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Examination of primary school teachers' attitudes and views towards multicultural education

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Just like in many countries around the world, there is a multicultural society in Northern Cyprus. As migrations to the island continue to increase, the phenomenon of multiculturalism has begun to be discussed in the education system. This research was conducted with the aim of determining the attitudes and views of primary school teachers in Northern Cyprus towards multicultural education. Mixed methods strategy was used in this research. In the research, the concurrent triangulation strategy from mixed methods strategies was used. Data collection tools the Teacher Multicultural Education Attitude Scale and developed interview form were used. In the quantitative part of the research, the Teacher Multiculturalism Attitude Scale was applied to 111 randomly selected teachers. According to the survey results, no significant difference was detected depending on the variables of gender, nationality, professional seniority, branch, graduation degree and graduated school. However, significant differences were identified in the multiculturalism scores age and based on the region where the teachers were employed. In the qualitative part of the research, interviews were conducted with 12 participant teachers. According to the qualitative findings, teachers perceived multiculturalism as diversity in terms of nationality, ethnic background, language, and religion. Further, teachers indicated that education in Northern Cyprus does not cater to a multicultural structure, leading to various problems experienced by students and parents, primarily related to communication. The teachers attributed this situation to the unpreparedness of the Ministry of Education (MEB) and the reluctance to change education policies due to an exclusive society. Subsequently, teachers expressed that they did not consider themselves competent in multicultural education and expressed a willingness to participate in in-service training programs if provided.

KEYWORDS

multiculturalism, multicultural education, attitudes towards multicultural education, primary education, mixed method

1 Introduction

The education system has the task of transmitting culture. Through informal and formal education, each society passes on its culture to new generations. Culture is related to education in terms of being learned and transmitted, but it is also an element that directs education because it contains all the elements of social life. Culture refers to “values and behaviors learned and socially transmitted through the process of acculturation (Schaefer, 2010),” while education is defined as “the process of intentional acculturation (Erturk, 1972, p. 9).” In today's

world, it is difficult to find societies consisting of monocultures. Every society harbor more than one culture. Moreover, societies are experiencing a rapid social change. Social change is also a concept which affects culture. Satellite technology plays a key role in this social change. On the other hand, problems around the world also bring migration. People migrate to other countries due to poor living conditions in the countries they migrate from. As a result, the cultures of societies are changing from monocultural to multicultural. Throughout the world, there are hardly any societies that are pure and do not contain individuals from other cultures. This phenomenon has given birth to the concept of multiculturalism.

Ramsey (2018) uses the concept of multiculturalism in a broad sense, emphasizing the relationships between race, economic class, consumerism, culture, language, gender, sexual identities and orientations, competencies and disabilities, and the natural world. The task of education in transmitting culture requires a new structuring with the concept of multiculturalism. Gay (2014) emphasizes that cultural diversity is a powerful and important factor affecting the educational process. He states that evaluating the relationship between culture and education in this context can solve many problems experienced in schools (Gay, 2014). Teaching and learning should be based on differences and culture, which are essential parts of human beings (Gay, 2013). The concept of multiculturalism draws attention to diversity and harmony. It is emphasized that different cultural values in a society should live in harmony in the same society. In order for communities with different cultural values to live harmoniously together, the values to be transmitted to individuals through education should be appropriate for a multicultural lifestyle. Moreover, respect for the cultural patterns of others should be the basis. For this reason, the world has already started to create multicultural education systems. Banks and Banks (2013, p. 1) defines multicultural education as ensuring that all students have equal opportunities to learn at school, regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, social class and ethnic, racial or cultural characteristics. Another important idea in multicultural education is that some students, because of these characteristics, have a better chance to learn in schools as they are currently structured than do students who belong to other groups or who have different cultural characteristics (Banks and Banks, 2013).

Due to migrations that societies experience, cultural diversity is rapidly increasing. Cultural diversity leads societies to transform into multicultural dynamics. This situation also affects the requirements of traditional monocultural societies. Particularly, it compels the educational institution, which imparts the desired behaviors of the society, to undergo fundamental changes. This problem can only be addressed through the transition to multicultural education, which accepts and implements cultural diversity. Therefore, countries should reform multicultural education to respect differences and create equal educational opportunities for all. The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) has a multicultural structure. There are students from 45 different countries in the state's public schools (Turkish Cypriot Teachers' Union, 2022). Therefore, in public schools, cultural diversity should be taken into account at all levels of the education system in order to respond to the needs of students and to ensure cultural balance within the differentiated social structure.

Primary school teachers hold a significant place in the personality development of students (Uluğ et al., 2011). The

attitudes and behaviors of teachers, who serve as constant role models for students, have a powerful impact on them. Students perceive their teachers as role models and tend to imitate their behaviors. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to have positive attitudes towards multicultural education. Examining the attitudes of primary school teachers, who have significant influences on children, is important in this regard. The ways in which teachers conceptualize multicultural education and their attitudes towards it are noteworthy as they have the potential to influence future generations. Additionally, this study is pioneering in its examination of the attitudes of primary school teachers in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) towards multicultural education. This is because there has been no scientific study found that focuses on determining the attitudes of primary school teachers in the TRNC education culture towards multicultural education. The findings from this study can be considered as an innovation in primary education in the TRNC.

The research aims to determine the attitudes of primary school teachers working in the TRNC towards multicultural education, to contribute to the development of strategies to deal with cultural diversity in education and to raise awareness about multicultural education. In particular, the data to be obtained on the views and approaches of primary school teachers towards multicultural education, which is the subject of the research, will help to develop a better understanding of educational practices and the educational needs of students. Teachers are the architects of society in the sense that they provide every member of society with the knowledge, skills and values they need. One of the most important elements of the education system is the teacher. Schools cannot function without teachers (Erden, 2017). Although education programs are prepared by a higher authority, teachers have some control in this field. It is the teachers who determine the immediate goals of education based on the distant goals and therefore decide how to present the content to be conveyed to students in the educational processes in schools. For this reason, the views and experiences of teachers working in a multicultural environment such as the TRNC on multicultural education are an important source in developing educational practices.

Banks and Banks (2010) regard multicultural education as a movement for educational reform that aims to provide equal opportunities for school success for boys and girls, students with exceptional abilities, and students from diverse racial, ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups. For this approach to be successfully implemented, the school must be approached as a social system. Important factors such as culture, power relations, curricula, materials and the attitudes and beliefs of staff need to change the structure of the school to offer educational equality to students from diverse groups. This process should be implemented with the aim of creating a flexible, inclusive and fair environment for educational institutions. Based on this idea, the attitudes of teachers, who are the first subject of education, towards multicultural education are of great importance. When working with students from culturally diverse groups, teachers need to use strategies to encourage positive interactions between students. Teachers who work with individuals, not with groups or stereotypes, embrace an educational approach that addresses multicultural education (Gollnick, 2017).

