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TEACHING FOR DIVERSITY: INTEGRATING MULTICULTURAL COMPETENCE INTO PRIMARY SCHOOL CURRICULA

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ОСВІТА ДЛЯ РОЗМАЇТТЯ: ВПРОВАДЖЕННЯ МУЛЬТИКУЛЬТУРНОЇ КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТІ В ПРОГРАМИ ПОЧАТКОВОЇ ШКОЛИ

In today's globalized world, fostering multicultural competence in primary school students is essential for preparing them to engage with diverse communities. This article explores the integration of multicultural education into primary school curricula, emphasizing its role in developing cultural awareness, empathy, and inclusivity. By examining theoretical foundations, the study highlights the significance of culturally responsive teaching in shaping young learners' perspectives.

The article outlines key strategies for designing a multicultural curriculum, including the incorporation of diverse educational content, inclusive teaching practices, and real-world cultural experiences. Methods for

assessing multicultural competence, such as reflective activities and project-based learning and more, are discussed to ensure meaningful engagement. Additionally, challenges as resistance to curriculum changes, and teachers' readiness are analyzed, along with practical solutions for overcoming these barriers.

By presenting some case studies of our successful experience of multicultural education, this study provides actionable insights for pre- and in-service educators in primary school. The conclusions emphasize the need for continuous teacher training to sustain multicultural competence development in young learners. Ultimately, this article advocates for an inclusive educational approach that equips primary school students with the skills necessary for thriving in an increasingly diverse society.

Key words: multicultural competence, primary school, diversity in education, future educators.

Анотація. У сучасному глобалізованому світі розвиток мультикультурної компетентності в учнів початкової школи має важливе значення для підготовки їх до взаємодії з різноманітними громадами. У цій статті висвітлено результати дослідження проблеми інтеграції мультикультурної освіти в навчальні програми початкової школи, підкреслено її роль у розвитку культурної обізнаності, емпатії та інклюзивності. На підставі аналізу теоретичних джерел підкреслено важливість культурно зорієнтованого навчання у формуванні світогляду молодших школярів.

У статті окреслено ключові стратегії розробки мультикультурної навчальної програми з урахуванням різноманітних освітніх матеріалів,

інклюзивних практик навчання та реального культурного досвіду. Методи оцінки мультикультурної компетентності (рефлексивна діяльність і проєктне навчання) розглянуто як ефективні чинники забезпечення дієвої взаємодії. Проаналізовано проблеми, пов'язані з опором змінам у навчальних програмах і підготовкою учителів до їх реалізації, а також запропоновано практичні рішення для подолання цих перешкод.

Представляючи приклади успішного впровадження мультикультурної освіти, це дослідження дає корисну інформацію для майбутніх учителів початкової школи і педагогів-практиків. У висновках підкреслюється необхідність постійного навчання вчителів для ефективного розвитку мультикультурної компетентності у молодших школярів. У результаті, ця стаття виступає за інклюзивний підхід до освіти, який забезпечує учнів початкової школи навичками, необхідними для успішного життя в культурно різноманітному суспільстві.

Ключові слова: мультикультурна компетентність, початкова школа, різноманітність в освіті, майбутні педагоги.

General problem setting. The competency-based approach is a priority in the educational process of the New Ukrainian School. The Law "On Education" and other regulatory documents define the key competencies of primary schoolchildren, among which an important place is occupied by fluent command of the state language, the ability to communicate in the native (if it differs from the state) and foreign languages, lifelong learning, cultural competence, innovation, and others. In the context of European integration and close intercultural interaction, the competencies necessary for life in a multicultural society are of particular importance.

