



## Intercultural Approach in Early Childhood Education

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### Abstract

**Problem Statement:** People have been doing researches about culture notion for many years. And, it has been getting very complicated to identify the culture notion in parallel with these studies. The term of multiculturalism is new but the notion is pretty old. Multicultural approach in education has emerged as a reflection of this situation and has become one of the subjects to be taken as a priority as a result of the globalized world. It is needed to secure an education concept to meet all education needs of all different cultures living in a society and to make these different groups learn to live together in harmony. This viewpoint should be secured starting from preschool period. This subject is one of the most important needs of today's education world.

**Purpose of the Study:** The aim of this study is to research the content, the methods and the motives of the intercultural approach in education and to try to recognize this subject, which is new in our country, with its practices around the world. Multiculturalism is a subject with many possible expansions which can be discussed among many different experts, but it's been approached in terms of reflections to the early childhood education in this study.

**Method:** The research is a work of collection which has been done as a literature review type. Primarily multiculturalism and multicultural education notions have been tried to be defined with the viewpoints of different researchers. Thereafter, the aims of multicultural education have been discussed and multicultural education approaches in preschool period have been analyzed.

**Conclusion and Recommendations:** Our world is actually a multicultural environment and since the children live in this world, they need experiences to make them fit into this environment. If children live in small groups, they miss the features of bigger groups and have narrow viewpoints. Yet, knowing the lifestyles of different cultures gives children a humanistic sensibility and universal viewpoint. It is needed in our country to take note of studies on intercultural approach in early childhood education. The priority must be given to the education of teachers.

**Keywords:** Multiculturalism, intercultural education, early childhood education, education programs.

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## INTRODUCTION

People have been doing researches about culture notion for many years. And, it has been getting very complicated to identify the culture notion in parallel with these studies. As Kağıtçıbaşı (1998) states, “culture” can be defined in 164 different ways. For example, it can be said that culture is “the traditional ideas and values”, “passing the learned attitudes from generation to generation”, “common shapes and meanings”, or “a set of ideas, applications, norms and meanings to put the attitudes in a system” (Kağıtçıbaşı,1998).

The term of multiculturalism is new but the notion is pretty old. The wars and developments of the last century have increased the number of cultures which form the societies in Europe and America, and so the multiculturalism has been one of the most overemphasized subjects for 30 years. *“As the meaning, multiculturalism can be defined as the differences in terms of content, along with various cultures existing side by side and together”* (Uygur,1996, p.86).

Many experts who are interested in the subject state that the one point to be emphasized in the notion of multiculturalism is that different cultures living together establish a new culture. Multicultural approach in education has emerged as a reflection of this situation and has become one of the subjects to be taken as a priority as a result of the globalized world.

### **The Aim of the Study**

The aim of this study is to research the content, the methods and the motives of the intercultural approach in education and to try to recognize this subject, which is new in our country, with its practices around the world. For many years, plenty of different cultures have been getting together in the same schools and in the same classes. For example, it is possible to see children of an Italian, Indian or an English family in the same classes in some countries. In this case, the children try to meet on a common education line even if they are from very different cultures.

These kinds of class structures where the children from different cultures of different countries do not yet exist in our country, rather it is possible to find education environments where subcultures of the same culture come together. But it seems possible to come across this kind of situation in the near future as a member candidate country to the European Union. Besides, our children can already keep up with different cultures one way or another. Most of the cartoons in our country, which our children watch with pleasure, are being produced in another countries and carry some features peculiar to the country it was produced. Multiculturalism is a subject with many possible expansions which can be discussed among many different experts, but it’s been approached in terms of reflections to the early childhood education in this study.

## METHOD

The research is a work of collection which has been done as a literature review type. Primarily multiculturalism and multicultural education notions have been tried to be defined with the viewpoints of different researchers. Thereafter, the aims of multicultural education have been discussed and multicultural education approaches in preschool period have been analyzed.

## **FINDINGS**

### **What is multicultural education?**

In general terms, intercultural education is defined as a process when the students can discover, share and reinterpret the past and future cultures. This approach states indirectly that students have different learning ways. This intercultural process starts with self-examination, acquaintance with the cultural heritage of each other, contraction with the different one, and finding a place between the developing mixed society.

The field of occupation of intercultural education is to realize an education comprehension which enables the education needs of all different cultures living in the same society to be fully satisfied and which ensures that these different groups learn to live together in harmony. Also, it is to raise individuals with high universal values and social abilities.

The mission of the intercultural education is to introduce an education environment where people from different cultures who live together can see and understand the positive features of each other without destroying their own values. Another important mission is to increase the social sufficiency of individuals and form a universal culture where local cultures can live together in harmony (Lynch, 1986).