Primary school age is the period where students become aware of the components of multiculturalism such as gender, sexual orientation,

race and ethnicity. According to Piaget, primary school students, who are in the concrete operational stage, can make groupings at the utmost level in this stage. In this period, students begin to recognize their own characteristics as well as the similarities and differences between one another. Teachers' attitudes towards multiculturalism and multicultural education are among the essential elements for such education. This is because attitudes towards any situation or object are reflected in an individual's behavior (Tavşancıl, 2010). Regardless of how well-designed it is, the quality of an educational program is determined by the level of the teacher's use during the instructional process. Therefore, the extent to which teachers have positive attitudes towards multicultural education is crucial. In this study, the general objectives include identifying teachers' attitudes towards multicultural education and indicating any necessary measures to be taken.

The attitude of the primary school teacher, whom students take as a role model, towards multicultural education affects their perception of similarities and differences positively or negatively. Examining the attitudes of teachers working in primary schools in the TRNC towards multicultural education will reveal the perceptions of multiculturalism of individuals who will shape the future generations. Understanding teachers' opinions on this issue can contribute to the updating of education programs to support multicultural approaches. This research aims to contribute to the development of strategies on how to address cultural diversity in education by analyzing the views and experiences of primary school teachers towards multicultural education. In line with this aim, the problem statement of the research was determined as "How are the attitudes and opinions of primary school teachers in TRNC towards multicultural education?" The following sub-problems were determined in line with the aim of the research;

- 1- Is there a significant difference in primary school teachers' attitudes towards multicultural education according to some variables (gender, nationality, nation, age, professional seniority, region, branch, graduation degree, graduated school)?
- 2- What are the opinions of primary school teachers regarding their *understanding of multicultural education*?
- 3- What are the opinions of primary school teachers regarding the adequacy of primary education in the TRNC Education System in addressing a multicultural structure?

1.1 Theoretical framework

Increasing cultural diversity due to factors such as globalization and migration has led to an increasing emphasis on the determining and distinctive features of cultures and the natural emergence of multiculturalism in societies living together (Banks and Banks, 2010). Multiculturalism is the product of the idea that people who share a common geography, life and beliefs can adopt different values and thought systems. The concept of multiculturalism is defined as the coexistence of different religions, languages, races, ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, education, ages, disabilities and classes by recognizing the cultural characteristics of all members of society (American Psychological Association, 2017). Conceptually, multiculturalism is a phenomenon that is analyzed from different perspectives. Multiculturalism, which some researchers consider only

in the context of race, is considered much more inclusive by some researchers and is expressed in terms of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, language, religion, age and similar criteria (Güvenç, 1994). The consideration of multiculturalism in the context of race is based on the traces of the civil rights movement in the United States of America (USA) in the 1960s. Racist and discriminatory incidents experienced by individuals of African descent led this community to unite around the search for rights in the US and form the group of African Americans, in other words Afro-Americans. The refusal to admit black African Americans into the schools of white Americans was the final act that triggered the civil rights movement (Ramsey, 2008). The origins of multiculturalism can be traced back to the social activism of African Americans and their supporters who challenged discriminatory practices in public institutions during the civil rights struggles of the 1960s (Banks and Banks, 2010). In the early 1970s, the separate actions of various disadvantaged groups dissatisfied with the inequalities of the education system and the resulting reaction of educational institutions gave rise to the first conceptualization of multicultural education (Gorski, 1999). In the 1980s, progressive education activists and researchers refused to allow schools to address their own concerns by adding symbolic programs and special units for famous women or famous people of color, leading to the emergence of a true multicultural educational scholarship (Banks, 1981). James Banks, the pioneer of multicultural education, was among the first experts in education to examine schools as social systems from a multicultural perspective. He grounded his understanding of multicultural education on the concept of educational equality (Banks, 1981). According to Banks (1981, 1989), to sustain a multicultural school environment, all aspects of the school must be examined and transformed, including policies, teacher attitudes, teaching materials, assessment methods, counseling and teaching styles. Many educators, from teachers to academics, such as Carl Grant, Christine Sleeter, Geneva Gay, and Sonia Nieto, among others, provided more scholarship in multicultural education in the mid- and late 1980s and developed new, deeper frameworks grounded in the ideal of equal educational opportunity and school transformation (Gorski, 1999). They made a connection between equal educational opportunity and school transformation and social change (Gorski, 1999). Educators, researchers and cultural theorists began to reconfigure traditional models of educational institutions at all levels from a multicultural perspective.

As a result of recent political and social changes, multiculturalism is now a widely accepted organizing principle of present-day American society. Children are now learning that diversity brings color to life, as opposed to ideas that promise to eradicate ethnic and group differences. America provides a safe haven for the many different groups within its borders, giving them the chance to preserve their cultural heritage, embrace a common culture or both. The choice is now the people's, not the state's. In America today, multiculturalism is recognized as the norm of a free society (Ravitch, 1990). Differences between groups are taught as a national resource rather than a problem to be solved. On the other hand, a particularist version of multiculturalism explicitly teaches people that their "cultural genes" determine their identity. According to this group, something in their blood, racial memory or cultural DNA defines who they are and what they can achieve. The corollary of particularism is the claim that racial and ethnic minorities are not part of American culture and should not try to be. It implies that the only culture to which minorities belong or can belong is that of their ancestors (Ravitch, 1990). When the

concept of multiculturalism spread in Europe, it found its counterpart in the framework of gender and sexual orientation-based problems. Today, social conflicts that vary from region to region ensure that attitudes towards multiculturalism are perceived and developed differently in each region (Banting et al., 2006). In the cases of Canada and Australia, multiculturalism has characterized the definition of targeted population communities. Latin American countries such as Brazil, Colombia and Mexico have introduced major changes in their constitutions to protect diversity by the state (Gros, 2016 cited in Doytcheva, 2016). In the case of Europe, which receives immigration rather than giving out, multiculturalism is a highly controversial issue. Despite the perceived threat to the millennia-long history of European nations, a sense of multiculturalism has developed in the process of building today's Europe. The process of political decentralization in Italy and Spain has led to the granting of autonomy to regional minorities. Northern European countries such as Sweden, Norway and Netherlands granted partial citizenship to immigrants, ensuring equality between foreigners and citizens. Today, they support multiculturalism through the state with constitutional arrangements. In countries where the ethnic understanding of the nation is dominant, such as Germany and France, the republican approach was approached and eventually citizenship rights were liberalized (Doytcheva, 2016).

