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## CURRICULUM & TEACHING STUDIES | RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Factors of students' intercultural competence development in the context of Georgia

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**Abstract:** Research aims to define the impact of diverse cultural factors on formation of students' intercultural competences. Study revealed following negative tendencies: students have insufficient knowledge about different cultures, in fact, they do not have any experience of communicating with other cultural representatives, and they are reluctant to integrate with different cultures. These gaps are directly correlated with school culture dimensions, such as: school community diversity, teaching content, and the style of pedagogical relations. Among the positive trends, we can differentiate the following: students' readiness to consider different views in school-related decision-making process; students' belief that they can improve the school culture. The school, as the leading agent of intercultural education, should undertake the responsibility for developing intercultural competencies in students in order to eliminate the identified gaps and strengthen the positive trends, which can be achieved by active, consistent, and purposeful use of intercultural education methods and extracurricular educational strategies.

**Subjects:** Educational Research; Multicultural Education; Secondary Education; Classroom Practice

**Keywords:** intercultural education; intercultural competence; school culture; diversity

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

The research was held at Ilia State University within the framework of project Intercultural Education—Problems, their Analyses and Development Perspectives in Georgia (2013–2017) funded by Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation. The project is implemented by professors of School of Arts and Sciences at Ilia State University: David Malazonia (Research Director), Shorena Maglakelidze (researcher), Nino Chiabrishvili (researcher), Giorgi Gakheladze (researcher). Researchers have valuable experience in intercultural education and the teaching methods, therefore the present study aimed to study intercultural education competencies in students and development of their respective strategies, was become a common interest of their recent research activity.

### PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

In Georgia as historically multicultural country, the modern trends of transformation of social, economic, political, demographic, and cultural environment has conditioned the search for adequate educational solutions. This research is an attempt to find solution through studying students' intercultural awareness and the factors affecting it. Intercultural education is directly related with intercultural awareness of family, school, and society. It was found that positive changes in family, school, and society culture towards diversity, parenting, and teaching content, style of relations has its immediate effect of students' intercultural competencies. Understanding these effects can improve future programs for intercultural education. Exploration of intercultural education issues can also help all the interested parties (Ministry of Education and Science, public schools, self-governments, non-government organizations, and parents) to develop and implement successful experience and overcome the difficulties.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. *Urgency of intercultural education<sup>1</sup> in Georgia*

Soviet legacy has turned the peaceful coexistence and civil integration among different ethnic and religious communities living in Georgia into a serious problem. Intercultural relations are impeded by the stereotypes toward cultural legacy and national traditions. All this causes mutual alienation and insularity among different communities in diverse society of Georgia.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the map of ethnic minorities is changing. As a result of globalization, new ethnic cultural minorities have emerged along with the so-called “traditional minorities,” we had certain empiric experience of relationship with. Likewise, the geographic space of external mobility of Georgian citizens has increased. The new reality has raised the issue of intercultural education and competences even more sharply.

In the soviet times, ideologized interpretative works about the so-called Soviet Internationalism were created. By itself, this phenomenon (Soviet Internationalism) had turned into a distorted perception, political purpose of which was to promote assimilation process through leveling of identities. The studies of cultural identities and intercultural relationships in post-soviet, independent Georgia has started since 2000 (Javakhishvili & Sarjveladze, 2007; Sarjveladze, Shushania, Melikishvili, Baliashvili, 2009; Tabatadze, 2010; Tabatadze & Natsvlshvili, 2008; Tsereteli, 2015, etc.), although this issue has not yet become the subject of fundamental and consistent research. Mainly, the representatives of nongovernmental sectors<sup>3</sup> are taking interest in this issue. Studies tend to focus on individual segments of the problem (e.g. linguistic, religious, ethnic segments, separate levels of secondary school).

Studies, including those carried out by us<sup>4</sup>, show following trends: the attitudes of dominant group students toward cultural minorities are mostly negative; there is a lack of communication between ethnic groups in Georgia; textbooks tend to develop mostly negative attitudes toward different cultures and facilitate the formation of stereotypes, as they does not allow to consider and evaluate the problems from different perspectives; school role in intercultural education is ineffective—the school administration is not involved in the implementation of intercultural education; curricular and extra-curricular activities for development of students’ intercultural awareness and sensitivity are rarely offered; significant part of the teachers do not have enough intercultural knowledge and the experience of teaching cultures. Although such researches still continue, intercultural education on basic and secondary levels had not been studied consistently yet. This gap led to our interest to study students’ intercultural competence formation on secondary and high levels of general education schools.

### 1.2. *Theoretical basis for the study of intercultural competences*

In the process of research, we considered a combination of intercultural knowledge, intercultural skills and intercultural attitudes as the basis for students’ intercultural competence, which has a solid foundation: in particular, the goals of general education of Georgia provides for continuous development of these three components and correspondingly, subject competences are focused on the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes in secondary school curriculum. Our research, being focused on three-component model of intercultural competence, is also based on successful international practice.

