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ATTITUDES OF BULGARIAN TEACHERS TO MULTILINGUALISM DEPENDING ON THE LEVEL OF EDUCATION

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Summary:-

The article presents the survey results about the attitudes of Bulgarian teachers to multilingualism. The sample covers 249 teachers from schools with a concentration of pupils from socially disadvantaged Roma families. Responses are analyzed using percentage frequencies and a multilevel General linear model. Expectations of differences in the attitudes of teachers with different degrees of education - namely, bachelor's and master's degree - were not justified.

Abstract:-

This study examines the attitudes of Bulgarian teachers toward multilingualism across different educational levels. In response to growing linguistic diversity and European educational policies promoting multilingual competence, the research analyzes how teachers at preschool, primary, secondary, and higher education levels perceive multilingual education. Data were collected through a structured survey and follow-up interviews. The results indicate generally positive attitudes toward multilingualism, particularly regarding its cognitive, cultural, and socio-economic benefits. However, differences were observed across educational levels. Teachers in early education show stronger support for early language exposure and intercultural development, while those in secondary and higher education emphasize academic performance and global competitiveness. Despite overall support, respondents report challenges such as limited training, insufficient resources, and lack of institutional guidance. The findings suggest that targeted professional development and structured policy support are necessary to strengthen multilingual education practices in Bulgaria.

Key words:- *Multilingualism, teaching, attitude*

1. INTRODUCTION

Pedagogical education in Bulgaria has a long tradition. The first pedagogical course was opened in Shumen, in 1879. In 1919, it was transformed into a Pedagogical Institute for Presecondary Teachers. Our most prestigious university - the Sofia University - also started to function as a higher pedagogical course in 1888. Since then, pedagogical education in Bulgaria has gone through various stages in its development - some of them more successful; others - unsuccessful.

At the present stage, two levels of pedagogical education - bachelor's and master's degree - are regulated. Unfortunately, not all higher schools publish the curricula of their pedagogical specialties. From the information available, it can be said that for the specialties of primary education pedagogy the relative share of the compulsory subjects is 80.77%; of the elective subjects - 9.62% and of the faculty subjects - 9.62%; the practical training accounts for 23.17% of the course hours. In the fields of study related to pre-secondary and secondary education, the distribution of the course hours is approximately the following: 85, 33% for compulsory subjects; 12% for elective subjects; 2.66% for faculty subjects. 9.86% of all hours for the entire course of education (2535) are devoted to practical training. According to the state standards for the acquisition of teacher qualification, adopted in 2016, the compulsory psychological and pedagogical training covers the following training courses: pedagogy (60 hours); psychology (60); methods of teaching ... (90), inclusive education (15), information and communication technologies in education and work in a digital environment (30). Practical training takes place in three ways: teacher training (30 hours); current pedagogical practice (60), internship practice (90). The content of the training courses and the criteria for assessing achievements in the practical training process vary. Each university implements its own education policy.

Master's programs build on the students' scientific and research knowledge and skills. Training courses usually profile their training. They are mostly related to the teaching methods, the diagnosis of learning achievements and the conduct of research within the curricular and extracurricular institutions. The National Agency for Assessment and Accreditation monitors the quality of education at the faculties of pedagogy at universities. The specific content of the courses is determined individually by the lecturer. This leads to extremely varied approaches in the training of students in pedagogical specialties. However, in parallel to this, the quality of vocational training varies greatly depending on the academic competence of the habilitated lecturer. The inclusion of the "inclusive education" course is a relatively new element in the pedagogical education in Bulgaria. Many teachers who already work in a specific ethnic environment have passed a course of further qualification on the issues of multicultural education. Therefore, it would be interesting to trace the existing attitudes of teachers who work with students most often coming from socially disadvantaged families.

2. Purpose and method of study

The purpose of the study is to determine the attitudes of the sample of the currently working 249 teachers. 68.7% (171) of them have a bachelor's degree (2 - red); 28,5% (71) with a master's degree (3 - green) and only 2,8% (7) with vocational education (4 - blue). Graphically the sample looks like this: LED_31

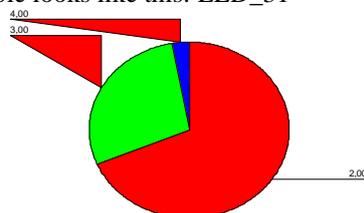


Fig. 1: Structure of the sample surveyed

All participants work in classes in which the Roma ethnicity is represented. Representation ranges from 25% to 100% of socially disadvantaged bilingual students. The study is part of an international comparative study conducted under COST Action IS1401 "Strengthening Europeans' Capabilities by Establishing the European Literacy Network", led by Prof. Rui Alves of the University of Porto, Portugal.