As for the region of Cyprus, there are two components that constitute the multicultural society. The first component comprises the Greek Cypriot, Turkish Cypriot, Maronite, Armenian, and Latin communities. These groups represent integral parts of Cyprus's diverse society, which, shaped by various civilizations throughout history, has endured to the present day (Shiakides, 2017). The homogeneous structure, as defined by Durkheim (1893), in which members of a society share a common culture and do not retain their unique characteristics, does not fully apply to the community of Cyprus. However, the two main ethnic groups that make up the Cypriot population, the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities, and the minority groups of Maronites, Armenians and Latins (Republic of Cyprus, 2021), have coexisted for centuries, creating a common "Cypriot culture" (Psaltis and Çakal, 2016). The second component of multiculturalism on the island of Cyprus is the migration activities on the island. Since the second half of the 20th century, Cyprus has been under the influence of accelerating globalization movements, cultural interaction and migration waves. These interactions have made the island a region where different cultures and diversity have come together as never before in its history. In the 21st century, this cultural richness has increased even more.

According to the United Nations' International Migration Report 2022, 281 million people worldwide are migrants today. The migrant population corresponds to 3.60% of the entire world population. This number was 173 million in 2000 and 222 million in 2010 (McAuliffe and Triandafyllidou, 2021). The most recent total number of migrants in the TRNC, a state in the northern part of the island of Cyprus, was 141,634 in 2006 (TRNC, State Planning Organization, 2007). According to the 2011 census data, which is the most recent census conducted in the TRNC, the total population is 286,257, while 95,763 people hold non-TRNC citizen status. With dual citizenships, this number rises to 149,895 (TRNC, State Planning Organization, 2011). This is the most recent data available regarding the population. No population census has been conducted after 2011. When these data are taken into consideration, it is seen that the TRNC is a country that

receives immigration, thus many individuals and families with different cultural backgrounds are integrated into the social structure. Therefore, the phenomenon of multiculturalism is the reality of the TRNC, which covers the population of the study.

In multicultural societies, discussions on the role of cultural diversity and the importance of cultural values in education have raised questions about teachers' teaching methods and students' learning styles (Ferguson, 2005). These discussions aim to raise awareness about how to adopt a more effective approach to education in line with the changing needs of societies. The multicultural education movement, which initially emerged in the 1970s, focused primarily on race and culture. Over the course of time, however, it has become clear that the effects of social class and economic discrimination must also be taken into account. The feminist movement has emphasized that gender inequalities transcend the boundaries of race, culture and class. Therefore, gender inequalities have also become an important component of multicultural education debates. In discussions on multicultural education, there has been an acknowledgment of the inclusion of disadvantaged individuals and families, who oppose marginalization in education and occupation. The emphasis in multicultural education goes beyond superficial expressions and celebrations of cultural diversity, highlighting the necessity for radical social and economic change (Ramsey, 2018). The increasing spread of cultural diversity in the modern classroom has led to the adoption of multicultural approaches in education. Educational institutions serve as miniatures of diverse societies, harboring a wide range of students from cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious perspectives. The goal is to create inclusive educational environments that embrace cultural differences and provide equal opportunities for all students (Garcia and Kleifgen, 2018). The main goals of multicultural education are to increase cultural awareness, promote intercultural understanding and develop critical thinking skills among students. By incorporating diverse perspectives and contexts into the curriculum, multicultural education provides students with a comprehensive education that reflects the complexities of the world in which they live and equips them with the necessary skills to navigate diverse cultural contexts. It encourages cooperation across cultural boundaries and prepares them to become active global citizens (Banks, 2009). Students who interact with multicultural education become aware of respecting cultural differences and contribute to the formation of a more just and harmonious society (Gay, 2018). A multicultural education system is necessary to maintain and sustain a common culture (Parekh, 2000). Multicultural education is not about a specific curriculum or course, but about programs and practices that include educational equity, gender, ethnic groups, language minorities, low-income groups, LGBT individuals, and individuals with disabilities (Gollnick and Chinn, 2017). These practices and programs can target a specific segment of the population, or they can emerge as school reforms that ensure equity for all students (Banks and Banks, 2010). In practice, multicultural education has approaches that cover various areas such as gender, sexual orientation, language, religion, disabilities, etc. Furthermore, in different regions around the world, multicultural education is emerging in different ways as a result of different needs (Race, 2018).

The concept of social justice, which focuses on improving the situations of disadvantaged individuals (Nayir, 2020), can be considered the most suitable theory for individuals with differences in multicultural education. This is because it is an approach that

emphasizes addressing the unequal distribution of resources, including access to fair education for marginalized individuals, and serves as an inclusive educational tool (Nayir, 2020). The concept of social justice is the equal distribution of rights, opportunities, and responsibilities. Multicultural education focuses on individuals with differences benefiting from the access, education, and social rights that others enjoy. Therefore, organizing multicultural education on the basis of social justice and ensuring that individuals with differences also have equal opportunities in the social context is necessary. This way, individuals with various differences can benefit from opportunities, ensuring social justice.

1.2 Literature review

1.2.1 Multicultural education practices abroad

It is stated that in America, problems arising from ethnic diversity are minimized while educational opportunities are maximized (Aydın, 2013). Multicultural education is given great importance in public schools and an understanding of embracing everyone is adopted in line with the principle of democracy (Aydın, 2013). In the USA, bilingual education practices were initiated with a law enacted in 1968 (Kaya and Aydın, 2014). The multicultural and multilingual education program aims to implement the principle of equality in public schools. This program aims to promote self-expression, self-esteem, intergroup communication and harmony with an understanding of equality among cultural differences (Tesconi, 1984). In the education given to prospective teachers in the USA, there is a particular focus on multicultural education. Because there is diversity in all schools and it is important for each culture to preserve its own identity and to ensure integrity (Aydın, 2013: 35).

Canada is a country where communities of various ethnic origins coexist and was the first country to officially adopt multiculturalism with a government program that takes ethnic identity into account (Aydın, 2013). English and French are the official languages of Canada, but the rights of minorities are constitutionally protected. The multicultural and multilingual education program in Canada focuses on social integration, language education and academic achievement of students from different ethnic backgrounds. Schools in Canada are designed to help students adapt to multiculturalism and ethnic diversity (Aydın, 2013). The Canadian model is referred to as “multicultural integration.” The constitution, laws and school programs demonstrate that the multicultural component of the integration regime is comprehensive, showing that cultural diversity is recognized as a fundamental feature of Canadian life (Kymlichka, 1998).