The essence and importance of intercultural competences are presented in the work Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, European Reference Framework, published by Council of Europe (2007)—defining social and civic competencies, which “include personal, interpersonal and intercultural competence and cover all forms of behavior that equip individuals to participate in an effective and constructive way in social and working life, and particularly in increasingly diverse societies, and to resolve conflict where necessary.” This document gives a description of knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to the above-mentioned competence.

The above-mentioned three-component model is also recognized as basis for intercultural competence by researchers (Banks, 2013; Banks & Banks, 2012; Bennett, 2008; Cushner, McClelland, & Safford, 2014; Gorski, 2010). This triad was also pointed out in the instrument elaborated by the Council of Europe (2010) “A framework of reference for pluralistic approaches.” The component of knowledge is presented in the above-mentioned document with the following content: Language and the society; Culture, language, and identity; pluralism, diversity, multilingualism, and plurilingualism, similarities and differences between the cultures, culture and acquisition/learning, etc. This content is broken down in details according to the Indicators. According to Bennett: Intercultural Knowledge is “a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural contexts” (Bennett, 2008).

The document provides basic skills indicators in details (observation and analysis, detection and identification, comparison, talk about language and culture, the use of language skills in relation with the other, communication, learning) These skills are underlined by Dorn and Cavalieri-Koch while explaining intercultural skills, Intercultural skills “enable us to interact both effectively and in a way that is acceptable to others when working in a group whose members have different cultural backgrounds” (Dorn & Cavalieri-Koch, 2005).

According to the above-mentioned document of the Council of Europe, intercultural approaches cover several key categories: attention to the different, sensitivity, curiosity, perception/acceptance/recognition, openness, respect, attitude/motivation, will/readiness, position/attitude of interrogation (questioning), distancing, decentering, relativization, tendency of refraining from judging, tendency to the process of relativism, readiness for adaptation, self-confidence (self-reliance), recognition of own (linguistic or cultural) identity, motivation, and commitment to learn. Ultimately, intercultural approaches indicate the openness, curiosity, and readiness of an individual to accept and learn the characteristics of the other culture (UNESCO, 2006).

Intercultural competences are further more detailed in a paper published by the Council of Europe “Intercultural Competence for All Preparation for living in a heterogeneous world” (Intercultural competence for all preparation for living in a heterogeneous world, 2012). The paper reviews not only intercultural competences, but also their indicators, which are divided in two main—personal and institutional categories. Personal indicators are divided into four categories: personal values and skills, formation of interpersonal relations, intercultural knowledge and sensitivity, knowledge of global issues. While institutional indicators are allocated on four levels: country, school, curricula development, and teacher’s teaching/education levels.

In addition to the above-mentioned, we have studied and analyzed documents (curricula) of various countries, related to intercultural competences, in order to familiarize with the existing strategies of intercultural competence development. We can present Australian Curriculum as an example, according to which the continuum of intercultural education is organized through interrelated elements: (1) Recognizing culture and developing respect; (2) Interacting and empathizing with others; and (3) Reflecting on intercultural experiences and taking responsibility (Intercultural Understanding Australian Curriculum, 2011).

Following the reviewed experience, we have elaborated an intercultural competence model, customized to Georgian reality, which became the basis for the research framework and the corresponding instruments (see Section 1.4).

### **1.3. Research goals and objectives**

The purpose of this research is to study students’ intercultural competences on basic and secondary levels of school. Specifically, in the research process (1) we have defined intercultural competence level of basic and secondary school students, their teachers and family members; (2) we have established the impact of school culture, teaching/learning style, teachers’ intercultural competences on the quality of students’ intercultural education and perception of cultural diversity.

**Table 1. Types and geography of respondents**

	School	Student	Teacher	Family member of student
Tbilisi	13	441	138	275
Kvemo kartli	36	553	371	492
Guria	8	22	23	21
Samtskhe-Javakheti	6	29	24	12
Total	63	1,045	556	800

The research hypotheses were the following:

- (1) Students' intercultural competence is influenced by their cultural identity sources (school, family, social environment, media, content, and practice of informal education);
- (2) From the listed sources of cultural identity, school culture, teaching/learning approaches, teaching content, and school relationships have a determining impact on students' intercultural competence.

Research objectives were the following: (1) determination of intercultural competence criteria through studying/considering international practice and local specifics; (2) Development of specific research tool based on the criteria; (3) Testing the above-mentioned hypothesis using these tools.

#### **1.4. Research methodology**

One of the most important and volumetric activity of the research was education-related data collection and handling. In this process, we had to communicate with the Ministry of Education and Science, as well as with the schools and parents directly. In total, 2,401 respondents were interviewed. Including: 1,045 students; 800 student's family members and 556 teachers (see Table 1).

The majority of respondents (81%) were Georgian respondents, followed by Armenians (8%) Azeris (8%), Russians (1.5%) Yezids (0.5%), Ossetians (0.5%) in terms of their number. Among Christian respondents (2,155) 1,554 are orthodox, and 20 respondents are members of Armenian Apostolic Church, but 581 respondents do not specify which Christian church they belong to.

