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## **Multiculturalism: Is It There, Another Challenge or Chance?**

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### **Abstract**

*This study aims to find out academicians' attitudes who work at Aksaray University- Turkey towards multiculturalism in their classes. Their attitudes hold great importance in the adaptation of higher education to the globalization that brings many people from various cultural backgrounds together in a class. For this purpose, attitudes of 122 academicians who were selected by simple random sampling method from different faculties, vocational schools and departments have been researched via a five point scale translated into Turkish by Yazıcı (2009), namely "Teacher Multicultural Attitude Survey (TMAS)". Obtained data has been analyzed by using t-test and one tailed variance analysis in order to find out whether there is a meaningful difference between the descriptive statistics such as department, gender, experience, where most of their life has been spent etc.*

**Keywords:** *Multiculturalism, higher education, academicians' attitudes, cultural background, diversity in class.*

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**Introduction:** The World which used to consist hundreds of separate countries with strict borders stayed in the past, maybe because of either strict nationalism or lack of effective transportation or both. Today, countries form unions such as The European Union or remove the borders with each other and let "others" to come and live. Whatever the reason - sometimes education, sometimes work or sometimes wars- people need or choose to go and live in another country rather than the one they were born. When this happens, an important question arises: "How will those people be called?" Immigrant, foreigner, visitor, refugee and minority are only some of the names used for them. An inevitable fact is that nearly all nations need to do some preparations or take precautions for "others".

One of the most important things that "others" bring with them is the need for change in daily life appropriate to newcomers. However, this diversity in everyday situations desire special care as it is a knife edge point. If it is not controlled, such diversity may result in contradictions within the society. The scientists studying this topic have put the term "multiculturalism" to address this problem. In brief, the term intends to mean one's living convenient with his/her cultural features while getting respect for choices s/he does from others but showing the same respect to the others at the same time while choosing.

Rosado (1996) defines multiculturalism as a system of beliefs and behaviors that recognizes and respects the presence of all diverse groups in an organization or society, acknowledges and values their socio-cultural differences, and encourages and enables their continued contribution within an inclusive cultural context which empowers all within the organization or society (Rosado, 1996). As he gives this definition, he also gives seven important actions as an outcome of this framework of beliefs/behaviors:

- “Recognition” of the rich diversity in a given society or organization
- “Respecting” as a process whereby the Other is treated with deference, courtesy and compassion in an endeavor to safeguard integrity, dignity, value and social worth of the individual (treating the people in the way they want to be treated)
- “Acknowledging” the validity of the cultural expressions and contributions of the various groups
- “Encouraging” and “enabling” the contribution of the various groups to society or an organization
- “Celebrating” ,as the essence of multiculturalism, with the other in a manner that transcends all barriers and brings about a unity in diversity
- As the last and most important, “within an inclusive cultural context” because it is the point where most people get off and refuse to go along with an inclusive approach to society or to education with fear of invasion by “foreign” concepts and ideas

On the other hand, within the term multiculturalism, there exists not only immigrant integration but also national minorities, indigenous groups or life style groups (Joppke, 2004).

Rex and Singh (2003) explain that multiculturalism has been central to the political concerns of European countries since 1945, just after the World War II, in different circumstances. One of the issues it reflected concern was about immigration and the ways in which immigrants might settle in Western Europe in the 1950s and 1960s. Then, when the communism broke up in 1989, the term centered the question how devolution of power from central national governments to regionally based sub-national groups and the possibilities of power sharing at the center. The third was its having had to be dealing with growing numbers of political refugees and asylum seekers in Western Europe. Most recently, it has been concerned with the dangers posed by unassimilated immigrant groups after the terrorist attacks on the United States uprising American power in the world following that (Rex & Singh, 2003).

When we search for multiculturalism in education applications, citing from Yogevev (2001), Nirit informs that the focus on multiculturalism in education dates from the end of World War II too, and the real awakening took place during the 1960s, following meeting of Education Ministers and the establishment of the European Union. Two fundamental approaches can be discerned as having developed in Western societies: The pluralistic

approach requires granting an ethical multicultural education to all pupils. In contrast, the particularistic approach supports differential education for each of the social groups, emphasizing its specific culture and principles (Yogev, 2001; cited by Nirit, 2011). If it is needed to explain multicultural education, Abdullah (2009) says that it refers to the learning appropriate knowledge, attitudes and skills related to respect and appreciation of different cultures and other differences which include race, ethnicity, religion etc. (Abdullah, 2009).