In Switzerland, multiculturalism has ensured that unity and mutual support prevail in the country and made Switzerland one of the countries where democracy has been successful. With the multicultural federative structure, the balance between the majority and the minority is maintained, equality is ensured in social and cultural areas, and bias and discrimination that may arise between groups is prevented. Switzerland is one of the most successful examples of multilingual education culture. 22 out of 26 cantons are officially bilingual (Bhatia and Ritchie, 2008). Lessons are taught bilingually and in addition to the official language of the region, other languages spoken in the country are also included in the program. In schools that provide multilingual education, students can receive

subjects bilingually and meet all their social, physical, affective and personal needs (Kaya and Aydın, 2014).

China has placed importance on the education of minorities in order to preserve national unity and integrity, to foster adherence to socialism, and to prevent the division of the nation (Minggang, 2004). Multicultural education in China includes enabling students to understand, accept and respect their own culture and other cultures, and eliminating discrimination and prejudice based on race, ethnicity, class, gender and religion in the educational process (Aydın, 2013). In the Chinese education system, the right of minority ethnic groups to protect their language and culture, which is one of the most fundamental human rights in the international community, is respected. This is also secured by law.

1.2.2 Multicultural education practices in the TRNC

The TRNC, which unquestionably has a multicultural structure, constitutes the universe of the research. Migration to the TRNC occurs both individually and in the form of family members migrating together. School-age children of migrant families are directly involved in the public or private education system (Kendir and Guneyli, 2021). According to education statistics published by the TRNC Ministry of Education and Culture in recent years, the number of migrant students has been increasing and these students are receiving education in public and private educational institutions in the TRNC. According to the “Statistical Yearbook” report for the 2021–2022 academic year, the most recent data available at the time of the research, the number of TRNC citizen students in pre-school, primary and special education institutions of the state is 18,680 (66.2%), while the number of Republic of Turkey citizens is 7,477 (26.5%) and the number of third country citizens is 2,075 (7.3%) (Directorate of Education Joint Services Department, 2021). In the report titled “Primary Education Needs Analysis Report and Comparative Statistical Overview of Education” published by the Turkish Cypriot Teachers’ Union (KTÖS) in June 2022, it was stated that 40% of the students attending public schools in the TRNC are not TRNC citizens and that students from 45 different countries, mostly from Turkey, are studying in public schools (Turkish Cypriot Teachers’ Union, 2022). In the light of these data, it is seen that public schools in the TRNC have a multicultural structure just like the society as a whole.

It is a natural situation for immigrant students who come to Cyprus from different countries and families to exhibit different behaviors within the education system. It is undoubtedly a time-consuming process for these children to adapt to the island’s culture and school, learn Turkish as a foreign language and understand the lessons (Kendir and Guneyli, 2021). When the cases of children growing up in multicultural environments are examined, it has been revealed that the development of a positive self-perception of children is also extremely important. Because individuals who have their own cultural identity will also have a positive attitude towards other cultures. This positive attitude will facilitate the adaptation process starting from childhood and enable them to live harmoniously between the culture of the society and their own culture. Otherwise, children who fail to develop a positive cultural identity may lose their self-confidence by clinging to their own cultural values and may become distant and in conflict with the society they live in. In this case, children from the host culture may also develop negative attitudes towards children from the guest

culture and barriers in communication may arise (Temel and Yazıcı, 2003).

Northern Cyprus switched to a constructivist education system in 2005 (Department of Education and Training, 2005). The curricula and textbooks were organized according to the constructivist education approach based on cooperative learning in a student-centered manner. Individual differences, one of the important values of multicultural education, were emphasized. The teacher is defined as a guide to learning, not as an information loader. Guiding students to develop their own learning structures and the ability to construct new meanings in problems, concepts and subjects was described as the teacher's duty. In 2005, the curricula were reorganized according to the student-centered education approach and the duration of basic education (Department of Education and Training, 2005). Since 2005, the approach reflected in the curriculum should be implemented and an educational approach in which students are valued should be adopted.

2 Methodology

2.1 Research model

Mixed method was used in this study. Mixed method is a research method that combines or relates quantitative and qualitative methods (Creswell, 2009; Clark and Plano Clark, 2019). It is a research approach that integrates qualitative and quantitative data sets and then draws conclusions using the advantages of integrating the two data sets (Creswell, 2017). Creswell (2017) points out that the rationale for using mixed methods in research is to indicate situations where understanding the research problem adequately requires both qualitative and quantitative methods, as neither alone may be sufficient. In this study, since the aim is to determine whether primary school teachers' attitudes towards multicultural education show significant differences according to certain variables and to reveal how they define the concept of multicultural education, both quantitative and qualitative methods have been employed. This decision is based on the recognition that the use of only quantitative or qualitative methods would not be sufficient. Quantitative research was conducted to obtain data on teachers' attitudes. Qualitative research was incorporated to explore how teachers define the concept of multicultural education, whether they include multicultural education in their teaching processes, and whether they perceive themselves as adequate in terms of multicultural education.

Concurrent triangulation strategy, one of the mixed methods, was used in the study. In the concurrent triangulation strategy, the researcher collects qualitative and quantitative data together, but analyzes them separately and compares the findings to determine whether the findings confirm each other (Creswell, 2017). In this study, the quantitative phase was applied in parallel to determine primary school teachers' attitudes towards multicultural education and the qualitative phase was applied in parallel to determine their more detailed thoughts about multicultural education (Creswell, 2009, 2017). At the end of the study, quantitative and qualitative data were presented and the data obtained were combined and discussed in the discussion and conclusion section.

2.2 Quantitative part

The aim of the quantitative part is to determine whether there is a significant difference in primary school teachers' attitudes towards multicultural education according to some variables. In the research, nationality, ethnicity, gender, age, professional seniority, duty region, subject area, educational level, and the school of graduation were taken as independent variables, which have the potential to influence the dependent variable, the attitude towards multicultural education. "Survey" method was used in the quantitative part of the study. Neuman (2013) defines the survey method as a process that refers to the actions of "getting answers from a large number of participants, measuring multiple variables, testing many hypotheses and making inferences from past experiences in time order." When conducting screening, alternative explanations and variables that will represent them (control variables) should be taken into account and their effects should be measured. For this purpose, teachers' attitudes towards multicultural education were presented as they are. The Teacher Multicultural Education Survey (TMAS) material used in the quantitative part of the study and the Personal Demographic Information Form were prepared and printed out in questionnaire form in Microsoft Word. The questionnaires were applied to 111 primary school teachers who constituted the sample.