We used qualitative and quantitative research methods while studying students' intercultural competences. In particular, while analyzing the data of intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes of school community agents—students, teachers, and parents—we applied quantitative methods, while studying the agents' interactions—we used qualitative methods.

The specific tools of intercultural education research in diverse society of Georgia, developed by us, have made it possible to: (1) Define personal intercultural competences of students, teachers, and students' family members and interactions among them. (2) Study school environment in terms of facilitating students' intercultural education.

Correlative study has helped us to establish the impact and level of interaction of intercultural competences of three key agents of school community. A random selection-based research is the best guarantee for protecting against the threats of internal reliability, such as group inequivalence. Of course, we treated such a correlation analysis with much prudence, which clearly indicates casual relations and at the same time, ignores the threats of internal reliability. Specific attention was paid to correlative analysis, providing a detailed review of potential biases and simultaneously, convincingly analyzing the existing data.

### 1.5. Development of research tools

Intercultural education competencies were present and studied on three main levels: personal, school, and family levels. Our work on the content of measurement instruments for all three components (knowledge, skills, attitude) of intercultural competence was relied on successful international experience (the Council of Europe, UNESCO, Austria, Australia, Ireland, Intercultural education in the post-primary school (2006), Intercultural education in the primary schools (2005), Council of Europe, n.d., Learning: The Treasure Within, 1996, and so on.) of developing intercultural education curriculum. The content and approaches of Georgian National Curriculum (2011–2016) and successful researches in education (Bortini & Afshari, 2012; Lugovtsova & Yavuz, 2014, etc.) were also considered as a solid basis for our decision. Thus, the three-component model of intercultural competences was presented in following content:

Intercultural knowledge, which includes the knowledge of: connections among language, individual, and the society; interactions between culture, individual, and the society; multicultural environment and cultural interaction; intercultural conflict settlement strategies, interaction among culture, language, and identity.

Intercultural skills, which include: detection and analysis of more or less known cultural phenomena in different cultures; identification of cultural phenomenon; comparison of different cultural characteristics; communication with different cultural identity representatives; use of diverse and effective teaching strategies.

Intercultural attitudes, defined by: attention, sensitivity, interest, and openness to cultural diversity in the surrounding world; positive perception/acceptance of cultural diversity; desire to be involved in multilingual and multicultural environment and the will of action; thoughtful and less standardized perception of cultural events; disposition of refraining from judgment, drive for adaptation, and flexibility; recognition of one's own identity; sensitivity toward one's own cultural competitiveness; motivation for learning native and other cultures.

As already mentioned, we considered it reasonable to study intercultural competences in three key groups involved in general education system—student, teacher, parent, and correspondingly,—on three levels: personal, family and school levels. We defined the criteria of intercultural education by the following content:

- (1) Culture, an individual, the society
- (2) Culture, as an incentive for development and the outcomes
- (3) Cultural similarities and differences
- (4) The role of culture diversity in the development of an individual and the society
- (5) The importance of interpersonal communication in multicultural environment
- (6) Social groups and cultures
- (7) Intercultural conflict prevention

We elaborated three types of questionnaire based on the criteria: (1) for a student, (2) for a teacher, and (3) for a parent. The questionnaire examined intercultural competences (knowledge, skills, and attitude) of the respondent on personal and institutional levels (school and family).

The questionnaire, developed for defining intercultural competences of school community members, envisaged to gather information about respondents' key demographic data: gender, age, nationality, religious affiliation, native language, place of residence, place of birth (country), in case of teachers and students' family members—education and economic status.

The questionnaire provided for determination of intercultural competences of all the three types of respondents (student, teacher, students' family member) according to the following levels:

(a) Knowledge on personal level

*Basic provisions:* connection between culture, individual, and the society; development of culture, different rules, values, and conduct; respect of different cultures; knowledge about different cultures and human relations; sustainability of traditional societies and cultures.

(b) Skills on personal level

*Basic provisions:* Identification of culture-related misconceptions; determination of similarities and differences among cultures; use of variety of means to study the culture.

(c) Attitude on personal level

*Basic provisions:* Connections between various languages/culture; acceptability of diverse behavioral norms and rituals; respect of a person of any culture; readiness to live in a different cultural environment; readiness to provide help to the representative of other culture; interest toward peoples' cultural diversity; will to overcome cultural obstacles.

(d) Teaching/learning at school

*Basic provisions:* Familiarizing with diverse cultures; teaching the culture by a variety of means

(e) School environment

*Basic provisions:* Mutual care; making friends with other school students; getting prepared for living in a culturally diverse society; respect of different norms and traditions; impact of school culture on students' conduct; school culture improvement by students.

(f) Learning at home

*Basic provisions:* learning/teaching various cultures; introducing ones' own family traditions/rules.

(g) Family environment

*Basic provisions:* Mutual care; peculiarity/uniqueness of family culture; impact of family culture on student's conduct; student's influence on family culture.

### **1.6. Selection of target regions**

For testing the hypothesis, we have chosen typical regions of Georgia in terms of diversity, in order to determine the difference between mono- and multicultural environment from the standpoint of intercultural competences.

