different schools in the province of Van have been consulted. This study is a qualitative and descriptive study. Structured interview forms were used to collect data. The obtained data were analyzed by content analysis. In the study, when the results obtained are examined in generally; teachers did not receive an adequate training / seminar on multiculturalism; teachers see themselves insufficient in a multicultural classroom management; teachers generally evaluate multicultural classrooms positively; teachers think that textbooks and teaching programs are insufficient in terms of multiculturalism.

**Keywords:** multiculturalism, primary school teacher, opinions

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### Introduction

Today, it is known that all of the countries in the world consist of people from different ethnic origins. While this difference is tolerated by some countries, it is seen as a serious problem by some countries. The coexistence of different cultures is not just a situation specific to today. People with different cultural backgrounds lived together in past empires. We see that different ethnic groups continue to live together in the nation states that emerged after the collapse of the empires.

Multiculturalism, which is expressed as a culture of coexistence, has been officially considered for the first time in countries such as Canada, USA and Australia. These countries, known for many types of unpleasant behavior such as intolerance, prejudice and oppression in their history, have recently made significant improvements in valuing differences and they continue to do so (Türk, 2013, 119).

To understand the concept of multiculturalism better, it is necessary to explain the concept of culture. When the literature is examined, it is seen that very different definitions are made about the concept of culture. Şişman (2014) has been defined the culture the way that reflects one's thinking and feeling; the social heritage added by the society to individual where he/she lives; everything a person has gained in the social environment in which he was born, from birth to death. These traditional thoughts in society and differences in values resulting from this paved the way for the emergence of the concept of multiculturalism.

The concept of multiculturalism first came up in 1971 in Canada due to the Quebec issue. Later, this concept was used in the USA and Austria. In Europe, after 1975, Sweden officially used this concept, and after 1980, the Netherlands started to come up with this concept in detail (Canatan, 2009). Multiculturalism is recognizing different groups of people living in society and taking an attitude within itself (Altaş, 2003). Educational institutions have an important role in recognizing groups from different cultures in the society and raising more sensitive individuals related to the subject. Many countries (USA, Canada, Sweden, Netherlands) are supporting multicultural education by giving practice in their curriculum (Cırık, 2008). Making multicultural education functional is one of the important duties of teachers.

Szabo and Anderson (2009) stated that teachers working in countries where people from different cultures live heavily do not understand students from different cultural backgrounds sufficiently. They have communication problems with them, and this situation negatively affects student achievement (cited in Özdemir & Dil, 2013, 221). In this context, primary school teachers who work in the first level have a very serious duty to prevent children from falling into a disadvantageous position in the classrooms where they study. These teachers should protect children from the overwhelming attitudes of dominant groups in an inclusive and fair manner.

When the literature is examined related to multiculturalism in education, it has been reached such as studies: the attitudes and behaviors of teachers and administrators towards multiculturalism (Washington, 1982; Yazıcı, Başol ve Toprak, 2009; Başarır, 2012; Coşkun, 2012; Kaya, 2013; Bahadır, 2016; Avval, 2018; Aşcı, 2020); developing a scale to reveal the attitudes of students in higher education towards multiculturalism (Munroe & Pearson, 2006); student perceptions of multiculturalism (Boyle-Heimann, 1997); academicians' perceptions of multiculturalism (Damgacı, 2013); the views of teachers and administrators on multiculturalism (Polat, 2011; Demirçelik, 2012).

However, it has not been reached any study that directly reveals the opinions of primary school teachers on multiculturalism. The purpose of this study is to reveal the opinions of primary school teachers who work in our country, especially in the eastern regions, about students from different ethnic backgrounds. In this respect, it is thought that the research will eliminate this deficiency in the field and will lead researchers interested in the subject to conduct different-dimensional research on multiculturalism.

## **Methods**

The study, which was conducted to reveal the opinions of the primary school teachers related to multiculturalism, is a qualitative and descriptive study. In qualitative studies in which the researcher himself is a tool, more in-depth data are obtained with a limited number of people. Qualitative research seeks to understand situations and events from the perspectives and views of the participants. Qualitative researchers generally do not generalize outside of a specific event or situation; however, they can leave this to the reader to measure and determine its applicability, and generalization in these studies is very limited (Büyüköztürk, Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz and Demirel, 2014: 12). In this study, teachers' views on the concept of multiculturalism were analyzed through the structured interview form.