In Turkey which has aimed to participate to the European Union and seems to be in the closest point to realize it since 1987, it is probable that mostly the academicians will be affected by complement of this process as they will have a chance to study in all European countries and have many foreign students. Taking a part in student and academician exchange program of the European Union –namely Erasmus- Turkish academicians visit other countries and lecture to foreign students, but are they really aware of the differences and difficulties that are the results of various cultures?

As appropriate to the aim of this research, when the applications on multiculturalism in higher education in Turkey are compared with those in the United States, it can be clearly seen that Turkey lacks a policy in that point. In the US, literature on multiculturalism within higher education indicates that multiculturalism is found, practiced and implemented through the curriculum either through required courses that meet what has been termed a diversity requirement (AAC&U, 1995a; AAC&U, 1995b; Levine & Cureton, 1992) or through departmental infusion of multiple perspectives into the curriculum (Levine & Cureton, 1992). While the departmental infusion is haphazard, the more common method of implementing multiculturalism into the curriculum has been through university-wide diversity requirements which expose students to experiences different from their own. These curricular experiences include courses on gender studies, ethnic studies, institutional or societal racism, religion, ethnicity, intolerance, and social class (Butler & Walter, 1991; Humphreys, 1997; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999; (Dwyer, 2006)). However, in Turkey neither of these two ways is used, and multiculturalism is surely an “absent” topic at universities.

***The Aim of the Study:*** As multiculturalism has become an important topic because of rising population transfer among the countries, every state should take required precautions and carry a step forward the regulations concerning it, especially in education, before it becomes a problem. In this sense, the biggest responsibility is hold by universities as they are inevitably and naturally the centers of multiculturalism, because even if all of their students come from the same country, they surely come from different regions, cities with different customs, beliefs etc. What is more, some universities in the US even have established special departments for multicultural education, e.g. New York University, University of Kansas, Iowa State University. If this is the case, the first thing to be done is to learn academicians’ attitudes towards multiculturalism. This study aims to find out academicians’ attitudes towards multiculturalism and examining them in the point of some variables.

***The importance of the Study:*** Multiculturalism is accepted as a crucial topic in education as education guarantees keeping diverse elements of a society together and multiculturalism aims the same by taking respect to and understanding “others” at the center. When Turkey reaches its aim to join the European Union, all educators especially academicians will need to work in a more multicultural environment. So, it is important to learn the attitudes of educators towards multiculturalism. When the literature is reviewed, it can be seen that the studies on this topic in Turkey are really limited and there is only one research done by Demir (2012) that has taken the same problem into its center. All these reasons make this research valuable for literature.

***The Problem Sentence:***

What are the academicians’ attitudes towards multiculturalism?

Are there any meaningful differences among those attitudes and personal variables?

***Sub-problems:***

1. Is there a meaningful difference between gender and academicians’ attitudes towards multiculturalism?
2. Is there a meaningful difference between experience (years of work) and academicians’ attitudes towards multiculturalism?
3. Is there a meaningful difference between academic unit and academicians’ attitudes towards multiculturalism?
4. Is there a meaningful difference between the place where most of the academicians’ life has passed and academicians’ attitudes towards multiculturalism?
5. Is there a meaningful difference between academicians’ titles (professor/assoc. prof./asst. prof., lecturer, instructor) and academicians’ attitudes towards multiculturalism?

***Limitations:*** The study is limited with academicians taking part in the research and the questions in the survey. The research is limited with Aksaray University.

***Method:*** This study employed descriptive survey model. Büyüköztürk (2012) defines the model as a survey study done by collecting data in order to find out particular features of a given group (Büyüköztürk, Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, & Demirel, 2012). In this study, it has been tried to find out attitudes of academicians working at Aksaray University to multiculturalism, and for this purpose “Teacher Multicultural Attitude Survey (TMAS)” which was translated into Turkish by Yazıcı (2009) was used.

***Universe and Sample:*** The universe of the study consists of 363 academicians who lecture in the classes –which keeps research assistants out of the research as they are neither supposed to lecture nor interact much with the students through the academic year- at Aksaray University. All of them were tried to be reached one by one, and 123 of 190 who were given the survey returned it. This way of sampling is called simple random sampling and Büyüköztürk and et al describe it as the method in which every sampling unit is given equal chance of being chosen (Büyüköztürk et al, 2012).The returned surveys count for

nearly 34 percent of the universe (33.8). Gender rates within the participants are: 47 female (%38.2) and 76 male (%61.8).

