



INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES IN MODERN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract. *Multicultural and multilingual classrooms have become the norm in many education institutions throughout the world due to changing immigration patterns caused by globalization. Subsequently, understanding the role that culture plays in the classroom is essential to effective teaching, learning and communicative interaction in general.*

Culture is an intricate concept, with many different classifications. The word "culture" refers to a group or community with which we share common experiences that shape the way we understand the world. Each of us is shaped by many factors, and culture is one of the powerful forces that influence our lives.

This paper offers a critique of problems experienced in multicultural learning environments and explores factors that inhibit intercultural communication. In addition, this paper highlights current cultural issues which are relevant to contemporary life in Moldova.

Keywords: *multilingualism, multicultural education, higher education, internationalization, globalization, intercultural communication*

In many educational institutions around the world, multicultural and multilingual classrooms have become the standard norm due to changing immigration patterns caused by globalization. Therefore, the comprehension of the cultural factor in the classroom is essential for teaching, learning and overall communication.

Culture is a complex and perplexing concept, with a wide range of characterizations and classifications. "Culture" broadly speaking, means a group, community or simply a gathering or network of people within which we share common experiences that shape the way we comprehend the world around us. Every one of us is moulded by numerous elements, and culture is one of the incredible powers that influence our lives.

This paper offers a scrutiny of issues experienced in multicultural learning conditions and investigates factors that hinder intercultural interaction. Moreover, this paper features current social issues, which are important to the contemporary life in Moldova.

1. INTRODUCTION

Thirty years ago, many Europeans saw multiculturalism - the embrace of an inclusive and diverse society - in response to Europe's social problems. Today, an increasing number consider it a cause of theirs [1]. Internationalization is a part of the process of globalization, with an increasing mobility worldwide [2]. In the United Nations it is estimated that resources

of Global Migration in 2015 are approximately 248 million international migrants in the world. In this regard, internationalization in higher education has been a goal of many governments. Intercultural communication, which has become a subject of study in universities around the world, has reopened the file of perennial themes of social thinking, such as the unity and diversity of cultures, the relationship between us and others, the crisis of identities and their redefinition under the combined pressure of several factors. [3]. Intercultural experiences enrich us spiritually, open up new horizons for understanding the world and oblige us to an implicit comparative evaluation, which helps us to know better our own identity.

Interculturality is required in modern education as a necessity to respond to the educational demands of the contemporary society, by developing the students' interest in intercultural aspects, by developing the attitude of cultural and intercultural empathy.

Intercultural education promotes tolerant, open attitudes, acceptance and natural understanding of the "self-other" relationship and of the notion of foreigner, the recognition and respect of cultural differences through the positive valorization of the relations of equality between people and not by applying the superior-inferior polarity.

This article will focus on the scientific literature to show the challenges of intercultural communication, that is, a basic approach to the multicultural learning environment. Therefore, my goal for this paper is to explore some issues in a multicultural class that can be confronted by teachers and students; most specific: low academic achievement, adaptation to a new cultural environment and problems of self-confidence, as well as with the new culture. Figure 1 shows a visual overview of the basics of this study.

