The Identity and identity: The extant of national and regional identity on Albanian students

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This study explores how the perceived cultural identity as a social and individual concept impacts the effectiveness of communication among Albanian students in Albania, Kosova, and the FRY of Macedonia. The new democracies in South East Europe and European Union integration aspiration have raised the sensitivity toward culture and identity in every aspect of social life. This new process of building, rebuilding, changing, and shaping new democratic institutions requires at the same time new ways to communicate and negotiate. What before democracy was silenced, and implicit, now it has come into the open for evaluation and discussion. Now, as the identities are not as set and rigid as they used to be, the identity negotiation becomes a thrilling environment to be examined. The recent past of totalities and control raises the attention towards how one positions itself in the intercultural relations.

Kim (1999, 2006) utilizes four interconnected positions with respect to culture and intercultural relations: assimilationism, pluralism, integrationism, and separatism. These are four ideological positions which use ideology is employed to mean Billig’s (1991) “lived ideology,” that is largely shared by people within a society as “a society’s way of life” (pp. 27–29). The results reveal five different basic themes of cultural identity: (a) an adaptive and evolving entity of an individual; (b) a flexible and negotiable entity of an individual; (c) a discrete social category and an individual choice; (d) a distinct and communal system of communicative practices; and (e) a discrete social category and a non-negotiable group right (Kim, 2007).

Also, cultural contracts theory explains how individuals negotiate their identities and worldviews when interacting with others (Jackson & Crawley, 2003). This theory provides framework of understanding the “cultural contract” between South East European countries and cultural groups as they reestablish their position in the present. Cultural contracts theory is based on the idea “that intercultural relationships may or may not be coordinated, depending upon the dynamics involved, such as power, boundaries, cultural loyalty, group identification, and maturity” (Jackson, 2002a). In addition, Bennett’s (1993b) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity provides a constructivist view and sees experience of cultural difference as a process in six orientations: Denial, Defense (Reversal), Minimization, Acceptance, Adaptation, Integration. As such, Bennett’s model works better when intercultural interactions encounters are continuous.
The intercultural communication competence is conceptualized as the ability to achieve the communication goal while appropriately and effectively negotiating varied cultural identities. The competence comprises three dimensions, the cognitive, the emotional, and the behavioral. Intercultural Communication awareness is the ability to understand cultural similarities and differences. Intercultural communication sensitivity is the emotional desire to acknowledge, appreciate, and accept cultural differences (Chen and Starosta, 1997). The intercultural communication effectiveness is the third dimension of this concept, and it refers to the verbal and nonverbal ability to attain communication goals in intercultural interactions (Portalla and Chen, 2010).

This study focuses on the last two dimensions of the intercultural competence, intercultural sensitivity and effectiveness. These are the two main questions attempted to be answered: 1) What is the extent of intercultural sensitivity of Albanian students towards non-Albanian cultures? Chen and Starosta’s 24-item Intercultural Sensitivity Scale is adapted as the instrument to measure the intercultural sensitivity, comprising five dimensions. 2) What is the extent of local and regional identity on students’ communication effectiveness? Portalla and Chen’s 20-item Intercultural Effectiveness scale is adapted to measure the intercultural effectiveness among Albanian regions.

The quantitative method is in progress in the effort to prove the thesis that the intercultural sensitivity is high among students, and that ‘regional’ identity has an impact on communication effectiveness among Albanian students. The sample is comprised of 460 university students in Tirana (Albania), Prishtina (Kosova), and Tetova (Macedonia). The participants’ age range is from 18 to 27. The original scale item are translated from English to Albanian, and back translated for accuracy. The survey is self-administered in five different universities. The confirmatory factor analyses are conducted for possible culture-specific effect of the instrument use in a different cultural context. The exploratory analyses are being performed for final results.
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