**Data Collection Tool:** In the process of data collection, a survey was used, namely “Teacher Multicultural Attitude Survey (TMAS)” which was developed by a group of researchers under the leadership of Ponterotto (1998) and was translated into Turkish and reliability and validity studies were done by Yazıcı (2009). The survey that has been developed on two main studies consists of 20 items, 13 of which is positive and the rest negative. While it shows a four-factor form, analyze results forced to single-factor verifies a single-factor general multiculturalism sensitivity and awareness model. Cronbach alpha value was found as .86 in the original study, and as .75 in adaptation study (Yazıcı, Başol, & Toprak, 2009).

The items within the five point likert scale have been ranked as “Completely Agree”, “Agree”, “Indecisive”, “Disagree” and “Completely Disagree”.

The survey consists of two parts. In the first part, there is a short description of multiculturalism and multicultural education and variables (academic unit, title, gender, working experience, the place (village, town, city or metropolitan) where the academician spent most of his/her life), habit of regular reading and subscribing to any academic publication). In the second part, as told before, there are 20 items, 7 of which are negative, that are thought to be descriptive of academicians’ attitudes towards multiculturalism.

**Analysis of the Data:** In the process of data analysis, the items within the survey have been have been interpreted according to following ranges: 4,20-5,00 “Completely Agree”, 3,40-4,19 “Agree”, 2,60-3,39 “Indecisive”, 1,80-2,59 “Disagree”, 1,00-1,79 “Completely Disagree”. Mean, frequencies, percentage, one way variance analysis and t-test have been used in data analysis.

**Findings and Comments:** The findings of the research and the tables showing the results have been ordered according to sub-problems. What are the attitudes of academicians to multiculturalism?

The means and the frequencies of the data gained from 123 surveys fulfilled without errors have been shown in table 1.

**Table-1** *Frequencies and Means of the Items*

Items		1	2	3	4	5	X	Result
1. I find it important to teach culturally different student groups.	F	1	5	17	48	52	4,17	Agree
	%	8	4,1	13,8	39,0	42,3		
2. Teaching methods should be organized appropriate to needs of student groups with cultural differences.	F	-	12	19	47	44	3,97	Agree
	%	-	9,8	15,4	38,2	35,8		

3. Sometimes, I think there is much stress on educators' conscious and training on multiculturalism.	F	6	18	47	29	22	3,32	Indecisive
	%	4,9	14,6	38,2	23,6	17,9		
4. The educators have the responsibility of being aware of their students' cultural backgrounds.	F	8	16	27	35	37	3,62	Agree
	%	6,5	13,0	22,0	28,5	30,1		
5. I often meet with their families to learn more about my students' culture.	F	24	35	16	22	24	2,84	Indecisive
	%	19,5	28,5	13,0	17,9	19,5		
6. It is not a part of educators' responsibilities to promote a person to be proud of what s/he has done in his/her own cultural belief.	F	5	13	31	38	36	3,70	Agree
	%	4,1	10,6	25,2	30,9	29,3		
7. The more cultural diversity within a class, the more difficult becomes an educators' job.	F	5	15	15	54	33	3,74	Agree
	%	4,1	12,2	12,2	43,9	26,8		
8. I believe that the educator's role should be redefined in order him/her to address culturally different students' needs.	F	5	21	30	44	23	3,47	Agree
	%	4,1	17,1	24,4	35,8	18,7		
9. Communication styles are often interpreted as behavior problems while caring with students with two languages (with a different mother tongue).	F	4	19	38	35	27	3,50	Agree
	%	3,3	15,4	30,9	28,5	22,5		
10. The more culturally diverse becomes the class; the more precious becomes the educators' job.	F	5	13	21	41	43	3,84	Agree
	%	4,1	10,6	17,1	33,3	35,0		
11. I can learn much from students that are culturally different.	F	2	6	18	53	44	4,06	Agree
	%	1,6	4,9	14,6	43,1	35,8		
12. It is not necessary for educators to be trained for multicultural education.	F	10	30	27	27	29	3,28	Indecisive
	%	8,1	24,4	22,0	22,0	23,6		