## Working Group

**Table 1.** Information About the Participants

Variables		n	%
Age	24-26	9	%90
	31	1	%10
Gender	Male	6	%60
	Female	4	%40

The working group of the research compose of 10 classroom teachers working in different primary schools in the 2019-2020 academic year in the province of Van. Criterion sampling method, which is one of the purposeful sampling method, was used in sample selection. In the criterion sampling method, the studied situation must meet some conditions (Patton, 2014). The fact that the teachers included in the sample group work in rural areas was determined as a criterion in the study. When the table is examined, it is seen that the teachers are between the ages of 24-30 and the majority are male teachers.

### *Sample*

In sample selection, criterion sampling, which is one of the purposeful sampling method, was used. In the criterion sampling method, the studied situation must meet some conditions (Patton, 2014). In determining the sample group, attention was paid to the criteria for primary school teachers to work in rural areas and to have students from different cultures in their classrooms.

### *Data Collection*

The interview technique, which is one of the qualitative data methods, was used to collect data in the research. Patton mentions three types of interview approaches.1) Chat style conversation, 2) Interview form approach, 3) Standardized open-ended interview (cited by Yıldırım ve Şimşek, 2016). In this study, interview form approach was used. Before the interview form was applied in general, a preliminary application was made to 3 teachers. Some changes were made in the form in line with the teachers' opinions. For the validity and reliability of the interview form, opinions were taken from an academician and 3 teachers. After the necessary changes were made on the form, the general application was started. The data obtained as a result of the interviews with the teachers were analyzed using thematic analysis method. The data of the study were analyzed with the content analysis method. 4 stages were followed in the analysis of the data.

- Coding of data: The codes (sub-category) were reached by analyzing the interview data. Under each sub-problem heading, it was reached 12 codes explaining the data.
- Finding the themes (main categories): At this stage, the codes were brought together to establish meaningful relationships between them. Considering the codes in the interviews with the teachers, a total of 5 themes were reached.
- Organizing information by code and themes: At this stage the 12 codes reached are given under 5 thematic headings.
- Interpretation of the findings: At this stage, the tables in which the findings were presented were interpreted by the researcher. In addition, the comments made by the researcher were tried to be supported by making quotations from the direct statements of

the participants. Some codes are used in direct quotations from teachers. MT codes were used for male teachers and FT codes for female teachers.

## Findings

In this section the obtained findings are tabulated and supported by direct quotations from the participants.

**Table 2.** Teachers' Views on the Trainings Received on Multiculturalism

Theme	Code	f	%
The received trainings	We received an education related to this topic in candidature seminar.	MT1 FT3 FTÖ4	30
	Did not receive any training	MT2 MT3 MT4 MT5 MT6 FT1 FT2	70

In table 2, it is seen that most of the teachers do not receive training on multiculturalism. When direct quotations supporting the research of the findings are examined:

FT1: No, I did not take any course about multiculturalism. Immm so that I mean, I don't have a experience.

FT3: No, I did not take a theoretical course.

MT6: I did not have a seminar on this. However, I participated in a project for the education of Syrian children within the scope of the Pictes project. I have two years of working experience after this training. That's why I'm considered experienced.

**Table 3.** Teachers' Views on a Multicultural Classroom Management

Theme	Code	f	%
Classroom Management	I do not find myself sufficient	MT1 MT2 MT3 MT4 MT5	80
	I find myself sufficient.	MT6	10
	I have no idea, as I have no such experience	FT1	10

In table 3 is examined, it is seen that most of the teachers are not competent in classroom management in a classroom with students from different cultures. When direct quotations supporting the research of the findings are examined:

MT4: I do not think I am fully sufficient about this topic.

MT1: I am working as a primary school teacher for three years. I dont find myself experienced. Also I grew up in Aydin. My culture is different from my students. Some times my student not understand me accurately. Iıı I am not sufficiently about the school management.