2.2.1 Population-sample of the study

The population is the structure that covers all the individuals related to the subject being researched (Arik, 1992). The universe of the study consists of primary school teachers working in public primary schools in the TRNC. In the quantitative part of the study, the sample consisted of 111 primary school teachers working in TRNC public primary schools in the 2022–2023 primary school year and selected randomly. The distribution of teachers in the research population is as follows: In terms of nation, 85.6% are from Northern Cyprus (TRNC), 12.6% are from a combination of Northern Cyprus and Turkey (TRNC-TR), and 1.8% are from Turkey (TR). Regarding ethnicity, 41.4% identify as Cypriot, 54.1% as Turkish Cypriot, and 4.5% as Turkish. In terms of gender, 71.2% are female, and 28.8% are male. The age distribution is as follows: 12.6% are between 22–25 years old, 24.3% are between 26–35, 31.5% are between 36–45, and 31.5% are between 46–55. Regarding professional seniority, 26.1% have 0–5 years, 8.1% have 5–10 years, 15.3% have 10–15 years, 12.6% have 15–20 years, 13.5% have 20–25 years, and 24.3% have 25 or more years. In terms of the region where they work, 45% are in Nicosia, 18% in Famagusta, 11.7% in Kyrenia, 12.6% in İskele, and 12.6% in Güzelyurt. Branch distribution shows that 31.5% are Key Stage 1 Teachers, 27% are Key Stage 2 Teachers, 15.3% are English teachers, 7.2% are Music teachers, 9.9% are Art teachers, and 9% are Physical Education teachers. Regarding educational background, 75.7% have a Bachelor's degree, 22.5% have a Master's degree, and 1.8% have a Ph.D. The majority graduated from Atatürk Teacher Training Academy (69.4%), 21.6% from private universities in Northern Cyprus, and 9% from foreign state universities.

2.2.2 Teacher multicultural education survey

For the quantitative research, data on teachers' attitudes towards multicultural education were collected through the Teacher Multicultural Education Survey (TMAS) developed by Ponterotto et al. (1998) and adapted into Turkish by Yazıcı et al. (2009). As a result of the

translation and language validity studies, it was determined that the reliability of the scale was sufficient to measure teachers' attitudes towards multicultural education. According to the analysis of the reliability of the TMAS, the Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficient of all scale items was determined as 0.75. The reliability coefficient found by the split-test method is 0.72. Factor analysis revealed that the unidimensionality of the scale, which was theoretically predicted in the original, was not supported in the Turkish translation (Yazıcı et al., 2009). The TMAS consists of a total of 18 items, 13 positive and 5 negative. The items in the scale are scored in the range of "1—Strongly Disagree and 5—Strongly Agree." Negative items were reverse scored. After the reverse scores were applied, the total score of each individual was determined. In this case, high scores indicate a positive attitude towards multicultural education, while low scores indicate a negative attitude. In order to reach the demographic characteristics of the teachers, which constitute the variables of the study, a "Personal Demographic Information Form" was prepared and added to the front page of the TMAS.

2.2.3 Analysis of quantitative data

The aim was to create an accurate and complete data set for the participants in the quantitative part of the study. The 111 scales applied were transferred to MS Excel and transferred to SPSS. The skewness-kurtosis values were examined for the normal distribution suitability of participants' scores on the multicultural education attitude scale concerning the considered variables. Since the data did not follow a normal distribution, nonparametric tests were used for the data analysis. In the analysis of quantitative data, Mann–Whitney U test and Kruskal Wallis test were used to test whether there was a significant difference in terms of some variables.

2.3 Qualitative part

In the qualitative part of the study, the case study strategy was used. Case studies 'are a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals' (Creswell, 2009, p. 13). In the study, 'interview', one of the qualitative research techniques, was used to collect data. Individual or focus group interview (structured, semi-structured, unstructured) is an effective data collection method for confirming observation and document data and learning the perceptions, reactions and experiences of individuals participating in the research. It is a powerful data collection method because there is interaction between the researcher and the data source and because it facilitates the researcher in confirming, explaining and elaborating the data collected (Şimşek and Yıldırım, 2013).

2.3.1 Participants of the study

Twelve teachers were selected as participants in the qualitative part of the study and convenience sampling technique was used among the teachers participating in the quantitative part (Creswell, 2009, p. 155). In the qualitative part of the study, 7 of the participating teachers are female, and 5 are male. Two of the participant teachers are in the age range of 22–25, two are in the range of 26–35, three are in the range of 36–45, and five are in the range of 46–55. Among the 12 participant teachers, 11 are

graduates of Atatürk Teacher Training Academy, while one teacher graduated from a foreign state university.

2.3.2 Interview form

A structured interview form was prepared by the researchers to answer the research questions. While preparing the form, the researchers first conducted a literature review (Banks and Banks, 2010; Banks and Banks, 2013; Doytcheva, 2016; Ramsey, 2018; Aslan and Aybek, 2019; Clark and Plano Clark, 2019; Demirdağ, 2020; Nayir, 2020). The aim of the literature review is to determine the status of existing scientific studies on the researched topic, to identify existing gaps and to determine the contributions of the study to the literature. In this way, when expressing any information or statement correctly, it is important to use the ideas and works of others with proper attribution (Demirci, 2014). An interview form consisting of 8 questions was prepared based on the literature review and research questions. Expert opinions (1 Assoc. Prof. Psychological Counseling and Guidance, 1 Dr. Social and Historical Foundations of Education) were taken for the interview form. In line with the expert opinions, an interview form consisting of a total of 6 interview questions and probe questions was prepared to be included in the final form.

2.3.3 Collection of qualitative data

The researchers conducted one-to-one interviews with 12 teacher participants. During the interview, with the permission of the participants, voices were recorded and notes were taken. No name was asked from the participants in the interview form and they were informed that the data obtained would be used for a scientific study. The interviews were conducted one-on-one with each teacher participant once in a closed environment. The average interview time with each participant was 30 min.

2.3.4 Analysis of qualitative data

As a result of the interviews, the information obtained was documented and recorded in a computerized environment. 'Content analysis' technique was used to analyze the data. Berg and Lune (2019) define content analysis as "the careful, detailed and systematic examination and interpretation of specific material in order to identify patterns, themes, biases and meanings." The aim of content analysis is to reach concepts and relationships that can explain the data obtained through participants' opinions, file and document analysis (Şimşek and Yıldırım, 2013). The basic process in content analysis is to bring together similar data within the framework of certain concepts and themes and to interpret them by organizing them in a way that the reader can understand (Şimşek and Yıldırım, 2013).