Accordingly, schools of different regions of Georgia were selected:

- (1) Guria—is densely populated by ethnically homogeneous (Georgian) people and the rate of their communication with other ethnicities is traditionally low. Their religious belief (Christian, orthodox), traditions and agricultural life are also homogenous.
- (2) Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti regions have ethnically diverse population (Georgians, Azeris, Armenians, Greeks). Religious map of these regions is also diverse: Orthodox Christians (Georgians and Greeks), Christian-Gregorian believers (Armenians), Muslims (Azeris). There are settlements in the same region, which are densely populated by homogeneous and non-homogenous groups. Georgian, Azerbaijani, Russian, and Armenian, as well as mixed-sector schools are functioning in this region. At first glance, this specificity should facilitate high-level integration of diverse population of this region, although, the reality is not so good.

(3) Tbilisi is characterized by high density and interaction of diverse population. This diversity of relationship is manifested in educational institutions of the city (schools, vocational institutions, universities with students from regions, as well as the students of non-Georgian origin) and in economic or daily life. In terms of diversity, specificity of Tbilisi is arguably interesting from the standpoint of interculturalism.

### 1.7. Main findings

We can review the questionnaire, designed for defining intercultural competences, as a single criterion if we consider it to be the Likert scale, and calculate the index from the questions, which simplifies the comparisons. Chronbach's Alpha, defining internal reliability of the questionnaire (that is, how the question N1, question N2, etc. correlate with each other), shows that the questionnaire, developed by us, has a high reliability. It refers to evaluation of intercultural competences in case of students, as well as of their parents and teachers. Chronbach's Alpha exceeds 0.85% in all the three cases, indicating high internal reliability of the questionnaire.

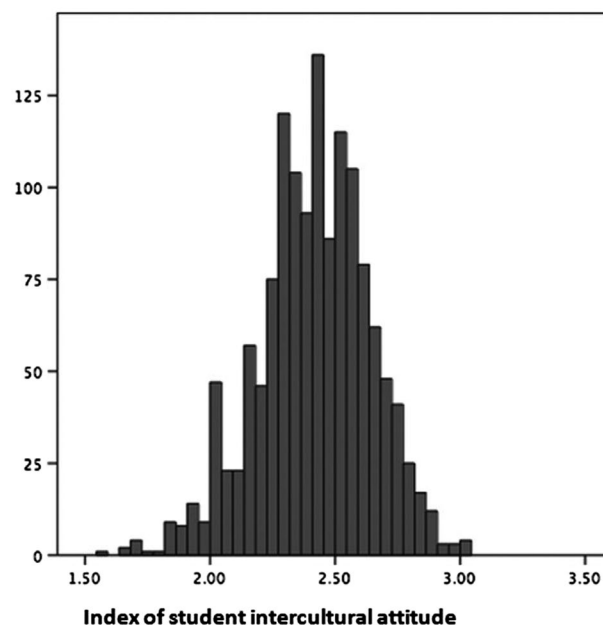
Despite high index of reliability, the presented questionnaire still has some drawbacks. In particular, the survey showed that the formulation of some questions needs to be adapted. While working with students, in number of cases, we had to provide additional explanations for some of the provisions. This problem was particularly evident while working with non-Georgian respondents.

In the process of data handling, we merged the questions into a single variable as an average indicator of respondents' answers. In students' case, this indicator fluctuates between 1.58 (minimum) and 3 (maximum) points. This variable is distributed normally (average point is 2.41, midpoint 2.43, standard deviation 0.22) (see Figure 1 and Table 2).

As the analysis showed, teachers' and parents' intercultural competences are close to each other. In addition, compared to students, their intercultural competences are not so high.

Reliability of answers of students and their family members are higher than those of the teachers. Relatively high index of teachers' intercultural competences may be conditioned by the fact that teachers knew about high expectations toward their competences and most frequently they provided the answers corresponding to those expectations.

**Figure 1. Students' intercultural competence distribution.**



**Table 2. Teachers' and students' family members' intercultural competence index distribution**

	<b>N</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>Standard deviation</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>
Index of teacher intercultural competencies	656	2.54	2.557	0.16999	1.7	3
Index of family member intercultural competencies	800	2.5247	2.58	0.26776	1	3

The main question during our research was to find out how the school's intercultural characteristics affect students' intercultural competences. We have calculated the average of parents' and teacher's education, parent's and teacher's average economic status, the average of standardized point of a parent's and a teacher's intercultural competences and linked them with students' data (see Table 2).

After that, we conducted an analysis, aimed at assessing the influence of above-described variables on intercultural competence index. Student's variables, used in the analysis, are the following:

- (1) Student's gender: girl = 1, boy = 0.
- (2) Student's age.
- (3) Student's religion: orthodox Christian = 1, სხვა = 0.
- (4) Student's nationality = Georgia = 1, other = 0.
- (5) Location of the school: Tbilisi = 1, other = 0.
- (6) Average education of parents at student's school (0 = incomplete 1 = secondary 2 = vocational, 3 = bachelor, 4 = master and PhD).
- (7) Average of parents' economic status at student's school (1 = low, 2 = average 3 = high).
- (8) Average of teachers' education at student's school (1 = average, 2 = vocational, 3 = Bachelor, 4 = Master and PhD).
- (9) Average standardized point of parents' intercultural competences at student's school.
- (10) Average standardized point of teachers' intercultural competences at student's school.