According to Leslie Williams and Yvone De Gaetano, who are administrators of an intercultural early childhood program called "A Learning Environment Considering Everyone", the culture of a family includes everything from food, dance, music, clothing, art to lifestyle, entertainment, social traditions, medicine, history, festivals, language spoken, religious beliefs, rules, education, attitudes towards others and child growing practices (Hofmann&Weikart,1995:45). Through this information, the general aims of intercultural approach in education can be listed as (Lynch, 1989):

- To make individuals to develop empathy towards other people, to understand the differences, similarities and diversities of people, to develop the society with mutual solidarity, to cover local cultures in a way to make people from different cultures feel like they are in home,
- To make people realize the reasons of their personal, interactional or international conflicts and to help with the solutions,
- To give responsibility on the matters like not to discriminate, not to be opinionated, and to be in cooperation for better features,
- To create awareness that all individuals, even if they are different, are values and everyone can contribute to the humanity,
- To make everyone act in accordance with both the social and the personal ethics about the cultural differences in the society and the world,
- To make the humanity understand that they need to be in mutual cooperation in environmental and economical field and to make them feel responsible in reaching economical prosperity at international level,
- To ensure the necessary skill, awareness, ability and manner for a democratic cultural pluralist society.

The aims listed above are seen necessary for enlightening the matters like differences, which are necessary for societies on the doorstep of a multicultural structure, living together in harmony, and raising world citizens with global values.

### **Why multicultural education?**

Since World War 2, today's democratic societies in the western countries have become mosaics where spiritually, glossary and ethnically different cultures come together. In this regard, they have started to take interest in multicultural education or intercultural education for 20 years. Nowadays, England and other western societies have started to do researches about the reflections of pluralist democracy concepts on the field of education. Because, Western Europe and the countries like the United States and Australia have encountered many problems for the last 20 years, which are arising from different cultures living together and increasing. The intercultural education or multicultural education has become one of the primary strategies in integrating the new cultural groups, emerged after World War 2, with their own societies (Lynch, 1986, p.92).

In addition to this, European Union picking up speed in 2000's has revealed the necessity of union members to be in cohesion on the education like every other matter. As is known to all, one of the most recognized features of European Union is the effort to provide harmony among differences. This situation is especially the important field of education where the practices show great differences from county to country. Differences mean enrichment for every individual and form an efficient ground for quality and new discoveries (Çavdar, 2000). The key of education policy of European Union is built on "harmony of differences". With the Council decisions which were made in October 6 1898, forming the multiculturalism has become one of the common basic aims emphasized on the policy and cooperation with European Union on the field of education (Topsakal&Hesapçıoğlu, 2001, p.441).

### *Curriculum Guidelines for Multicultural Education*

Emerging of the need for intercultural education in the world and beginning of discussions about programs devoted to it have taken shape in a long period of time. In this period, the experts interested in the subject have foreseen different ways in education methods and programs. In most of these approaches, there are elements such as having activities to increase the awareness of solidarity and cooperation, using different learning methods and organizing the course contents in accordance with the learning requirements of the students.

According to Phenice and Hilbrand (1988), these matters should be taken into consideration in an effective intercultural program (Wollfolk,1997, p.203):

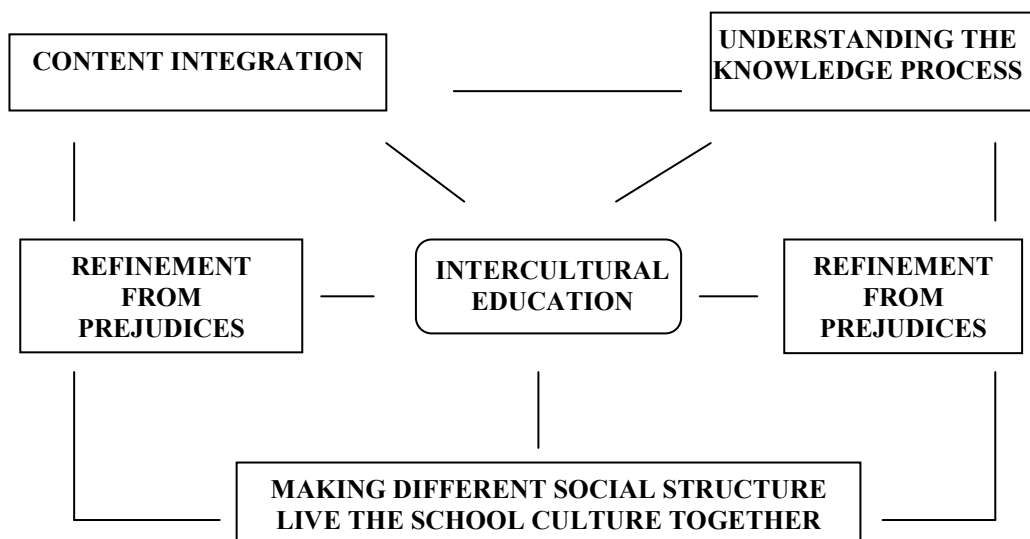
- Helping the children learn "all children of all cultures are valuable",
- Helping the children recognize the differences between societies and accept them,
- Helping the children value their own cultural characteristics and develop self-esteem,
- Helping the children understand that they are a small part of a much bigger world,