Member checking was conducted for the credibility of qualitative data. Member checking is the process of asking participants whether the findings of the study accurately reflect their own thoughts (Şimşek and Yıldırım, 2013). Researchers using participant confirmation have participants read the study results to ask them about the accuracy of the interpretations and results. Member checking requires each participant to be interviewed twice. The first interview is held to collect data and the second interview is held to check the accuracy and completeness of the results (Şimşek and Yıldırım, 2013). In this study, the researchers asked the participants whether the results reflected their views. All of the participants stated that the results reflected their views.

2.4 Hypothesis

1. It is hypothesized that the sample selected for the research represents the universe within the determined limits.

2. It was hypothesized that the questionnaire administered by the researchers was of sufficient quality to obtain the necessary information for the purpose.

2.5 Limitations

This study is limited with the:

1. Answers given to the questionnaire by the sampled classroom teachers working in TRNC public primary schools in the 2022–2023 academic year.
2. Answers given to the interview form by 12 classroom teachers who worked in TRNC public primary schools in the 2022–2023 academic year and who were the participants of the qualitative part of the research.

3 Results

3.1 Findings and interpretations related to sub-problem I

In order to find an answer to the first sub-problem of the study, the participants' attitudes towards multicultural education were analyzed in terms of gender, nation, nationality, gender, age, professional seniority, region of profession, branch, education level, and the institution of higher education from which they graduated. [Table 1](#) shows the values obtained from the participants' multicultural education scale according to some variables.

As depicted in [Table 1](#), the participants ($N = 111$) exhibited an average multicultural education attitude score of 61.47. With a maximum possible score of 90 on the attitude scale, it is evident that participants' attitudes towards multicultural education surpass the average, leaning towards a positive orientation. Furthermore, the participants' attitudes towards multicultural education remain positive across the independent variables considered in the study, namely nation, nationality, gender, age, professional seniority, region of profession, branch, education level, and the institution of higher education from which they graduated.

The suitability of participants' multicultural education attitude scale scores to a normal distribution, considering the variables, was assessed through the examination of Skewness-Kurtosis values. Given that all variables fell outside the range of -1.96 to 1.96 , it was concluded that the data did not conform to a normal distribution ([Can, 2014](#)). Consequently, nonparametric tests were employed for the data analysis.

The Mann–Whitney U test was used to test whether there was a significant difference in the participants' multicultural education attitude scores according to gender. The results are presented in [Table 2](#). As can be seen in [Table 2](#), no significant difference was found between male and female teachers ($p > 0.05$).

The differences in teachers' attitudes towards multicultural education according to various independent variables in the study were tested with the Kruskal–Wallis test. In cases where a significant difference was found as a result of the Kruskal–Wallis test, the Mann–Whitney U test was used to make pairwise comparisons to determine where the significance originated from. In [Table 3](#), the results of the analysis of teachers' attitudes towards multicultural education according to various variables are presented.

According to the results of the analysis in [Table 3](#), no significant difference was found in the attitude scores towards multicultural education according to the variables of nation, nationality, professional seniority, branch, degree of graduation and graduated higher education institution. According to the results of the analysis given in [Table 3](#), a significant difference was found in attitudes towards multicultural education according to the variables of age and region of profession. In order to calculate between which variables there is a significant difference, Mann–Whitney U analysis was applied. As a result of the analysis, it was found that teachers between the ages of 22–25 had higher attitudes towards multicultural education than teachers between the ages of 36–45, teachers between the ages of 25–35 had higher attitudes towards multicultural education than teachers between the ages of 36–45, and teachers between the ages of 46–55 had higher attitudes towards multicultural education than teachers between the ages of 36–45.

As a result of the analysis given in [Table 3](#), it was found that teachers working in Nicosia region had higher attitudes towards multicultural education than teachers working in Famagusta region, teachers working in Nicosia region had higher attitudes towards multicultural education than teachers working in Kyrenia region and teachers working in Güzelyurt had higher attitudes towards multicultural education than teachers working in Kyrenia region.

3.2 Findings and interpretations related to sub-problem II

In this section, the answer to the second sub-problem “What are the views of primary school teachers about their understanding of multicultural education?” was sought. For this purpose, the findings related to the interview form are presented in [Table 4](#).

As seen in [Table 4](#), the majority of participant teachers ($n = 8$) inadequately define multicultural education in a manner that does not align with the inclusive definition of multicultural education in the literature. Also evident in [Table 4](#), teachers predominantly define multicultural education by considering nationality, language, and religion dimensions in their descriptions. However, the literature's definition of multicultural education is recognized as encompassing all individual differences, including ethnic background, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, socioeconomic status, and individuals with special needs, beyond those with nationality, language, and religion differences. Less than half of the teachers ($n = 4$) have adequately defined multicultural education in a manner consistent with the literature's definition.

As seen in [Table 4](#), almost all teachers ($n = 11$) are of the opinion that primary school education in the Turkish Republic of

TABLE 1 Mean and standard deviations of the number of participants and multicultural education attitude scores according to some variables.

Variable	Groups	<i>F</i>	Average	SD
Nation	TRNC	95	60.98	0.83
	TRNC-TR	14	62.93	2.19
	TR	2	74.50	3.50
Nationality	Cyptiot	46	63.02	1.00
	Turkish Cypriot	60	59.88	1.16
	Turkish	5	66.20	4.24
Sex	Female	79	61.44	0.746
	Male	32	61.53	2.03
Age	22–25	14	63.13	1.56
	26–35	35	62.89	1.42
	36–45	27	57.74	1.61
	46–55	35	62.26	1.40
Professional seniority	0–5	29	60.52	2.15
	5–10	9	64	2.39
	10–15	17	60.35	1.67
	15–20	14	60.36	1.40
	20–25	15	61.40	1.80
	25+	27	62.96	1.41
Region of profession	Nicosia	50	63.72	0.96
	Famagusta	20	58.95	1.40
	Kyrenia	13	54.08	3.30
	Iskele	14	63.29	2.38
	Guzelyurt	14	62.07	1.91
Branch	Key Stage 1	35	58.74	1.49
	Key Stage 2	30	63.27	1.50
	English	17	62.70	1.46
	Music	8	59	3.92
	Arts	11	62.36	1.59
	Physical Education	10	64.50	2.78
Degree of graduation	Bachelor's Degree	84	61.54	0.88
	Master's Degree	25	62.00	1.49
	PhD	2	52	18
School of graduation	Atatürk Teacher Training Academy	77	61.44	0.76
	Private University in the TRNC	24	60.42	2.23
	State University Abroad	10	64.20	3.85
Total	All groups	111	61.47	0.79

TABLE 2 Mann Whitney U test results of TMAS scores of teachers according to gender variable.