The questionnaire used in the study was developed by Charles Mifsud, Julie Dockrell and Rositsa Petrova. The article will only analyze fifteen items that should be evaluated under a six-tier scale: 1 - Strongly disagree; 2 - Disagree; 3 - Somewhat disagree; 4 - Somewhat agree; 5 - Agree; 6 - Strongly agree. Four of the questions direct the attention of those surveyed to how many languages students should learn - just one, two or more. Multilingualism is linked to the processes of convergence between European countries. Three of the questions concern the benefits of multilingualism, namely: it promotes understanding among people in the global world, facilitates the use of the media, and therefore teachers have to stimulate students to better understand the links between languages. The next five questions concern the social and cognitive aspects of multilingual learning. Teachers should understand the social situation of migrant children and monitor how they learn the new languages and the different subjects. Further, information is sought about the teachers' attitudes about whether multilingual learning is an advantage or a disadvantage in the learning process. Teachers are also required to share if they have difficulties in teaching bilingual students, which teaching practices contribute most to the learning of more than one language. The calculations are made with SPSS for Windows. Statistical analyzes are aimed at verifying the null hypothesis: the degree of education does not affect the attitudes of teachers to multilingualism.

3. Results

Table 1 shows the relative frequencies of the responses given by 249 teachers. For various reasons, of the total 255 participants the results of 6 were removed. *Cronbach's Alpha* for the fifteen-item scale for the sample is, 8717, which proves its high reliability. Removing one of the items would increase the credibility. If there is no statement that "Being multilingual is a disadvantage for relationships with peers", Cronbach's Alpha will reach, 8815. In this case, however, the

authors have determined that it is more important to establish in a comparative manner how respondents assess multilingualism - once as an advantage for learning at school, then as a disadvantage for relationships with peers. 54.6% of teachers are frankly positive that only one language should be taught in school. Significantly less are the hesitant - only 8.4%. 20.9% of them are negative. Graphically, this percentage distribution looks like this: ON_77

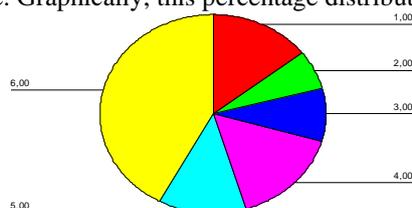


Fig. 2 Percentage distribution of attitudes of teachers on the statement “Schools should teach in only one language”

Similarly, the percentage distributions for the following statements look like this:

- Students should be encouraged to learn different languages - 75.5% with a positive attitude;
- Every European citizen must be fluent in at least two languages in addition to the first - 49.4%;
- Proficiency in mastering foreign languages is important to face global challenges – 62,2%;
- Teachers should have an understanding of the social circumstances of the children in their class – 59%;
- It is often said that the more languages one knows, the easier it is to learn new languages - 57%;
- The teaching of multilingual children is more challenging than teaching children who are monolingual – 47,8%.

On the other pole - the negative - the answers are focused on the statement that two or more languages should be taught in school (51.4%). Teachers also disagree with the statement that multilingualism is a barrier to relationships with peers (39.4%). Relatively high is the percentage of the fluctuating in the assessment of the role of the media as an intermediary in the inter-ethnic dialogue - 45.8%. Similar is the opinion of teachers on the possibility of personal contribution in promoting the understanding among students of different ethnic groups using the diversity of languages - 40.5%. They are not convinced yet whether bilingual education - target and mother tongue - will lead to some difficulties (49.8%). There are also fluctuations in the extent to which multilingualism is an advantage (47.4%).

For two of the statements, teachers are not united in their judgment: if 8.8% disagree strongly that children who know several languages will have better results in learning, 25.3% rather agree, 19.3% - agree and 16.5% agree completely. Assessments of the influence of the linguistic knowledge of migrant children on the use of the new language are similarly distributed: 10.4% totally disagree, and 25.7% somewhat agree. They are positively supported by 22.9% of teachers who agree and 14.9% who fully agree.

Table № 1: Frequency distributions of teacher responses in percentages (n= 249)