- Helping the children understand the common humanistic bonds in all cultures and contributing to the peace and harmony in the world (act. Carton and Allen 1993).

However, according to Banks, these matters should be taken into consideration in an effective intercultural program (Carton&Allen,1993, p.251):

- *Content integration*, creating a learning content which includes the examples of key concepts, principles, generalizations and theories about other disciplines and subjects of different cultures and groups,
- *Understand the structure of knowledge process*, helping the students understand the cultural impacts of different disciplines,
- *Equal Pedagogy*, adjusting the teaching style in accordance with the learning style of the students by the means of considering the differences arising from the cultural and socio-economic environments of the students,
- *Refinement from Prejudices*, with the thought that every group may have different individuals, evaluating every child separately, even if they are from the same cultural group, and recognizing their individual characteristics and organizing the learning environment properly,
- *Making different social structures live the school culture together*, under the guidance of a qualified teacher-student interaction in the school, organizing group and sport activities to make students different from cultural groups socialize and share the school culture.

Intercultural education forms according to the approach of Banks are seen in Figure 1:



**Figure 1. The content of intercultural education according to banks' approach**  
(Carton&Allen, 1993).

*Multicultural Education in Early Childhood Education*

Intercultural education in early childhood education should be a process of developing and materializing a multicultural viewpoint, rather than a different education program. In this period, bringing a multicultural viewpoint to the children makes him/her more sensitive towards other positive elements of his/her own culture along with others.

Gomez (1991) emphasizes that intercultural education in early childhood period must include the expectation from children to accord with behavior patterns of other cultures. Because children may identify the ones similar to them or the ones different from them sharply as “we and them”. Children need guidance to show empathy towards the ones who have different lifestyles from the ones they are accustomed to. The programs in preschool education institutions should also be oriented at introducing different cultures. But teachers must be good observers and make provisions for the children who do not take lessons from the examples given and who cannot fit into the group.

According to Faust (1987), the most important point of practicing the intercultural education program in the early childhood period correctly and effectively is to make a positive relationship between personnel and the parents. It is needed to work together for children to learn easily and permanently and to increase his/her development. Another important aspect of a good practice based on intercultural approach in early childhood education, is to secure the necessary materials for a holistic approach. The teacher must form a rich environment with carefully chosen objects and materials. These materials must be tools to make children reflect their creativities and teach them through games.

Another important point to emphasize on the intercultural approach in early childhood education is to teach the child that being different is not weird and strange but interesting and valuable. Children need to identify and evaluate intercultural similarities and differences. Not only the things which make ourselves different and distinguish us from others, but also the things which unify and make us a part of societies must be emphasized. For example, cooking various bread types from various cultural grounds and discussing their similarities as much as their differences can be an indicator of the value given to the differences.

Since the little children have the characteristic to think substantially, sometimes they can make wrong and negative generalizations when they compare the peculiarities of their cultures with others. Teachers can prevent these negative impressions by submitting different materials and activities to make the children compare different characteristics correctly. Big group activities in preschool education institutions where a whole group gets together is the best opportunity for this. In these big group activities, teachers can make children feel the group awareness and organize various activities to teach the children important characteristics of different cultures (Keim, Warring&Rau, 2001).

The learning plays an important role in intercultural approach in early childhood education. Teachers should make the children know different cultures in his/her class and give them a chance to understand that every culture may have similar and different features. Bringing the children with similar and different lifestyles together in common activities give them opportunity to gain positive self-conceptions. Child

games, especially drama, are important strategies for giving children different viewpoints towards different cultures and lifestyles. Developing the personal features of the children and making the others recognize the peculiar characteristics of every child are important strategies. Teachers should learn which cultural features the children possess in the beginning.

According to Catron and Allen (1993), providing an intercultural experience in accordance with the development of little children is only possible with teachers respecting the individual differences and being sensitive towards other cultures (Wollfolk, 1997, p.121).