13. S/he needs to be aware of existing cultural differences in the class to be an effective educator.	F	2	10	13	55	42	3,99	Agree
	%	1,6	8,1	10,6	44,7	34,1		
14. The training on multiculturalism awareness can help me to work more effectively with a culturally different student group.	F	1	13	19	52	38	3,91	Agree
	%	,8	10,6	15,4	42,3	30,9		
15. The students should learn to communicate only in Turkish.	F	9	31	16	27	40	3,47	Agree
	%	7,3	25,2	13,0	22,0	32,5		
16. Current curriculum gives too much importance to multiculturalism and diversity.	F	9	34	32	22	26	3,17	Indecisive
	%	7,3	27,6	26,0	17,9	21,1		
17. I am aware of cultural background diversity in my class.	F	-	13	22	53	34	3,85	Agree
	%	-	10,6	17,9	43,1	27,6		
18. It is important that Students be aware of cultural diversity, no matter what my class' structure is.	F	4	12	22	54	30	3,73	Agree
	%	3,3	9,8	17,9	43,9	24,4		
19. Being aware of multiculturalism is not related to what I teach.	F	5	22	15	37	44	3,75	Agree
	%	4,1	17,9	12,2	30,1	35,8		
20. Teaching multiculturalism to students only cause conflicts within the class.	F	23	33	28	16	23	2,86	Indecisive
	%	18,7	26,8	22,8	13,0	18,7		

(5: Completely Agree. 4: Agree. 3: Indecisive. 2: Disagree. 1: Completely Disagree)

As can be seen from the table, the academicians participating this research generally have positive attitudes towards multiculturalism with fifteen "Agree" and five "Indecisive" results. Especially the two items with the highest means, number 1 with a mean of 4.17 which tries to find out academicians willingness on lecturing to student groups that are culturally different and number 11 with a mean of 4,06 that tries to find out their ideas if they can learn much from those students having different cultural backgrounds, show that the participants really appreciate cultural diversity. On the other hand, the item with the lowest mean, number 5 that asks if the academicians meet with students' families in order to know their cultures better, can be explained as the lecturers do not need such meetings to see students' cultural features as their students are old enough to live in the way they culturally choose and generally their families are away. The second item with the lowest

mean, number 20 that tells teaching cultural differences to the students only causes trouble within the class, also supports the idea that the participants generally positive in teaching cultural differences.

*Is there a meaningful difference between gender and academicians' attitudes towards multiculturalism?*

In Table-2, the data analysis results showing if there is a meaningful difference between gender and academicians' attitudes towards multiculturalism have been given. When the table is examined, it can be seen that mean of female academicians is 63.35, and the mean of male academicians is 66.74.

**Table-2** *T-test for Gender*

Gender	N	X	S.D.	T	p
Female	47	63.35	14.77		.19*
Male	76	66.74	13.76		

\*p>0.05

In order to determine if there is a meaningful difference between means and gender, t test was applied and the data analysis result shows that gender has not caused a meaningful difference in attitudes towards multiculturalism (p>0.05).

*Is there a meaningful difference between experience (years of work) and academicians' attitudes towards multiculturalism?*

In Table-3, the results belonging to one way variance analysis done in order to find out if there is a meaningful difference between experience (years of work) and attitudes towards multiculturalism have been given.

**Table-3** *One way variance analysis results for experience (years of work) and attitudes to multiculturalism*

Experience	N	X	S.D.	F	p
1-5 Years	53	65.09	13.47	1.194	.30*
6-10 Years	18	61.31	12.75		
More than 10 Years	52	67.23	15.27		

\*p>0.05

According to one way variance data analysis results done in order to find if there is a meaningful difference between experience and attitudes towards multiculturalism, there is not a meaningful difference between the two (p>0.05).

*Is there a meaningful difference between academic unit and academicians' attitudes towards multiculturalism?*



In Table-4, the results from one way variance analysis done in order to find if there is a meaningful difference between the academic unit (faculties, colleges, vocational schools) and academicians' attitudes towards multiculturalism have been given.

**Table-4** One way variance analysis results done for academic unit

Unit	N	X	S.D.	F	P
Faculty of Education	4	58.12	16.40	.970	.439*
Faculty of Science and Literature	18	65.48	13.73		
Faculty of Business Administration And Economics	31	63.70	12.18		
Faculty of Engineering	23	70.00	15.96		
Department of Foreign Languages	5	59.25	11.20		
Colleges/Vocational Schools	42	65.65	14.84		

\* $p > 0.05$

When the results are examined, one can see that there is not a meaningful difference between the academic unit and attitudes towards multiculturalism.

*Is there a meaningful difference between the place where most of the academicians' life has passed and academicians' attitudes towards multiculturalism?*

In Table-5, the results from one way variance analysis done in order to find if there is a meaningful difference between the place where most of the academicians' life has passed and academicians' attitudes towards multiculturalism have been given. The options for this variable are village, town, city and metropolitan. The first two evoke a homogenous environment with less cultural diversity within the environment while the last two recall more heterogeneous environment with many various cultures. What had been expected to find out by this variable was to see that those spent much time in heterogeneous places would be much aware of multiculturalism.