Items	Frequ ency in % 1	Frequ ency in % 2	Frequ ency in % 3	Frequ ency in % 4	Frequ ency in % 5	Frequ ency in % 6
Schools should teach in only one language	14,5	6,4	8,4	16,1	12,4	42,2
Schools should teach in two or more languages	34,9	16,5	12	14,5	11,6	10,4
Children should be encouraged to learn different languages	6,8	3,6	6	8	28,1	47,4
Every European citizen should master at least two other languages in addition to their first language	8	7,2	11,2	24,1	26,1	23,3
Proficiency in mastering foreign languages is important to face global challenges	6,8	5,6	7,6	17,7	27,3	34,9
Multilingual media can support mutual understanding	10,4	8,8	17,3	28,5	20,5	14,5
Teachers should emphasise the positive relationship between Languages	9,2	7,6	12	28,5	24,1	18,5
Teachers should have an understanding of the social circumstances of the children in their class	6,8	4,8	8,4	20,9	26,1	32,9
It is often said that the more languages one knows, the easier it is to learn new languages	9,6	3,6	9,2	20,5	29,3	27,7
Children who know several languages will achieve better results across disciplines	8,8	11,2	18,9	25,3	19,3	16,5
The migrant children’s previous language knowledge is important when learning a language	10,4	9,6	16,5	25,7	22,9	14,9
Teaching children in both the target language and their first language will result in language confusion	14,9	9,6	21,7	28,1	14,1	11,6
Being multilingual is an advantage for learning at school	11,6	13,3	19,3	28,1	17,7	10
Being multilingual is a disadvantage for relationships with peers	18,1	21,3	20,9	21,3	8,8	9,6
The teaching of multilingual children is more challenging than teaching children who are monolingual	11,2	10,4	11,6	18,9	21,3	26,5

The percentages presented above do not respond to the hypothesis already mentioned. In order to determine whether the degree of education influences the attitudes of teachers to multilingualism, the General linear model (multivariate) was used. For the purpose of statistical analysis, teachers who do not have bachelors or master's degrees were removed. Table 2 will show the F-test values and its significance at a significance level of 0.05.

Table 2: Results of the comparison of the attitudes of teachers with bachelor's and master's degrees through GLM (n = 242)

Item	F-test	p-value
Schools should teach in only one language	,001	,978
Schools should teach in two or more languages	,297	,586
Children should be encouraged to learn different languages	2,131	,146
Every European citizen should master at least two other languages in addition to their first language	4,332	,038
Proficiency in mastering foreign languages is important to face global challenges	2,051	,153
Multilingual media can support mutual understanding	2,468	,118
Teachers should emphasise the positive relationship between Languages	2,765	,098
Teachers should have an understanding of the social circumstances of the children in their class	1,789	,182
It is often said that the more languages one knows, the easier it is to learn new languages	2,832	,094
Children who know several languages will achieve better results across disciplines	,283	,595
The migrant children's previous language knowledge is important when learning a language	,106	,745
Teaching children in both the target language and their first language will result in language confusion	1,055	,305
Being multilingual is an advantage for learning at school	2,686	,103
Being multilingual is a disadvantage for relationships with peers	6,268	,013
The teaching of multilingual children is more challenging than teaching children who are monolingual	,973	,325

(Significance level $\alpha = 0, 05$)

The data in Table 2 at critical value is $F_{(14,\infty)} = 1,69$ the null hypothesis is rejected for the following items: children should be encouraged to learn different languages; Every European citizen should master at least two other languages in addition to their first language; Proficiency in mastering foreign languages is important to face global challenges; Multilingual media can support mutual understanding; Teachers should emphasize the positive relationship between languages; It is often said that the more languages one knows, the easier it is to learn new languages; Being multilingual is an advantage for learning at school; Being multilingual is a disadvantage for relationships with peers. However, the **p** values for most of the listed items exceed 0.05, meaning that the difference is not statistically significant. The assessments of the role of the European citizenship can be considered as a factor raising the interest in foreign languages – **p** value is about 0, 04. For understanding multilingualism as an advantage and at the same time as a disadvantage the F-test exceeds the limit value and the significance in the first case approaches 0.1 and in the second it remains below 0.05. For the rest of the items, the values of the F-test confirm the null hypothesis.

4. Discussion and perspectives

The presented results clearly show the general trend in teachers' judgment about the role and place of multilingualism in the Bulgarian educational system. The degree of higher education – bachelors or master's degree, has no influence on their understanding of the necessity of teaching one language - the target, in the multicultural classroom. The role of foreign languages in the integration of adolescents into life within the European Union and in the globalizing world is recognized. The positive attitude towards the influence of the social conditions on the learning of several languages at the same time reveals the personal attitude of the respondent teachers towards their students. At the same time, broader knowledge of language as a communicative tool according to teachers will expand students' ability to make quicker progress in the learning of subjects and of the target language. However, they also notice a negative trend - language can cause difficulties in relationships with peers, and in some extreme cases even to the isolation of individual students. Finally, some conclusions could be drawn about the need for a change in the learning process in ethnically mixed classes. Through teaching, conflicts between ethnicities can be avoided, as the use of the target language is linked to the available knowledge of the mother tongue. Targeting training to formation of communicative competence that covers not only reading and writing but also taking into account the personal and social attitudes of minority students would contribute to their faster progress and flexibility in integrating into other communities.

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