### *Studies on Multicultural Education*

Since there are too many different cultures in our world, it is almost impossible to learn all cultures. But appropriate targets and common programs in the class can prevent differences between the children from different cultures. The important thing is that the preschool teachers and the parents to admit that it is necessary for all children to participate in this common program. Learning by comparing their own cultures with others makes the children better understand the both.

As is seen, the teacher is one of the most important elements in making the individuals gain intercultural viewpoints. That's why, the studies aimed especially at teachers to have this kind of universal viewpoint have started to accelerate in 2000's.

For example, Keim-Warring-Rau (2011) has made a study about "The Impacts of Multicultural Education on the Students of the Faculty of Education". In the study, a multiculturalism lesson has been given to the students of faculty of education, and the states of the students have been tested at the beginning and the end of academic terms. It is very important that the result of the study show that the skills, attitudes and knowledge of students about multiculturalism have increased. Because, the individuals, who will be teachers in the future, to have positive viewpoints about multiculturalism will have positive impacts on the children who will be raised by them to have these same viewpoints.

In a similar way, Paccione (2000), has also made a research on "Developing Dedication to the Multicultural Education". The aim of the research is to analyze the elements which make the faiths and dedication of the teachers towards multicultural education. According to the result of the research, it has been determined that there are 4 stages to develop the faith and dedication towards multicultural education:

1st Stage; Awareness Context: In this stage, especially the important impacts of early childhood period and the events occurring in this period are emphasized.

2nd Stage; Providing Awareness,

3rd Stage; Having a positive change in manners and views,

4th Stage; Defending the multicultural education and developing dedication.

As is seen, the studies about intercultural approach in education which aims to give universal values to the individuals, indicate that the foundations of this education should also be laid in early childhood education.

## CONSEQUENCES AND SUGGESTIONS

Everyone is a member of a cultural group different from another. These differences are determined by the elements such as geographical region, homeland, moral values, gender, social class and religion. For an individual to be a member of a certain group does not mean that all of his behaviors and values will be the same as other members. Every group has big diversities within itself. But in a general sense, it seems that the behaviors of members of a certain group have similar behaviors and values (Catron&Allen, 1993).

Our world is actually a multicultural environment and since the children live in this world, they need experiences to make them fit into this environment. If children live in small groups, they miss the features of bigger groups and have narrow viewpoints. Yet, knowing the lifestyles of different cultures gives children a humanistic sensibility and universal viewpoint.

Intercultural education in early childhood education should be a process of developing and materializing a multicultural viewpoint, rather than a different education program. The aim of multicultural education is not only to teach the different groups and countries, but also to show them that there may be different lifestyles, languages, cultures and viewpoints from the ones they are accustomed to.

The aim of multicultural education programs is to make every child build friendly bonds with different cultural groups in the feature by providing positive experiences to the individuals in multicultural environments and creating awareness that every child is a value, even if they are different.

Today, in the conditions of our world, we need to understand and accept that every person can have different characteristics even if this is not a problem, but richness. Nowadays, a need for intercultural education has emerged in a lot of metropolitan countries like United States and Canada and European Union Member Countries, and studies have begun. It seems inevitable for our country, which is in the process of entering the European Union, to deal with this subject in the near future.

Early childhood period is also important to develop positive behaviors towards different cultures since it is a period when the foundations of behaviors and manner are built. Basically, educators play an important role in securing a multicultural education concept by making the children know and understand different cultures. It is needed in our country to take note of studies on intercultural approach in early childhood education. The priority must be given to the education of teachers.



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## Erken Çocukluk Eđitiminde Kùltùrlerarası Yaklaşım

### Özet

**Problem Durumu:** Kùltür kavramı ile ilgili olarak uzun yıllardır araştırma yapılmaktadır. Kùltür kavramını tanımlamak da bu uzun çalışmalarına paralel olarak oldukça karmaşıklaşmaya başlamıştır. Çok kùltürlülük terimi yeni ancak kavram oldukça eskidir. Konu ile ilgilenen çeşitli uzmanların çok kùltürlülük kavramı ile ilgili olarak özellikle üzerinde durdukları bir nokta, farklı kùltürlerin bir arada yaşamalarının da yeni bir kùltür oluşturacağı olgusudur. Eđitimde çok kùltürlü yaklaşım da bu durumun bir yansıması olarak ortaya çıkmıştır ve globalleşen dünya çerçevesinde günümüzde öncelikle ele alınması gereken konulardan biri olmuştur.