**Table-5** One way variance analysis results for the place where most of the academicians' life has passed

Place	N	X	S.D.	F	P
Village	2	61.87	4.41	.163	.921*
Town	5	69.25	16.90		
City	70	65.44	13.77		
Metropolitan	46	65.19	15.61		

\* $p > 0.05$

The data analysis results on Table-5 show that there is not a meaningful difference between the place where most of the academicians' life has passed and their attitudes towards multiculturalism ( $p > 0.05$ ).

*Is there a meaningful difference between academicians' titles (professor/assoc. prof. /asst. prof., lecturer, instructor) and academicians' attitudes towards multiculturalism?*

In Table-6, the results from one way variance analysis done in order to find if there is a meaningful difference between academicians' titles and their attitudes towards multiculturalism have been given.

**Table-6** *One way variance analysis results for academic titles and attitudes towards multiculturalism*

Titles	N	X	S.D.	F	P
Professor/Assoc. Prof./Asst. Prof.	57	66.25	14.26	.971	.382*
Lecturer	51	63.55	13.52		
Instructor	15	68.83	16.15		

\* $p > 0.05$

When the table is examined, it can be seen that there is not meaningful difference between academic titles and attitudes towards multiculturalism ( $p > 0.05$ ).

**Discussion:** This research was done in order to find out academicians attitudes towards multiculturalism at Aksaray University by attendance of 123 academicians. The results are indeed as expected in the beginning of the study. According to the findings of this research, academicians are generally positive against multiculturalism and Demir also found that academicians at Erciyes University give much importance to multicultural education (Demir, 2012). In order to understand how an important topic it has become in education, one can just make a search on teacher or pre-service teacher perceptions on multiculturalism and find many studies. Yazıcı (2009) also found that teachers have a positive attitude towards multiculturalism (Yazıcı, Başol, & Toprak, 2009). In the research by Anıl and Yavuz (2010) done in order to find out pre-service teachers' attitudes towards multiculturalism, results also show that they are positive (Anıl & Yavuz, 2010). Fry (2000) who studied the perceptions of multiculturalism of pre-service social studies teachers in Kansas found that they felt it was important to include many multicultural concepts in their classes although they didn't fully understand many multicultural concepts and aims of multicultural education (Fry, 2000). Concerning the question whether a course on multiculturalism affects pre-service teachers' attitudes towards it, Olson (2001) found that a multiculturalism course had a positive effect on pre-service teachers' attitudes and participants planned to address multicultural issues in their classes (Olson, 2001). The research by Mysore, Lincoln and Wavering (2006) also questioned the same effect of a multicultural awareness course and found that pre-service teachers entering the program appeared to be culturally responsive (Mysore, Lincoln, & Wavering, 2006). One more research that shows such training programs for pre-service teachers has a positive effect on developing positive beliefs to multiculturalism was done by Gao and Mager; they found that attendants showed a positive attitude towards not only diversity of students but also students with social and behavioral disabilities (Gao & Mager, 2011). In their study, Kang and Hyatt,

similar to Gao and Mager, found that pre-service teachers should be trained for multiculturalism not only from the most common term that comes to mind with it such as racial/ethnic diversity or gender equity but also linguistic diversity, gay/lesbian parenting, religion and people with disabilities (Wallace, 2000; cited by (Kang & Hyatt, 2010). Polat (2012) found that school directors also have a positive attitude towards multiculturalism (Polat, 2012).a similar study on principals perceptions of multiculturalism by McCray, Alston and Beachum found a correlation between lower socio-economic status of the community and lower the educational attainment of the principal, and this results as principals with lower educational attainment might be less aware of the benefits of a school climate that promotes diversity; thus not being willing to make any changes against the status quo (McCray, Alston, & Beachum, 2006). Since this is a new topic to be researched in Turkey, there are not many studies concerning multiculturalism. However, it has become a topic in trend nowadays and studies on it are rising day by day. When the foreign literature is reviewed, in her study, Waight (2008) found that teachers she questioned for their opinions about difficulties of teaching their students about multicultural issues were volunteered to talk about it (Waight, 2008). Sharma (2005) made a research and found out that pre-service teachers had serious concerns about the need for training and experience in multicultural education for teachers in culturally diverse classrooms (Sharma, 2005).

***Suggestions for Further Studies:*** The suggestions that can be done to those who want to study further this topic are: What are the attitudes of university students towards multiculturalism and multicultural education? What are the expectations of both academicians and students from each other concerning multiculturalism? Would there be a difference with the results if this study were carried out at a bigger university with more foreign students?

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