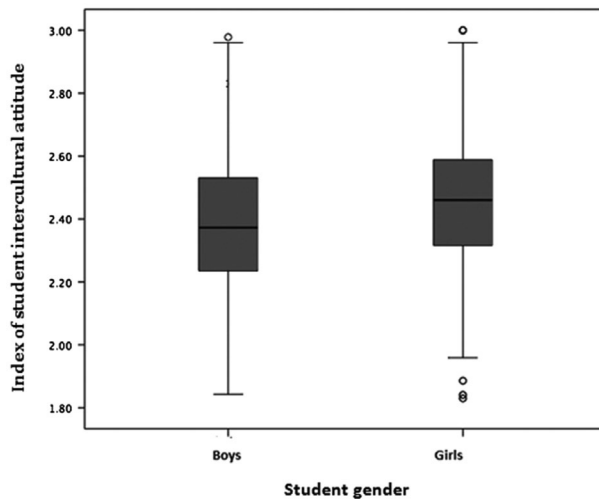
From the variables presented above, statistically, students' intercultural competences are significantly influenced by student's gender (on average, girls have higher index  $p < 0.0001$ ) and teacher's intercultural competence index (one unit change in teachers' cumulative index is associated with 0.43 units higher point in students' index). This means that the students' gender and school culture have evident effect on their intercultural competences, in particular: on personal level—teacher's intercultural competences and teaching style, and on institutional level—school environment, orientation on students' diversity, cooperation of school community members, students' equal participation in school life, encouraging students' involvement in extracurricular activities. The impact of other variables (place of residence, religion, economic status, etc.) on students' intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes are relatively lower.

Visual illustrations of the connection between these variables are presented in the bellow chart (see Figure 2).

Average indicator of respondents' answers according to the components of intercultural competence (knowledge, skills, attitude, teaching/learning, school environment, family environment) and research levels (personal, school, family) has revealed the following trends:



**Figure 2. Comparison of student’s intercultural competence indexes according to student’s gender.**



**1.7.1. Knowledge on personal level**

The main trends were assessed by extremes in the answers:

Approximately 80.5% of students agree with the statement—“Different cultures are characterized by different rules, values and behavior,” and 77.7% of students—to the provision “All cultures need to be respected equally.” Also the statement—“Knowledge about different cultures makes it easier for people to communicate”—has high percentage of approval.

As for the other important provision, such as “Traditions never change”—40% of students do not agree with, and 32.4% of them agrees partially.

Average frequency of the other data of this component of intercultural component fluctuates from “partial” to “full approval” (partially agree—29.8%; fully agree—50.0%).

**Table 3. Ratio between the average of student’s responses and an average of responses of a teacher and student’s family member**

Statement	Student			Teacher			Family member		
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
1. Different cultures are characterized by different rules, values and behavior			80.5			86.3			86.1
2. All cultures need to be respected equally			77.7			89.9			80.9
3. Knowledge about different cultures makes it easier for people to communicate			71.6			1.4			80.5
4. Traditions never change	40.2			40.9			33.4		
5. Other		29.8	50.0		35.2	51.9		27.0	57.5

Notes: In the Table, number 1 indicates answer “Do not agree,” 2 indicates answer “Partially agree,” 3 indicates answer “Agree.”

**Table 4. Ratio between the average of student’s responses and an average of responses of a teacher and student’s family member**

Statement	Student			Teacher			Family member		
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
1. I can recognize cultural misconceptions			35.0			36.9			39.1
2. I can identify cultural similarities and differences			68.8			63.8			62.1
3. I use a variety of tools for studying the culture			70.6			84.0			72.7
4. Other		24.2	58.1		30.0	61.6		26.2	58.0

Notes: In the Table, number 1 indicates answer “Do not agree,” 2 indicates answer “Partially agree,” 3 indicates answer “Agree.”

We have presented Table 3 for visibly comparing responses of all the three agents of education (student, teacher, and parent).

The table shows, that teachers’ and family members’ replies to the statement 1 are identical and outnumber student’s indicator. Responses of students, teachers, and family members to the statement 2 are different. Relatively low average index of students’ knowledge and attitude can be attributed to the deficiency of communication experience with other cultures. With regards to the third statement, students’ and teachers’ indexes are drastically different (89.9% marked the answer “Partially agree”), which might indicate that from experience, they know: that the knowledge about cultures are not directly correlated with sound relationships between cultures.

#### 1.7.2. Skills on personal level

The analysis of the results showed, that the majority of students (70.6%) is using a variety of methods to learn the culture, which certainly must be considered as a positive move. It should be noted, that according to students’ opinion, teachers do not/or very seldom apply to various methods of intercultural education in school practice (34.3% of students have given a positive answer to this question). As for the role of family environment in the issue of learning cultural diversity, 41.2% of students have provided positive reply.