FT2: Classroom management is very difficult due to the cultural conflict in the classroom. Students from different cultures do not get along well with each other. I try to explain that there are differences in order to manage them, but no matter how much I explain, there is something that comes from the family. There is something negative that reflects on the children from the family. Families must first accept the diversity of culturalism. Then we have to tell the children. I think therefore, if the families are more conscious, the children will be better in harmony with each other. Frankly, I have a hard time in classroom management.

**Table 4.** Teachers' Views on Students From Different Cultures in Their Classroom

Theme	Code	f	%		
Teachers' attitudes in classroom	I evaluate as positively	MT1	80		
		MT3			
		MT4			
		MT5			
		MT6			
		FT1			
		FT3			
		FT4			
		I evaluate as negatively		MT2	20
				FT2	

In table 4 is examined, most of the teachers have a positive attitude towards students from different cultures in their classrooms. When direct quotations supporting the research of the findings are examined:

MT5: I think a positive class atmosphere is emerging. After all, there is multiculturalism. there is cohesion in the classroom. Well, students get positive support from each other. So I think positive, I think positive.

MT2: I evaluate as negatively. Because it will be necessary to appeal to those coming from different cultures. this is a difficult situation. Each child's needs will be different. Therefore, the teacher may be negatively affected by this situation.

FT1: It is positive both for me and for the students. I think it would be better for them to acquire knowledge, approach different cultures and adopt it differently.

**Table 5.** Teachers' Views on the Adequacy of Curricula on Multiculturalism

Theme	Code	f	%
Adequacy of curricula on multiculturalism	I think the curriculum is insufficient	MT1	90
		MT3	
		MT4	
		MT5	
		MT6	
		FT1	
		FT2	
		FT3	
		FT4	
		I think the curriculum is sufficient	

When Table 5 is examined, most of the teachers think that the curriculum is insufficient about the subject of multiculturalism. When direct quotations supporting the research of the findings are examined:

MT3: There should be a curriculum that will include students from different cultures. This curriculum is very lacking in this respect. Everyone should add something from their culture to the curriculum. There should be a difference in curriculum in this respect.

MT2: I think the curriculum is sufficient in this topic. In our country, this curriculum is not arranged only for our Turkish citizens or Kurdish citizens. Okay, we do our teaching in Turkish, but ultimately it meets all cultures. For example, our books mention Aegean region and give examples about İzmir, or it mention

Trabzon and give examples about Horon, or mention about Van and give examples about Van Lake. I think it appeals to most cultures because we are multicultural and it covers every culture.

FT2: Actually, curriculum is called flexible, but it is not very flexible. The textbooks which we used not belong to this region. The children don't know their region yet. we give information about different regions. This is very meaningless. In this respect, the program is not enough at all.

**Table 6.** Teachers' Views on the Adequacy of Textbook on Multiculturalism

Theme	Code	f	%
Adequacy of textbook on multiculturalism	I find textbook insufficiently	MT1	80
		MT2	
		MT3	
		MT4	
		MT5	
		MT6	
		FT1	
	FT3		
	Sufficient, but I would like to have additional resources.	FT2	10
	Varies from lesson to lesson	FT4	10

When Table 6 is examined, most of the teachers think that the textbooks are insufficient about the subject of multiculturalism. When direct quotations supporting the research of the findings are examined:

MT4: These different cultures can be reflected in textbooks more positively. For example, we see it in images. there are only white children why not black children. Or, outside of culture, there are very few people with disabilities in the books. In this way, it needs to be distributed more extensively, to be considered in more detail. For example, as an ethnic or a religion, this should be reflected in examples. visuals in the books should not be monotonous. It should not represent a particular nation or a particular race, I think it should be more universal.

MT1: Textbooks are very incomplete. there is a lot of emphasis on one nation in the books. I think we do not touch on different religions, different cultures.

FT2: Yes, I find it sufficient now, but I would like to have additional resources. At the same time, children should not lean towards just one book.