Group	<i>N</i>	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	<i>U</i>	<i>p</i>
Female	79	54.37	4295.00	1135.00	0.400
Male	32	60.03	1921.00		

Northern Cyprus (TRNC) does not address a multicultural structure. Despite the majority of teachers inadequately defining multicultural education as an education provided only to students

with language, religion, and nationality differences, they have stated that primary school education does not even address to this kind of multicultural education. As seen in Table 5, all teachers ($n = 12$) have mentioned experiencing issues with students and parents in the context of multicultural education. Among the highlighted problems, language and communication issues are emphasized as the most frequently mentioned ($n = 12$). Additionally, problems such as students facing compatibility issues at school ($n = 3$), issues related to cultural differences ($n = 3$), immigrant students forming groups among themselves ($n = 2$), and face-to-face communication problems with parents are mentioned.

TABLE 3 Kruskal-Wallis results according to various variables.

Variable	Groups	<i>n</i>	Mean rank	df	χ^2	<i>p</i>	Significant difference
Nation	1. TRNC	95	54.41	2	4.782	0.92	
	2. TRNC—TR	12	60.07				
	3. TR	2	103.25				
Nationality	1. Cypriot	46	61.04	2	3.272	0.195	
	2. Turkish Cypriot	60	51.10				
	3. Turkish	5	68.40				
Age	1. 22–25	14	61.71	3	9.302	0.026	1*3
	2. 26–35	35	59.27				2*3
	3. 36–45	27	39.80				4*3
	4. 46–55	35	62.90				
Professional seniority	1. 0–5	29	54.29	5	4.911	0.427	
	2. 5–10	9	67.61				
	3. 10–15	17	48.59				
	4. 15–20	14	47.46				
	5. 20–25	15	53.13				
	6. 25+	27	64.09				
Region of profession	1. Nicosia	50	64.43	4	12.764	0.012	1*2
	2. Famagusta	20	45.33				1*3
	3. Kyrenia	13	32.77				5*3
	4. Iskele	14	60.21				
	5. Guzelyurt	14	58.50				
Branch	1. Key Stage 1	35	45.24	5	6.615	0.251	
	2. Key Stage 2	30	63.12				
	3. English	17	59.65				
	4. Music	8	53.06				
	5. Arts	11	58.77				
	6. Physical Education	10	65.40				
Degree of graduation	1. Bachelor's Degree	84	54.99	2	0.579	0.748	
	2. Master's Degree	25	60.00				
	3. PhD	2	48.50				
School of graduation	Atatürk Teacher Training Academy	77	55.12	2	3.380	0.185	
	Private University in the TRNC	24	51.65				
	State University Abroad	10	73.25				

The following views of teachers on this matter are noteworthy:

The children of families coming from different cultures reflect a mosaic in schools and classrooms with their own cultural structures. Children from different countries, with different ethnic backgrounds, and adopting different customs and traditions constitute multiculturalism. (T11)

Multicultural education involves organizing education by considering multiple cultures and taking into account the values of different cultures in the educational process. Within the scope of multicultural education, there are refugees, immigrants, people from different countries, individuals from

socio-culturally different classes, groups with special education needs, economically disadvantaged groups, and girls. (T3)

The education programs should be organized accordingly. The textbooks also need to be revised accordingly. These children must definitely receive education in Turkish because all our resources are in Turkish. (T1)

There is a multicultural structure, but there is no multicultural education. It seems to be left to the initiative of the teacher. I think we are unfamiliar with this. We could not empathize because we have not experienced it. (T9)

TABLE 4 Teachers' views on multicultural education.

Themes	Codes	f
Inadequate definition	Acceptance in terms of nationality, language, and religion	7
	Challenging education given to students who do not speak Turkish and have cultural differences	1
Adequate definition	Education provided to students from all disadvantaged groups with language barriers	4
No multicultural education	It does not address the multicultural structure	11
	<i>Foreigners should receive Turkish education</i>	1
	<i>Legal regulation should be made</i>	1
	<i>Textbooks should be revised</i>	1
	<i>Eğitim tek kültürlüdür</i>	1
	<i>There is no place for multiculturalism in our system</i>	1
	<i>There are exclusionary behaviors</i>	1
	<i>We are definitely not multicultural</i>	1
	<i>It depends on the efforts of the teachers</i>	3
	<i>Ministry is not prepared, it's not on its agenda</i>	2
	<i>The society is not ready</i>	1
	<i>The education program is not suitable</i>	1
	<i>Lack of empathy</i>	1
	<i>Language problems</i>	1
	<i>The structure is multicultural, but the education is not multicultural</i>	4
<i>Teachers are inadequate</i>	1	
There is multicultural education	It depends on the efforts of the teachers	1
There is a problem	There are students and parents facing problems	12
	<i>Language and communication problems</i>	12
	<i>Displaying aggressive behavior</i>	1
	<i>There is no special education support for immigrant children</i>	1
	<i>Crying of students who cannot communicate</i>	1
	<i>Parents cannot communicate face to face</i>	2
	<i>Not being able to do homework</i>	1
	<i>Problem of not internalizing local rules</i>	1
	<i>Incompatibility</i>	3
	<i>Marginalization</i>	1
	<i>Loneliness</i>	1
	<i>Failure</i>	1
	<i>Formation of groups among immigrant children</i>	2
	<i>Cultural differences</i>	3

We sent the child to a Psychological Counselor and Guidance specialist, but they said that the issue would be resolved once the child learns Turkish. However, nothing changed, and no solution was provided. (T1)

They do things that are allowed in their home countries but not in our school rules. For example, I have a Ukrainian student who dyed their hair blue, considering it normal in their country, but it's against our school rules. (T2)

I also have a Ukrainian foreign student who needs special education... I tried to send them to special education, but no one

I talked to helped. Unfortunately, they said they could not assist because the student does not speak the language. (T1)

As a result, the majority of participating teachers have been unable to define multicultural education in accordance with the inclusive definitions in the literature. It has been identified that most teachers still face inadequacies in conceptualizing multicultural education. This inadequacy is observed in the scope of multicultural education, where they tend to include only students with diversity in nationality, ethnic background, race, language, and religion, often incorporating immigrant students but excluding students with cultural differences such as gender, sexual orientation, and individuals with special

TABLE 5 Teachers' views on the relevance of primary school education in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus to a multicultural structure.