Today, Ukrainians, due to the war, find themselves in extremely difficult conditions that affect all aspects of their lives. Resettlement and loss of housing, moving to other countries, psychological stress and trauma, economic difficulties and educational challenges are far from the entire list of

problems and trials for our society. Many people are forced to adapt to a new cultural environment, learn to live in a society characterized by a variety of traditions and national customs. For effective multicultural interaction, it is necessary to have developed skills in multicultural communication, be aware of the peculiarities of different cultures, and have an idea of different national mentalities and ways of being. In this context, the educational system plays a key role, as it prepares the younger generations for life and activity in a multicultural environment. The initial link in the educational process is especially important, because it is in the younger school age that children form basic ideas, attitudes, and lay down value and worldview guidelines.

Multicultural competence of the individual could be characterized as a complex ability of a person to be aware of and have an understanding of different cultures, to be tolerant of cultural differences, and to be able to effectively interact, communicate, and cooperate with representatives of different cultures. The formation of this competence in primary education students contributes not only to their personal harmonious development, but also to the creation of a tolerant society in the future.

The concept of "multicultural competence" is very similar to another – "intercultural competence". They are used as synonyms, since the meanings of the concepts are alike in the educational context. However, researchers are convinced that they should be clearly differentiated through emphasis on aspects of the concept. "Multicultural" – focuses on the differences of cultures, while "intercultural" – on interaction. There is also the concept of "polycultural competence", which is actually synonymous with "multicultural competence", because it also means the ability to effectively and constructively interact with people of different cultures, respect their differences, understand cultural features and apply this knowledge in different social and professional contexts. However, taking into account such criteria as, for example, the focus

on cultural differences or the context of use, we can also notice different aspects in the meanings of these concepts. Multicultural competence focuses more on the acceptance and recognition of cultural differences and interaction with different cultures in the context of preserving their identity, while polycultural competence emphasizes more the ability to adapt and integrate in different cultural environments, including elements of mutual enrichment of cultures.

In the context of globalization and European integration, the importance of multicultural competence is growing. It helps prepare primary school students for life in a world where cultural differences are the norm, not the exception. In this regard, educational institutions should actively implement methods and programs that contribute to the formation of this competence, in particular through the integration of a multicultural component into educational subjects, the organization of intercultural events and projects, as well as cooperation with representatives of different cultural communities. Particularly suitable for this purpose are foreign languages, as they aim at improving multicultural communication through integrating appropriate educational content. Multicultural education is an educational approach that seeks to consider and integrate students' diverse cultural perspectives and experiences into the learning process. It aims to develop understanding, respect, and appreciation of cultural diversity, and to prepare students for life in a multicultural society.

The purpose of the scientific-methodological study is to explore how multicultural competence can be effectively integrated into primary school curricula to foster cultural awareness, inclusivity, and global citizenship among young learners.

Analysis of researches and publications. The aspects of the advantages of multicultural and polycultural education were highlighted in the works of J. Walter (2017), C. Slamet, M. Augistingrum and other foreign researchers (2021). They believe that such education is a

progressive approach to the transformation of the educational process, eliminating discriminatory problems in it. They also emphasize the importance of the gradual development of such education, since under such conditions, multicultural programs will always be aimed at mutual understanding between representatives of different ethnic groups. The problem of forming multicultural competence of younger schoolchildren in the educational environment of primary school was thoroughly studied by N. Ivanets (2019, 2020), L. Vorotnyak (2018), L. Peretyaha (2016), T. Smailova (2019), A. Bujar, S.

Petrovska, G.Xhambazi (2022), Ch. Eden, N. Onyebuchi (2024). No less important is the contribution of scientists who focused on issues of multicultural interaction and development of communication of school children (O. Dmytrenko, O. Milyutina, N.Shvadchak, etc., 2020).

Outline of the main research material. Multicultural competence involves recognizing and appreciating one's own and others' diversity and how it manifests itself in different situations. It is willingness to deal with differences in an ethno-relative manner. Therefore, considering the structural components of multicultural

competence of the individual and summarizing the research of various scientists, D. Furt claims that the main three components are: motivational, cognitive, and activity (Furt, 2016). The scientist bases his research on the fact that his study deals with older children, consequently these components are appropriate in the structure of multicultural competence of this age category. Scientists in other classifications suggest taking into account emotional, professional, cultural, and personal components.