## Conclusions

When the first finding is examined, It has been concluded that most of the teachers do not have sufficient knowledge about multiculturalism and have not received an informative training / seminar on this subject. Polat and Kılıç (2013) mentioned that it is not possible to talk about multicultural education in teacher education in Turkey, which has many different ethnic, religious, sect, etc. differences. They drew attention to the fact that multicultural education for teachers in pre-service and in-service training is almost nonexistent. In Turkey, it is very important to provide inclusive education within the scope of multiculturalism to teachers who will and are working in regions where different cultures are common (such as Eastern Anatolia Region and South Eastern Anatolia Region). A teacher who teaches by taking into account the peculiarities of these cultures will involve children more often in the education process. This will have a positive effect on children's motivation.

When the second finding is examined, most of the teachers participating in the study stated that they are not sufficient to manage a classroom with students from different cultures. Many schools

today, contains a cultural diversity that the past generation could not even imagine (Pewawardy, 2003). This situation makes management more difficult both in school and in the classroom. Hamurcu and Demirçelik (2015) found in their study on "Examining the difficulties faced by multicultural secondary school administrators and teachers in the management and teaching process" that teachers do not see themselves competent in managing students from different cultures.

Gay (2002) states that many teachers who do not have a sufficient background cannot create a quality classroom environment for students from different cultures. Programs that advocate culture-sensitive education in the teacher training process use traditional teaching methods (eg autobiographies, multicultural assignments, cultural therapy, discussion and field practice) (Sleeter, 2001). In order to overcome these problems, it is thought that it is important to provide teachers and teacher candidates with the skills necessary to design learning environments for students from different cultures.

When the third finding is examined, most of the teachers participating in the study evaluated the multicultural classroom environment positively. Özbilen, Canpulat, and Hamurcu (2020), in their study on " Evaluation of Teachers' Multiculturalism Perceptions And Attitudes Towards Undesirable Intraclass Behaviors of Students", revealed that teachers generally have a positive perception of multiculturalism. When many studies (Demir ve Başarır, 2013; Bulut ve Başbay, 2014; Aslan, 2017; Akyıldız, 2018) on the subject are examined, it is seen that a similar finding was been reached.

When the fourth and fifth findings were examined together, most of the teachers participating in the study stated that they did not find the teaching programs and textbooks sufficient in terms of multiculturalism. Firat (2010) has listed some practices that cause discrimination and an conflict environment in education: first of all, the culture of an individual with a different identity is not included in textbooks, curriculums, classroom practices, in short, in any area of education. Another factor, different groups are described in textbooks in negative expressions and events, and a negative image is drawn against diversity. In another study, Ünal (2004) states that the curriculum and textbooks are not sufficient in multiculturalism in Turkey. No nationality or cultural difference other than Turkish is included in the curriculum and textbooks.

To demand cultural difference in educational environment has been criticized severely. The monoculturalist approach encountered in the curriculum and textbooks, ignoring different cultures and increasingly enmitating the differences, has found a legal basis in the Constitution and the Basic Law of National Education "(p.148). Not including students' own culture in their textbooks or curricula may cause them to either have a negative judgment against the main culture or to gradually lose their belonging to their own culture. This wrong policy will seriously harm the children's feelings of patriotism, which is a country's own future.

In line the with findings, the following suggestions can be made: Turkey is a country where people from many different cultures live.

- Valuing differences and not separating them from fundamental componets is a situation that can happen with educated and prejudiced individuals. This will be achieved by educators who are in good mental health and love for people. In this

context, qualified educators have a lot of responsibility. Considering that education starts in the family, the priority falls to the families and then to the teachers. In this respect, the teacher candidates should be taken serious training on multiculturalism in faculties of education.

- The practices of countries experienced in the management of classrooms with multicultural students should be examined. Educational studies should be carried out on contemporary approaches to teachers on the subject. Teachers should also be allowed to work on multiculturalism individually, and these teachers should not be qualified with negative qualities.
- People from different cultures should be included in textbooks and curriculums. It should be taking into consideration that the differences are the main element of this country, and multiculturalism should be included in the textbooks or curriculum in a more concrete way.

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