It is noteworthy, that 68.8% of students consider that they can identify similarities and differences between cultures and at the same time, they have difficulties of recognizing culture-related stereotypical views.

The Table 4 shows that while evaluating intercultural skills on personal level, the position of students, teachers and student family members are close to each other. However, with regards to the third statement, ratio of approval is significantly higher compared to the other respondents’ answers. This was not unexpected though, since teachers are more self-confident as compared to students while evaluating one’s own practice.

#### 1.7.3. Attitudes on personal level

The study results have revealed that students’ positive answers to such important statements of intercultural attitudes as: the existence of connections between different languages/cultures; recognition of different behavioral norms and rituals of the representatives of other cultures; importance of respecting a person of any culture; readiness for sharing one’s own culture with the others; and assisting the representatives of other culture. However, a large part of students do not show the readiness for living in a different cultural environment.

**Table 5. Ratio between the average of student’s responses and an average of responses of a teacher and student’s family member**

Statement	Student			Teacher			Family member		
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
1. I do understand that there are links between different languages/ cultures			62.8			83.9			71.3
2. Representatives of other culture might have different behavioral norms and rituals			80.3			92.2			79.3
3. I respect every individual of any culture			72.7			91.7			82.7
4. I am ready to live in a culturally different environment			27.5			31.3			26.8
5. I am committed to share my own culture with others			69.5			85.7			73.1
6. I am committed to share my own culture with others			60.8			77.0			68.1
7. Other		27.0	56.7		18.6	73.1		22.8	62.5

Notes: In the Table, number 1 indicates answer “Do not agree,” 2 indicates answer “Partially agree,” 3 indicates answer “Agree.”

The Table 5 shows, that students’ and their family members’ attitude to the reviewed statements are mainly homogenous, but teachers’ answers reveal comparatively higher rate of approval to the statements reflecting intercultural attitudes. In addition, all the three respondents clearly express readiness to live in a culturally different environment.

#### 1.7.4. Teaching/learning at school

The analysis of student’s answers showed that they disapprove the role of the school in intercultural education. For instance, only 34.3% of students believe that teachers use a variety of methods of teaching different cultures. About 46.3% indicates that teachers introduce different cultures at the lesson. Students’ position that intercultural education should not be acquired only in a classroom environment, is natural, correct, but in this case, our attention is drawn to the extremely low indicator (65.2%) with respect to the mentioned statement, while the same indicator for the family does not exceed 47.6%.

As Table 6 shows, compared to students, teachers, and student’s family members give more importance to the classroom environment, as the main source of intercultural education. The same can be said with respect to the third statement—students are more skeptical about teaching methods of their teachers, than their family members.

#### 1.7.5. School environment

Students’ positive attitude toward school environment fluctuates between—“Partially agree” and “Agree.” Students’ answers to this criterion did not reveal a positive attitude toward any of these components.

**Table 6. Ratio between the average of student’s responses and an average of responses of a teacher and student’s family member**

Statement	Student			Teacher			Family member		
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
1. Relationships between different cultures are taught only in the classroom			35.0	58.6			56.6		
2. Teachers introduce us with different cultures at school			46.3			46.3			57.4
3. Teachers use a variety of methods to teach us different cultures			34.3			50.6			50.0
4. Other		30.0	39.6		31.1	51.1		26.0	48.4

Notes: In the Table, number 1 indicates answer “Do not agree,” 2 indicates answer “Partially agree,” 3 indicates answer “Agree.”

For example, considerably low percentage of students (36.3%) believes that students take care of each other at their school. Approximately the same results are observed toward other statements as well, e.g. our school always helps us in making friends with other school students (36.3%); the school prepares us for living in a culturally diverse society (49.5%) (This statement was negatively answered by 11.7% of students interviewed), different norms and traditions are always treated with respect at our school (45.6%). Students’ critical attitude toward school environment is somehow summed up in their negative position to the most important statement such as: students’ conduct is determined by the school culture. Only 32% of interviewed students agree with the statement, and 20.1% has a negative answer.

In addition, students’ belief (57.5%), that they can improve the culture of school—should certainly be considered as a positive trend.

The Table 7 shows, that during the assessment of school environment, students’ and their family members’ positions were close to each other and in general, were negative compared to teachers’ position. The attitude of target groups toward the statement “we can improve the culture of school” is also different. In this respect, expectations of students and their family members (respectively, 57.5 and 41.1%) are higher, than those of teachers. Such a position of teachers can be attributed to their low involvement in school life.

#### 1.7.6. Learning at the family level

From the competences revealed at this level, it is worth to note that the majority of students do not consider family to be an uncontested hub of intercultural education (47.9%). It is interesting that 65.2% of students do not believe that either school is the only environment for receiving intercultural education. It is clear, that such an attitude of students is correct; they rightfully believe that intercultural education sources are diverse and they are not related to a single specific environment. In this case, it’s an interesting fact that the larger part of students is skeptical toward school, than to their own family environment.