The State Standard of Primary Education claims that "the student will be tolerant of cultural diversity,

Table 1

Key components of multicultural competence for primary school students

COMPONENT	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE ACTIVITIES
Cultural Awareness	Understanding one's own culture and recognizing cultural differences in others.	Class discussions on traditions, cultural storytelling, and personal heritage projects.
Intercultural Communication	Developing verbal and non-verbal communication skills to interact respectfully with diverse groups.	Role-playing exercises, multilingual greetings, and collaborative group activities.
Empathy and Respect	Encouraging students to appreciate different perspectives and respect cultural diversity.	Literature from diverse cultures, problem situations resolution in role-plays.
Critical Thinking	Analyzing cultural stereotypes and biases to develop informed perspectives.	Media analysis of cultural representation, discussions on fairness and inclusion.
Inclusive Attitudes	Fostering openness and a positive attitude toward people from different backgrounds.	Classroom engaging activities, guest speakers from diverse communities, and pen-pal programs.
Global Citizenship	Understanding the interconnections between cultures and promoting social responsibility.	Participating in international projects, celebrating global events.
Language and Communication Skills	Exposure to multiple countries and their languages, learning how the language shapes cultural identity.	Bilingual storytelling, simple vocabulary lessons in a foreign language.
Social and Emotional Skills	Building confidence, tolerance, and adaptability in diverse social settings.	Cooperative learning activities, mindfulness exercises, and classroom reflection activities.

Source: created by authors

traditions, and different opinions" (*State Standard of Primary Education, 2018*). According to this document, foreign language proficiency as one of the key competencies involves "the ability to communicate in foreign languages, the ability to understand simple expressions, communicate in different situations, and master the skills of multicultural communication." As O. Dmytrenko explains, this means that, "in addition to basic linguistic skills, children must understand cultural differences and be able to find a common language with speakers of another language or culture" (*Dmytrenko, 2020*). The researcher gives an example of the formation of students' cultural competence in parallel with foreign language competence, when in an English lesson "along with grammar and vocabulary, students explore the socio-cultural features of the country whose language they are studying." She emphasizes that such knowledge should interest and motivate primary school students to learn more about the traditions of other countries independently and outside of school (*Dmytrenko, 2020*).

Considering the above-mentioned information, to effectively integrate multicultural competence into primary education, it is essential to understand its key structural components. They include a range of cognitive, social, and emotional skills that help young learners engage with diverse cultures in a respectful and meaningful way. In Table 1 below we offer an outline of the fundamental elements of multicultural competence, their descriptions, and practical examples of how they can be incorporated into the classroom.

The components outlined in **Table 1** highlight the multifaceted nature of multicultural competence in primary education. By fostering cultural awareness, communication skills, empathy, and global citizenship, educators can help young learners develop inclusive attitudes and respect for diversity. Integrating these elements into the curriculum through interactive and experiential learning activities ensures that students not only understand different cultures but

also actively engage with and appreciate them in their daily lives.

We consider it important to use project-based activities where students explore and present the cultural features of different countries. This contributes to a deeper understanding and respect for other cultures. The use of digital technologies, such as digital tools, virtual excursions and online communication with peers from other countries, further enrich the learning process and broaden the horizons of students. N. Shvadchak suggests the following effective methods and forms of work that will help teachers develop intercultural communication skills in primary school students and form their knowledge about other cultures (*Shvadchak, 2020*) (*see Drawing 1.*):

An analysis of lesson notes and teachers' pedagogical experience (*Kondratieva, 2017*) shows that teachers pay more attention to the formation of students' multicultural competence when teaching a foreign language more frequently than during other subjects. This is evidenced, for example, by lesson notes on the topics "Studying the holidays and traditions of different countries through simple phrases and words", "Comparison of family traditions and customs in Ukraine and other countries", "Study of the names of countries, their main cultural features and national symbols", "Food in different countries of the world", "Christmas in Great Britain and Ukraine", etc.