Günümüzde birçok ÷lkede uzun yıllardır pek çok farklı kùltür aynı okul ve sınıf ortamlarında bir araya gelmeye başlamıştır. Bazı ÷lkelerde aynı sınıfta hem İtalyan, hem Hintli, hem İngiliz ailelerin çocuklarını bir arada görmek mümkündür. Bu durumda çocuklar çok farklı kùltürlerden gelseler bile ortak bir eğitim çizgisinde buluşturulmaya çalışılmaktadır.

Bir toplumda yaşayan tüm farklı kùltürlerin eğitim ihtiyaçlarının tam olarak karşılanacağı ve bu farklı grupların uyumlu bir biçimde bir arada yaşamayı öğrenmelerinin sağlanacağı bir eğitim anlayışını gerçekleştirebilmek gerekmektedir. Bu bakış açısı en erken yaşlarda okul öncesi eğitim döneminden itibaren kazandırılmalıdır. Bu konu günümüz eğitim dünyasının önemli ihtiyaçları arasındadır.

**Araştırmanın Amacı:** Bu çalışmanın amacı eğitimde kùltürler arası yaklaşım kavramının içeriğini, yöntemlerini ve gerekçelerini araştırarak ÷lkemizde yeni olan bu konuyu dünyadaki uygulamaları ile tanımaya çalışmaktır. ÷lkemizde henüz, değişik ÷lke kùltürlerinden gelen çocuklardan oluşan sınıf yapıları bulunmamakta daha çok aynı kùltür içindeki alt kùltürlerin bir arada olduğu eğitim ortamlarına rastlanmaktadır. Ancak Avrupa Birliği'ne aday bir ÷lke olarak yakın gelecekte bu tip bir durumla da karşılaşılması mümkün gör÷lmektedir. Bunun yanında çocuklarımız zaten řu ya da bu şekilde diđer kùltürler hakkında bilgi sahibi olmaktadır.

÷lkemizde bugün çocukların severek izlediđi çizgi filmlerin bile büyük bir çođunluđu diđer ÷lkelerde üretilmekte ve üretildiđi ÷lkenin kùltürüne has bazı öğeler taşımaktadır. Çok kùltürlük birçok farklı uzmanın üzerinde tartışabileceđi geniş açılımları olabilecek bir konudur ancak bu çalışmada erken çocukluk eğitime yansımaları açısından ele alınacaktır.

**Yöntem:** Araştırma tarama türünde yapılmış bir derleme çalışmasıdır. Çalışmada öncelikle, çok kùltürlülük ve çok kùltürlü eğitim kavramları farklı çalışmacıların bakış açıları ile tanımlanmaya çalışılmıştır. Daha sonra çok kùltürlü eğitimin amaçları ele alınmış, okul öncesi dönemde çok kùltürlü eğitim yaklaşımları incelenmiştir.

**Sonuç ve Öneriler:** Dünyamız da aslında çok kültürlü bir ortamdır ve çocuklar da bu dünyada yaşadıklarına göre bu ortama uyum sağlayabilecek deneyimlere ihtiyaçları bulunmaktadır. Eğer çocuklar yalnızca küçük gruplar içinde yaşarlarsa büyük grupların özelliklerini kaçıır ve dar bir bakış açısına sahip olurlar. Oysa farklı kültürlerin farklı yaşantılarını özelliklerini bilmek çocuğa insani duyarlılık ve evrensel bir bakış açısı kazandırır.

Kültürler arası eğitim, farklı bir eğitim programı olmaktan ziyade çok kültürlü bir bakış açısı geliştirici ve bu kavramı somutlaştırıcı bir süreç olmalıdır. Çok kültürlü eğitimin amacı yalnızca çocuklara farklı grupları ve ülkeleri öğretmek değildir. Aynı zamanda onlara kendilerinin alışkın olduğundan farklı yaşam tarzlarının, dillerin, kültürlerin ve farklı bakış açılarının olabileceğini göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Bugün dünyamızın içinde bulunduğu koşullarda, tüm insanların birbirlerinden farklı özellikte olabileceğini ama bunun bir sorun değil bir zenginlik olduğunu anlamaya ve kabul etmeye ihtiyacımız bulunmaktadır.

Erken çocukluk dönemi pek çok tutum ve davranışın ilk temellerinin atıldığı bir dönem olması bakımından farklı kültürlere olumlu tutum kazandırılması yönünden de oldukça önemlidir. Ülkemizde de erken çocukluk eğitimine kültürlere arası yaklaşım konusunda çalışmaların başlatılması önceliğin öğretmen eğitimine verilmesi gerekmektedir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Çok kültürlülük, kültürlerarası eğitim, erken çocukluk eğitimi, eğitim programları.