Hereby, we note that a relatively small number of students deem that the role of the family is significant in their intercultural education process. For example, only 39.6% believes, that their family members familiarize them with different cultures, and according to the opinion of 41.2%, family members use a variety of methods for raising their intercultural awareness.

**Table 7. Ratio between the average of student’s responses and an average of responses of a teacher and student’s family member**

Statement	Student			Teacher			Family member		
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
1. Students care about each other at our school			36.3			65.8			43.3
2. Our school always helps us in making friends with other school students			36.3			73.4			49.4
3. The school prepares us for living in a culturally diverse society			33.1			73.7			61.6
4. Different norms and traditions are always respected at our school			45.6			71.1			54.1
5. Student’s conduct is defined by the culture of school			32.0			49.5			42.2
6. We can improve the culture of school			57.5			38.1			41.1
7. Other		28.8	51.0		27.0	65.3		31.3	53.6

Notes: In the Table, number 1 indicates answer “Do not agree,” 2 indicates answer “Partially agree,” 3 indicates answer “Agree.”

**Table 8. Ratio between the average of student’s responses and an average of responses of a teacher and student’s family member**

Statement	Student			Teacher			Family member		
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
1. We learn different cultures only at home	47,6			52.7			-		
2. Our elder family members familiarize us with different cultures			39,6			18.2			56.7
3. At home the elders teach us the culture through various tools			41,2			-			53.7
4. Other		35.6	31.9		47.9	21.6		31.5	53.6

Notes: In the Table, number 1 indicates answer “Do not agree,” 2 indicates answer “Partially agree,” 3 indicates answer “Agree.”

The Table 8 shows that teachers and students have almost the same position toward the statement 1. According to their opinion, the family does not represent a dominant institute of intercultural

**Table 9. Ratio between the average of student’s responses and an average of responses of a teacher and student’s family member**

Statement	Student			Teacher			Family member		
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
1. My family members care about each other			89.6			49.3			89.8
2. Every family has different culture			70.0			82.6			81.4
3. Our conduct is defined by a family culture			62.9			62.3			72.4
4. We can improve family traditions			59.7			25.4			-
5. Other		27.7	63.9		42.2	39.2		20.3	71.9

Notes: In the Table, number 1 indicates answer “Do not agree,” 2 indicates answer “Partially agree,” 3 indicates answer “Agree.”

education. Their positions drastically differ with regards to the second statement—teachers are skeptical about the role/abilities of family members in terms of educating students about cultural diversity.

#### 1.7.7. Family environment

Following trends were revealed by analyzing students’ answers at this level:

- (a) A vast majority of students (86.6%) believe that family members care and positively influence each other. With regards to the analogous statement at school level, students’ responses are diametrically different—only 36.3% considers that students care for one another at school.
- (b) Students (70.0%) also recognize that every family has different culture.
- (c) The majority of students (62.9%) believe that their culture is defined by their family culture. It is interesting that only 32.0% recognize that the culture of school has a determining impact on their own culture.
- (d) It is significant that 59.7% of students believe in the possibility of family culture improvement and understand their own role in this process. About the same number of students (57.5%) deem themselves able to improve the culture of school.

The Table 9 shows, that the answers of students and their family members are identical with regards to statement 1. They believe that family members care about each other. We face radically different answers from teachers’ side. Only 49.3% of them agree with the expressed assumption. From the other data it is notable that 72.4% of family members link students’ conduct directly to the family culture. Direct connection between student’s conduct and family culture is recognized by a relatively small number of teachers and students. One more trend needs to be noted—the majority of students consider that they are able to improve their family traditions. Unlike them, only 25.4% of teachers recognize the possibility of students’ positive impact on their family culture.

#### 1.8. Summary of results

Based on the study results, several important trends were revealed, as follows:

Teachers rarely resort to various methods of intercultural education in school practice. The family role in teaching intercultural diversity is low as well. Development of intercultural competences in students is hindered by: (1) the teaching (education process) style offered by a teacher (mostly reproductive, monologue) and (2) fragmentation of educational-research projects; all the

above-mentioned do hamper rapprochement of different cultural groups, formation and development of intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes in students.

Students give relatively less significance to school in terms of intercultural competence development; at the same time, they logically diversify intercultural education sources. The fact, that students give relatively low rate to the role of school, is linked with the reality that the main agents of intercultural education - teachers do not apply active teaching methods and diverse resources. Poor quality of intercultural education leads to undesirable level of students' integration, which in turn is reflected in low participation or in formal participation in school self-government and other events organized by school/class.

From the abovementioned it can be said, that school opportunities are not effectively used in terms of students' intercultural competence development. The school, as a leading agent of intercultural education, should undertake the responsibility of developing intercultural competences in students, which in diverse society will result in the following: (1) promotion of culturally diverse students' successful integration and (2) their active and thoughtful participation in school institution, which is important for democracy, such as students' self-government and implementation of school/class initiatives by them.