However, integrating multicultural competence into primary school curricula faces several challenges, including resistance to change, lack of teacher training, and limited instructional resources. Moreover, time constraints and the pressure to meet standardized academic requirements often hinder the seamless incorporation of multicultural perspectives into daily lessons. One of the primary challenges is resistance to curriculum changes. Some educators, parents, or stakeholders may perceive multicultural curricula as unnecessary or even controversial, believing that traditional teaching methods sufficiently prepare students for the world. Deeply ingrained biases and

stereotypes often create barriers to embracing diversity in the classroom. To address this, schools must engage in open discussions with stakeholders, highlighting the benefits of multicultural competence in fostering inclusivity, critical thinking, and global awareness. Clear communication about the importance of diversity in education, along with the inclusion of parents and communities in multicultural initiatives, can help reduce resistance and encourage broader acceptance.

Another challenge is the lack of sufficient training and professional development for pre- or in-service teachers in multicultural education. Many educators may feel unprepared to address diversity-related topics or integrate them effectively into their lessons. Without proper training, there is a risk of superficial approaches to multicultural teaching, which may not create meaningful learning experiences for students. To overcome this, schools and higher educational institutions must provide ongoing professional development programs, innovative courses that equip future teachers with practical strategies, culturally responsive teaching methods, and educational resources to navigate diverse classroom environments. Workshops, peer mentoring, and collaborations with multicultural experts enhance teachers' confidence and competence in delivering inclusive education as well. From our own experience we practice developing fragments of English lessons notes for primary school by Pedagogy Faculty students which contain educational contents for integrating multiculturalism in the classroom. In this context, English language university courses such as "English Literature for Children", "Methods for Teaching English in Primary School", "Country Study", "Geocultural Scientific Literacy" and others are very apt. During their study students work out handouts and other materials which they further use in their teaching practice or professional activity in primary school.

Furthermore, going back to challenges, time constraints and

curriculum overload often make it difficult for teachers to incorporate multicultural education effectively. With strict academic standards and testing requirements, educators may struggle to find room for multicultural content within their lesson plans. To address this, schools can integrate multicultural themes into existing subjects rather than treating them as separate topics. For example, literature classes can include stories from diverse cultures, history lessons can highlight global perspectives, and language activities can explore cross-cultural communication. By embedding multicultural education into everyday learning, schools can ensure that diversity becomes a natural and essential part of the educational

experience.

A noteworthy experience of multicultural communication and competence formation should be mentioned in this research. This is participation of Ukrainian researchers in the international project "We want to speak Ukrainian (A5 Children's Picturebook)" initiated by Irish scientists Blaithin Breathnach and Dr. Lindsay Myers. The initiative enables Irish primary school children get acquainted with Ukrainian language through traditions, customs, legends, fairy-tales and celebrations and vice versa (*Kachak, Blyznyuk, 2022*).

Thus, integrating cultural diversity into lesson planning and beyond is essential for creating an inclusive and engaging learning environment that

reflects the diverse backgrounds of students. By designing lessons that incorporate a variety of cultural perspectives, educators foster an appreciation for diversity and encourage empathy, critical thinking, and respect among students. This approach not only enriches the educational experience but also prepares young learners to navigate and contribute to a globalized society. The following strategies frame practical ways teachers can weave cultural diversity into primary school curricula, ensuring that every student feels heard, seen, valued, and empowered to learn from diverse viewpoints.