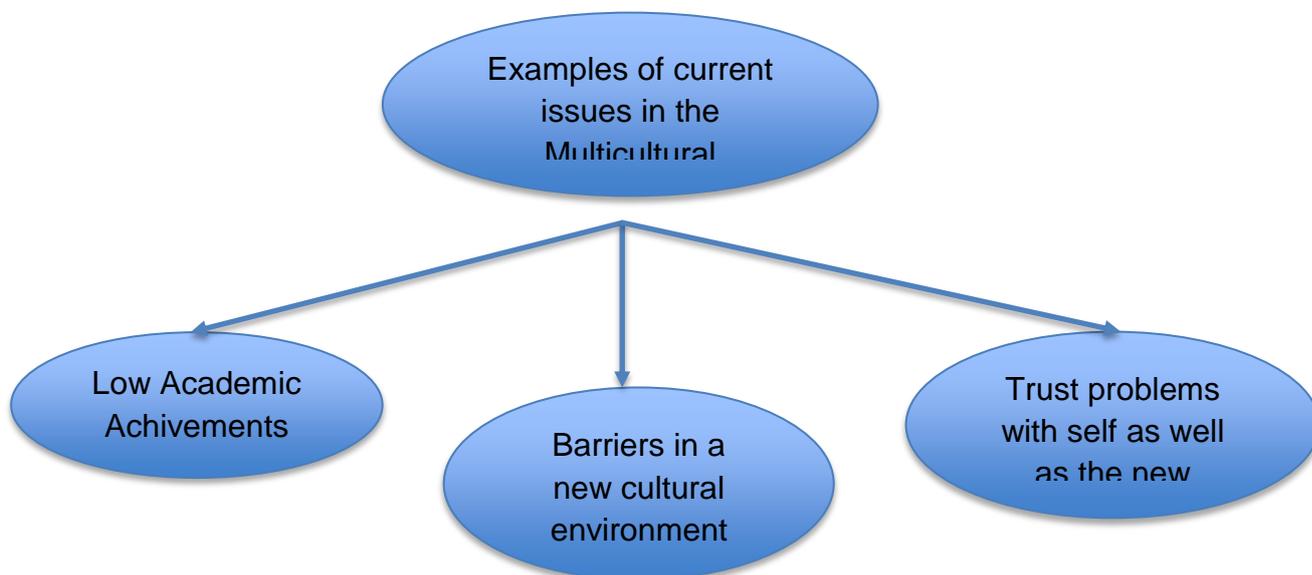


Figure 1. Example of current issues in the multicultural classroom

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Based on the learning concepts introduced above it is the subject of learning with students from different cultures. Song stated that the term "multicultural" is used as a descriptive term

to characterize the presence of diversity in a society, but in what follows, the focus is on its prescriptive use in the context of liberal-western democratic societies [4].

Learning in multicultural classes can be described as multicultural learning. Alexander Chomsky [5] define multicultural learning as learning that integrates and explores the rich tapestry of perspectives reflected in our diverse world. It occurs when the differences between the learners are both appreciated and explored. Multicultural learning recognizes and reaches the limits of capacity, age, class, gender, nationality, race, religion, sexual orientation and other personal, social and cultural identities, so that students can understand in more detail the multifaceted dimensions of knowledge to reflect and explore the implications of diversity and power. Multicultural learning is life education in our multicultural world [5].

Cantatore & Quappe [6] stated that cultural awareness is the foundation of communication and implies the ability to move away from ourselves and to raise awareness of our cultural values, beliefs and perceptions. Cultural awareness becomes central when we have to interact with people from other cultures.

There is an important relationship between culture and education, as the culture of teachers and students affects the education processes in the classroom. Thus, culture includes everything that makes one group or community within a society distinct from another: language, values, literature, worldview, food, religion, clothing, vacations, beliefs and behavior that builds lifestyle of a specific group [12]. Multicultural education encompasses practices and theories that support equitable opportunities and academic achievements for all students [13].

According to the Association (ASHE) for the Study of the Higher Education Report [7], in order to engage diversity in a classroom, the faculty must rely on a number of factors such as intentions, awareness, knowledge and development of additional skills. Also, the faculty should be willing to include teaching that supports the development of intercultural competences [8]. Therefore, theoretician Krutky stated in this regard: *"Education in the 21st century must prepare students for an increasingly interconnected, interdependent and diverse world."* *Teaching in a diverse classroom is a challenge for educators* [9].

3. METHODS

An overview of the methodology used in the article is represented by the following types:

1. Research approach (deductive)
2. Research method (qualitative)
3. Data collection (primary: Interviews, observations and secondary: books, journals, articles, previous studies in the literature and electronic sources)

4. EXPERIMENTAL

Given the geographical position of the Republic of Moldova, the development of cultural and intercultural competences is a constant concern of the universities of the Republic of Moldova. Thus, more than four thousand of the students who study in higher education institutions in the Republic of Moldova are foreign citizens. 2.1 thousand of them are studying medicine, according to data from the National Bureau of Statistics on the Activity of Higher



Education Institutions in the 2018/19 study year. In figure 2 we can see the evolution of the number of foreign students in the higher education institutions.