Students positively react to the important provision of intercultural education and attitudes, such as: existence of links among various languages and cultures; recognition of different behavioral norms and rituals of other cultural representatives; significance of respecting human values of any other culture; readiness to share one's own culture with others and provide assistance to the representatives of other cultures. High percentage of positive replies is given to the provision: "knowledge of various cultures makes it easier for people to communicate," "All cultures are equally Respected," etc. Students, teachers and parents provided different answers to this provision. Compared to other representatives of school community, relatively low indicator of students' respective knowledge and attitude can be explained by the lack of their experience of communicating with different cultures.

Students' intercultural knowledge and attitude completely correspond to their readiness to appreciate and consider different views in school/class-related decision-making process. Acceptance of different position, tolerance for the diversity is facilitated by school/class initiatives undertaken by students. The significance of such initiatives in terms of formation of teamwork, responsibility, mutual assistance, and other valuable attitudes is fully shared by the students interviewed.

Undeniably, students' belief that they can improve the school culture should be considered as a positive trend. At the same time, for students' participation in the improvement of school culture, it is necessary that their formalistic attitudes to public service, student' self-governments, and school/class initiatives are replaced by thoughtful and active participation in these processes, in which the entire school should play the decisive role.

### **1.9. Key findings**

Using specific tools of studying intercultural education in a diverse society of Georgia, the following was revealed:

- (1) The type (content and scale) of individual dimensions of the diversity of society (e.g. national, linguistic, social, religious, or cultural affiliation) and, also of the impact of their combination on intercultural education.
- (2) Students' intercultural competences are positively correlated to their sex. According to sex, intercultural competences of girls are relatively higher.
- (3) Students' intercultural competences are primarily influenced by school culture, diversity of school community, teaching content, and style of teaching pedagogical relations.

### 1.10. Practical significance of research

The strategy of our research includes identification of problems related to intercultural education and based on their analysis, development of systemic approaches, which will assist stakeholders (Ministry of Education and Science, secondary schools, self-government bodies, nongovernment organizations, parents) in overcoming the obstacles revealed. More specifically:

- (1) Lack of tradition of intercultural education. Accordingly, teaching environment is still ineffective, appropriate pedagogical approaches and resources are not yet processed.
- (2) Intercultural education and competences are quite low among teachers and in the society, in general, which does not have a positive impact on students' intercultural competences.

### 1.11. Developed recommendations

- (1) It is necessary to elaborate state/educational policy promoting intercultural education and relationships in ethnically compact and integrated environment of Georgia.
- (2) Develop appropriate resources on state level which will help raising family awareness in terms of intercultural education and relationships.
- (3) Select intercultural education resources and teaching/learning strategies considering students' cultural identity.
- (4) Create formal as well as informal integrated environment for different cultural groups of students, through which they will be able to overcome cultural isolation.

### 1.12. Research perspective

In the future, based on existing research experience and findings we aim to:

- (1) Study the impact of the existing level of intercultural education and perception of cultural diversity of the society on civic activity and integration process of the students having different identity. In particular, based on the analysis of active and passive forms of intercultural relationships, define the relation existing between education and skills of adapting to diverse environment, on one hand and civic integration, on the other.
- (2) Elaborate formal and informal education strategies, which will assist teachers, students, and their parents in intercultural competence development.

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#### Notes

1. In the article, we use the term Intercultural Education (Birzea, 2000) which is related to education. It has its own argument: according to "UNESCO guidelines on intercultural education," the term "multicultural" reflects culturally diverse nature of the society, and Interculturalism—indicates the relationship among cultural groups. (UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005), Article 8). Therefore, we use the term "multicultural" to denote diverse environment, and in relation to education, we apply the term "intercultural." Reader can also consider Prof. Cesar Birzea's opinion about the use of these terms: "the differences are valid especially in a European context. In the USA, Canada and Australia, the term "intercultural" is rarely used. "Multicultural" is common for both the static situation (diversity) and the interaction resulting from interpersonal encounters (the dynamic or intercultural dimension)."
2. According to the data of the census 2014, 86.8% of the population is Georgian, who are followed by Azeris (6.3%); Armenians (4.5%); Russians (0.7%); Ossetians (0.4%), 83.4% of the population is orthodox Christian.



- Approximately 10.7% of the population are Muslims, 2.9% is Armenian Apostolic religious follower, 0.5 %—is Catholic (Preliminary results of CENSUS, 2014).
- Centre for Civil Integration and Inter-Ethnic Relations, Civic Development Institute, The Tolerance Center at the Office of the Public Defender of Georgia, United Nations Association of Georgia, National Integration and Tolerance in Georgia (National Statistics Office of Georgia, n.d.).
  - In the framework of research funded by Shota Rustaveli National Scientific Foundation—Intercultural education—problems, their analysis, and development perspectives in Georgia (2014–2017), we studied: students' intercultural sensitivity in ethnically homogenous school environment; intercultural aspects represented in textbooks and problems related to development of students' intercultural competence (Malazonia, Maglakelidze, Chiabrishvili, & Gakheladze, 2017).
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