Use of Culturally Relevant Vocabulary and Expressions. At English lessons, for instance, educators



Drawing 1. Effective methods and forms of work for developing students' skills in multicultural interaction and communication (by N. Shvadchak)

introduce vocabulary and idiomatic expressions to expand students' understanding of the language use in different contexts. For instance, students can learn common phrases or greetings in English and explore the cultural significance behind them. This approach enriches students' linguistic skills while fostering an appreciation for the diversity of communication styles.

Incorporation of Cross-Cultural Discussions and Debates. It is helpful to create opportunities for students to discuss and debate topics related to cultural differences, global celebrations. Teachers encourage students to express their opinions on celebrating Easter or Christmas holidays in Ukraine, the USA and the UK while respecting diverse viewpoints. This strategy promotes critical thinking, helps students understand cultural perspectives, and improves communication skills as they learn to articulate their ideas thoughtfully and respectfully.

Inclusion of Multicultural Literature. Introducing stories, poems, and texts from a variety of cultures and authors proves to be supportive practice. This helps students explore different traditions, values, and lifemodes. By reading literature from diverse perspectives, young learners develop a deeper understanding of the world around them and gain insights into the experiences of others. For example, include books from authors of different ethnic backgrounds or books that highlight cultural festivals, traditions, and folk tales.

Celebration of Multicultural Holidays and Traditions. It is considered a good practice to integrate lessons or extra curricular activities around multicultural holidays and traditions into the English curriculum. In doing this, students research different global holidays, their significance, and how they are celebrated. This can be tied to reading comprehension, writing activities, and storytelling, where students share what they have learned and possibly write short essays or create projects about their findings.

Invitation of Guest Speakers or

Virtual Exchanges. Bringing guest speakers from diverse cultural backgrounds into the classroom (either in person or virtually) to share their experiences and perspectives is a common practice. Students engage with these speakers through Q&A sessions, which provides a real-world connection to the concepts they are learning in the classroom. This direct interaction with native speakers from different cultures allows students to expand their understanding of the world beyond the textbook.

The proposed strategies not only enhance primary school students' language skills but also contribute to developing their multicultural competence in an engaging and meaningful way.

Conclusions and prospects for further research. In conclusion, effectively integrating multicultural competence into primary school curricula is crucial for fostering an inclusive and culturally aware learning environment. By incorporating diverse perspectives, literature, and best teaching practices, educators create a classroom atmosphere where all students feel valued and respected. This approach not only enhances primary school students' academic skills but also nurtures their ability to empathize with people from different cultural backgrounds, preparing them for an increasingly interconnected world. Through intentional lesson planning and culturally responsive pedagogy, schools play a central role in shaping students' attitudes toward diversity, equity, and social responsibility.

Moreover, the integration of multicultural competence in the curriculum encourages critical thinking and helps students challenge stereotypes and prejudices. By engaging in activities that promote cultural awareness, such as discussions, storytelling, and collaborative projects, students gain a deeper understanding of their own cultural identities as well as those of others. These experiences provide young learners with the tools to navigate a globalized society with respect, curiosity, and open-

mindedness, qualities essential for becoming responsible global citizens.

Ultimately, the goal of integrating multicultural competence into primary education is to prepare students for a future where they can contribute to and thrive in diverse communities. By prioritizing diversity and inclusion, schools help build a generation of learners who not only excel academically but also embrace the richness of cultural diversity. The strategies outlined in this article demonstrate that with thoughtful planning, teacher training, and community involvement, multicultural education can become a powerful tool in shaping a more inclusive, empathetic, and interconnected world for future generations.

Future research on integrating multicultural competence into primary school curricula should explore innovative teaching methodologies that effectively foster cultural awareness and inclusivity. Studies could focus on the long-term impact of multicultural education on students' attitudes, academic performance, and social interactions, providing empirical evidence for improvements. Additionally, comparative research across different educational systems and cultural contexts could offer insights into best practices and adaptable recommendations for diverse learning environments. Further investigation into the role of digital tools, gamification, and virtual exchange programs in enhancing multicultural education would also be valuable in addressing modern educational challenges.

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