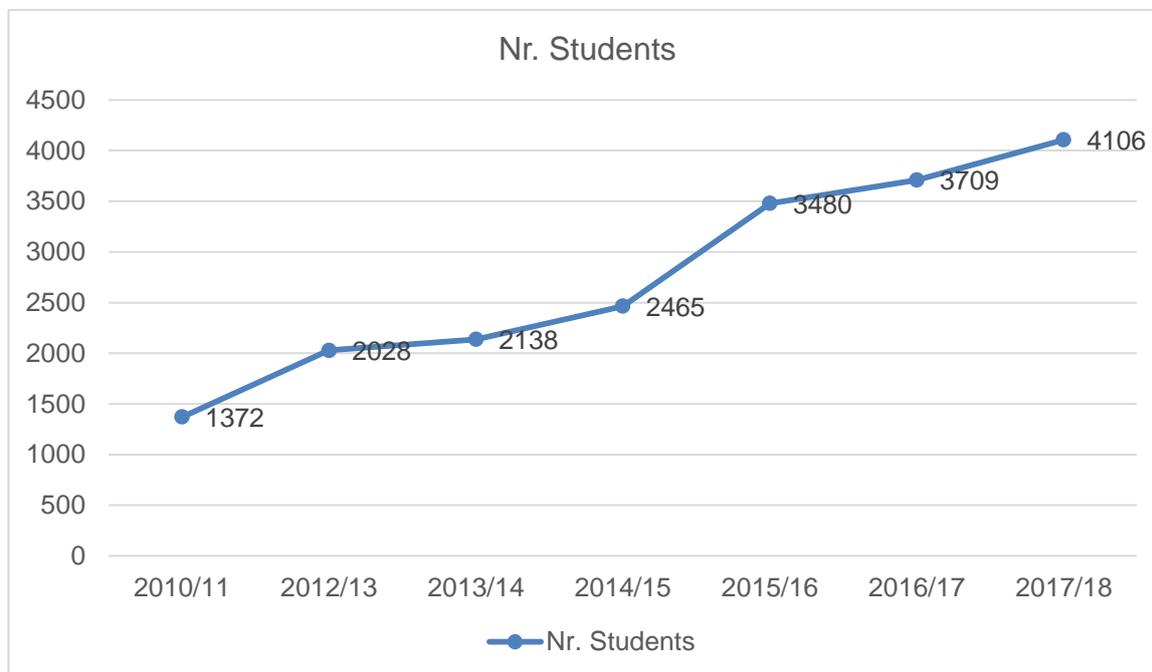


Figure 2. Evolution of foreign students in higher education institutions in the Republic of Moldova [10]

The majority of foreign students come from Israel - 41.8%, Romania - 39.2%, India - 6.3%, Ukraine 2.8% and Turkey - 2%.

For a few years now, Moldovan universities offer Romanian language courses for foreign citizens. In this context, the development of socio-linguistic, cultural and intercultural competences has become a necessity. The development of the above mentioned skills would be necessary for both Moldovans and foreign citizens, in order to avoid the possible situations of cultural differences.

In order to analyze the students' perception regarding the cultural and intercultural aspects, the need for skills development and how this would be possible, we conducted a quantitative research on a sample of 50 students enrolled in the bachelor programs of the American University of Moldova. The students had to complete a questionnaire with dual choice items but also some open items. The students in the sample are enrolled in the Bachelor of Economics (19), Finance and Accounting (10), Public Administration (17) and Tourism (4).

We will present their answers to questions in determining the need to develop intercultural competences within our study programs.

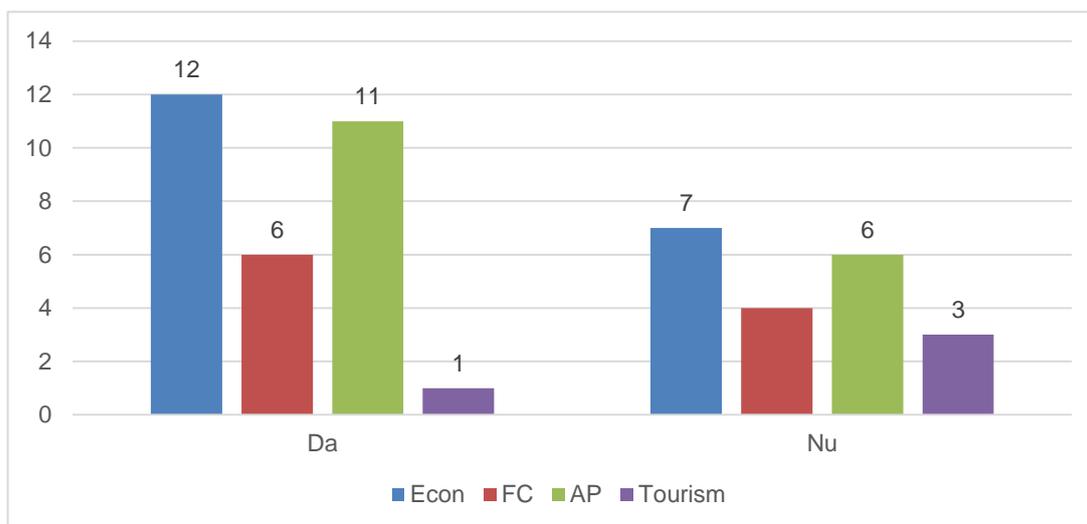
5. RESULTS

Question No 1. Do you consider the introduction of interculturality aspects in the course hours as positive?



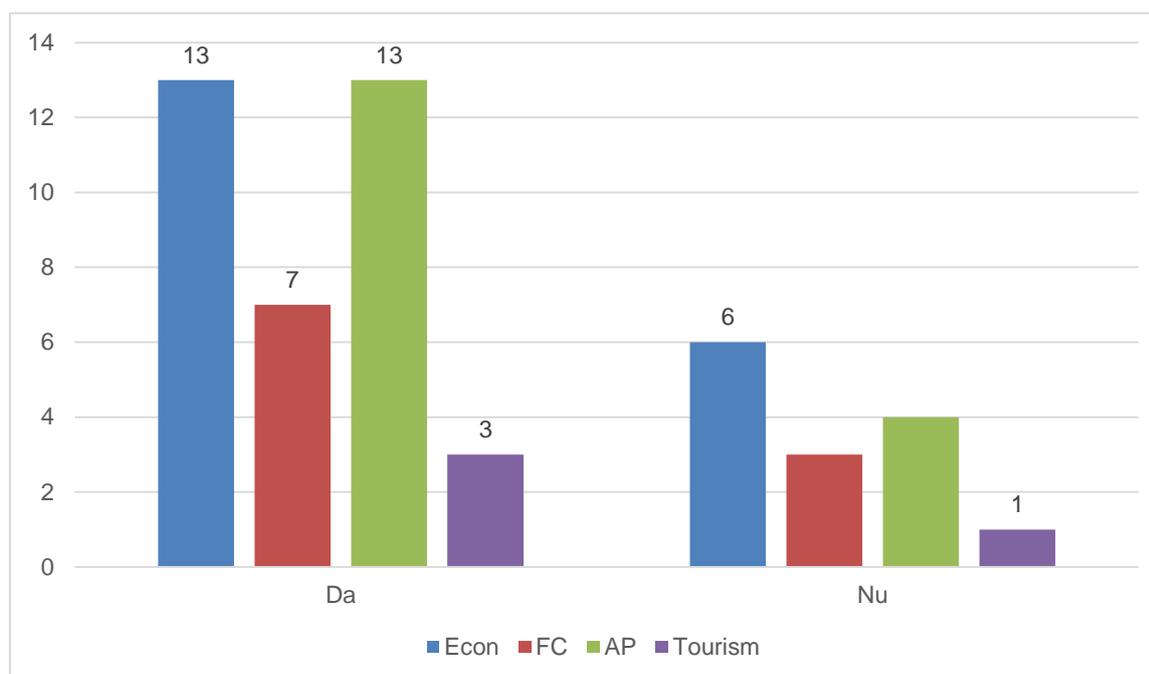
The students' answers are divided into study programs to allow an analysis of them from the perspective of the specific of each specialization.

Therefore, we find that the students of Economics, Fin and Con and AP are for introducing the intercultural aspects in the courses. Tourism students, however, feel that these issues are not important to them, that foreign nationals should adapt to the culture of the host country.



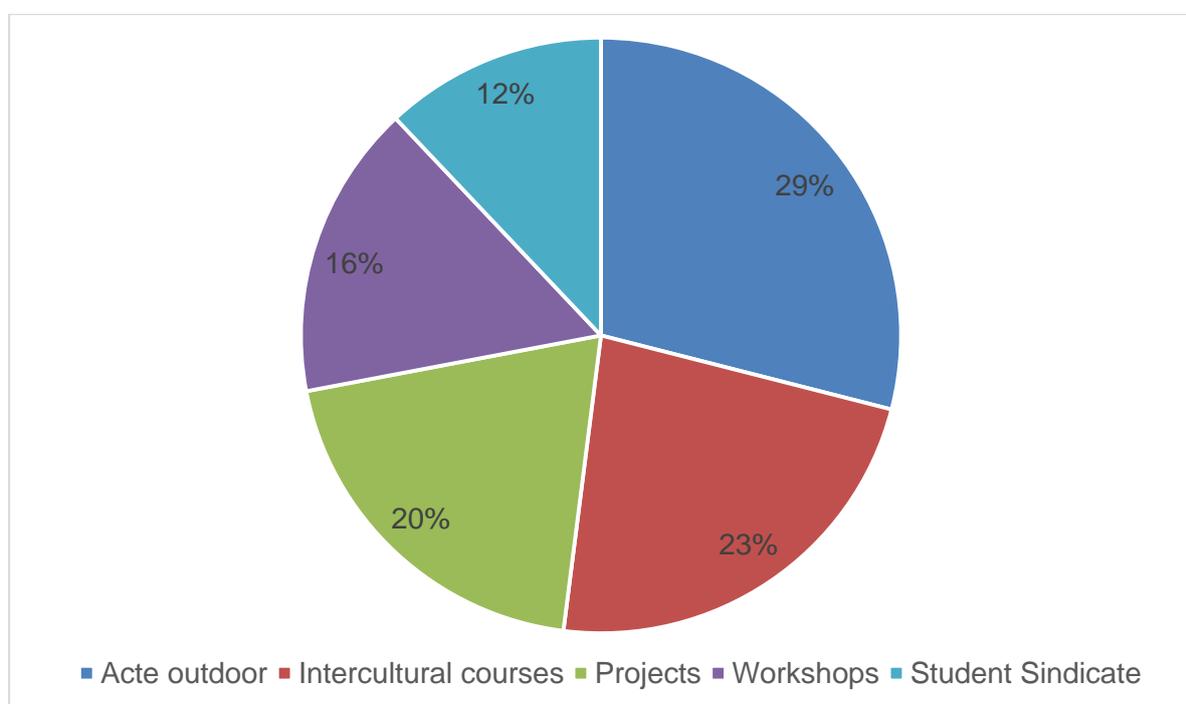
Question no. 2 Could the development of cultural and intercultural competences help to avoid conflict situations?

The figure below shows the students' answers to question number 2.



As we can see from the students' answers, the majority considers that the acquisition of cultural and intercultural competences would be useful in avoiding conflicting or embarrassing situations. Young people believe that most conflict situations between people from different cultural backgrounds originate from the lack of intercultural competences and not from hostile or conflicting attitudes. The students said that they often had a wrong approach towards the students who came with Erasmus mobility, because they did not have information about their culture, customs, traditions and holidays. In their turn, foreign students were offended by certain questions and attitudes, not understanding that they are in fact the result of cultural barriers and discrepancies.

One of the open item questions was question no. 3, which asked the students to list some activities that in their opinion would contribute to the development of intercultural communication. The graph below presents their options.



Finally, I believe that the trust between teachers and their students in the multicultural classroom plays an important role in motivating the class to learn in a challenging environment where language and culture differences can be barriers to learning. Thus, students should work hard to hone their language skills to help them understand and communicate better and integrate into a multicultural classroom.

6. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, teachers who learn more about the environments, cultures and experiences of their students will feel more capable and efficient in their work as teachers. Teachers should work continuously to improve the lives of foreign students. Also, teachers can reduce problems in the multicultural classroom by improving their teaching and learning approaches [11]. Flexibility is more important than knowledge in addressing multicultural issues.

Therefore, teachers should explore the issues in the multicultural classroom as they arise and deal with these issues. Also, teachers should try to find, create or design ways that elevate and improve students' academic performance and build an effective or strong relationship with students.

In conclusion, the necessary and compulsory direction in our modern education, but also in the extracurricular activity organized in specialized educational institutions, must ensure to the young generations a solid preparation for life, in the spirit of modern European values, to the extent that the teacher has the training and the endowment. necessary as both moderator and trainer of intercultural communication, thus becoming the promoter of intercultural education.

I would conclude by using the words of Pierre Dasen, who I find very eloquent in relation to the topic addressed: "The educator practicing an intercultural pedagogy will actually benefit from the presence of children from different backgrounds in order to (re) enhance their culture of origin and to raise awareness, at the same time, others to cultural diversity, but will avoid imposing some identification, will avoid stereotypes, the presentation of cultures in a static way. "

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