Themes	Codes	<i>f</i>
No multicultural teachin	It does not include multicultural education in the teaching process.	12
	I introduce the characteristics of different cultures.	6
	I implement practices related to values such as tolerance, empathy, and respect for differences.	4
	Turkish education should be provided to foreign students.	4
	I translate the topics	3
	I do the lesson in English	2
	Conduct video screenings for socialization.	1
	I use visual materials	1
	I conduct group activities.	1
	I facilitate educational games.	1
	I organize music and dance activities.	1
	I perform pantomime.	1
	Peace Culture	1
	There should be a translator in the class	1
	Immigrants should receive education in different classes and schools.	1
Inadequacy	Not adequate in terms of multicultural education.	11
	I have not taken any courses on multicultural education.	10
	I would participate if in-service training on multicultural education is offered.”	10
	I do not have sufficient knowledge.	8
	I was afraid because I will be teaching in a multicultural environment.	1
	I'm trying to improve myself	1
	Does not know how to approach immigrants from some countries	1
Adequate	In my experience, multicultural education is enrichment	1
Achievements were obtained	The achievements were gained by all students	10
Achievements were not obtained	Depends on the lesson	1
	Achievements are not obtained	1
There should not be common goals	Individual differences should be emphasized	8
There should be common goals	Common achievements should be obtained, differences should not be taken into account.	4

education needs. Less than half of the teachers have accurately and sufficiently defined multicultural education in line with the definitions in the literature. These teachers define multicultural education as a type of education provided in classrooms where students from all disadvantaged groups can be present.

Furthermore, almost all teachers believe that primary school education in Northern Cyprus does not address a multicultural structure. This situation is explained by less than half of the teachers as education in our country being left to the effort of the teacher. Additionally, less than half of the teachers attribute the lack of readiness for multiculturalism in society, the existence of an exclusionary attitude towards immigrants, and the unpreparedness of the ministry as reasons for education not addressing a multicultural structure. Almost half of the teachers suggest that if Turkish education is provided to foreigners, and less than half of them mention that the education can address a multicultural structure if the textbooks are rearranged. This indicates that teachers' understanding of multicultural education is limited to the education of immigrant students.

Another result obtained in the research is the revelation that students and their parents face issues related to multiculturalism at school. While all teachers report that students and parents experience communication problems, more than half of the teachers indicate that the problems arise from various reasons such as the inability of schools in Northern Cyprus to internalize their rules, the formation of groups among immigrant students based on the language they speak, the marginalization of immigrants by locals, the aggression of immigrant students who cannot express themselves due to not knowing Turkish, verbal or physical violence against foreign national students due to their appearance, and facing trust issues.

3.3 Findings and interpretations related to sub-problem III

In this section, the responses to the fifth sub-problem, 'What are the views of teachers on primary school education in the TRNC Education System in terms of addressing a multicultural structure?' have been investigated. For this purpose, the findings related to the interview form are presented in Table 5.

As seen in Table 5, none of the teachers incorporate multicultural education into the instructional process in their classes. Half of the teachers ($n=6$) introduce the characteristics of different cultures to their students and consider this practice as multicultural education. Less than half of the teachers ($n=4$) engage in practices related to values that are part of multicultural education, such as tolerance, empathy, and respect for differences, and consider these practices as multicultural education. Similarly, less than half of the teachers ($n=3$) presented the translation of the topic explained for the understanding of immigrant students as a multiculturalism practice. Four teachers expressed the desire to provide Turkish education to immigrant students if they had the means to conduct multicultural education. One teacher, if possible, would like to ensure that immigrant students receive education in separate classes or schools, while another teacher, if possible, would like to have interpreters in schools. Yet another teacher expressed the desire to conduct activities aimed at increasing the culture of peace if there were opportunities for multicultural education.

Table 5 indicates that almost all teachers ($n=11$) do not consider themselves adequate in terms of implementing multicultural education practices. Teachers who do not consider themselves adequate have stated that, despite their best efforts, they are not understood by immigrant students. Almost all teachers ($n=10$) mentioned that they lack adequate knowledge due to not receiving previous training on multicultural education. Nearly all teachers ($n=10$) expressed their willingness to participate in in-service training on multicultural education. One teacher stated that they would not participate, and one teacher was hesitant for various reasons. Only one teacher considers themselves adequate in terms of multicultural education.

As seen in Table 5, almost all teachers ($n=10$) believe that primary school education has achieved its goal and that the outcomes can be achieved by all students. One teacher stated that the outcomes are not achieved by all students, and another teacher mentioned that the achievement of outcomes differs from lesson to lesson. More than half of the teachers ($n=8$) expressed that primary school education should not have common goals and expectations for all students; instead, individual differences should be emphasized. Fewer than half of the teachers ($n=4$) stated that we should achieve the same outcomes as long as we live in the same society.

The following views of teachers on this matter are noteworthy:

Facilitating multicultural education involves creating an environment that actively engages all students in the learning process within the classroom. (T3)

I know that the child can handle that exam, has the capability. They are intelligent, clever, but unfortunately, they cannot do it because they do not know Turkish. So, for now, I translate the topic to help them understand it as a multiculturalism practice. (T1)

If our program was convenient and if we were not in a condition of race, I would have loved to get to know each other's cultures. (T9)

When I first arrived at the school and realized that 11 out of 19 students were foreigners, I found myself wondering what I had signed up for. That night, I even stayed up until the morning, contemplating what I was going to do with these children. (T2)

I believe that, despite my best efforts, I fall short. I teach a child to read and write, but they struggle to comprehend what they read. Frankly, I find myself questioning the efficacy of my teaching. (T12)

Everyone's family structure, culture, perspective, economic structure, perception and personal characteristics are different. Certainly their achievements cannot be the same. It must be accepted from the beginning, everyone's intelligence is different. There are individual differences. (T4)

The outcomes of primary school education should be the same for all students since we live together. For example, we experience this in traffic; cars are driven dangerously and noisily because you have not been taught this in primary school. (T6)

As a result, none of the teachers incorporate multicultural education into their teaching processes. Half of the teachers consider introducing students to the characteristics of different cultures as

multicultural education. Less than half of the teachers consider practices related to values education, such as tolerance, empathy, and respect for differences, as multicultural education. The misconception in teachers' perceptions of multiculturalism indicates that multicultural education is not being implemented.

Another result obtained in the study is that almost all teachers do not consider themselves sufficient in terms of multicultural education practices. Furthermore, almost all teachers have expressed their willingness to attend in-service training related to multicultural education.

Furthermore, as another result, almost all teachers believe that primary school education has achieved its purpose, and the gains can be achieved by all students. More than half of the teachers have expressed that primary school education should not include common goals and expectations for all students, emphasizing the importance of individual differences. Less than half of the teachers have stated that we should achieve the same gains as long as we live in the same society. The results obtained create a contradiction in terms of multicultural education practices. This is because multicultural education practices emphasize the need to determine different gains for students with cultural differences. However, in this study, the assertion that common gains are achieved by all students contradicts the principles of multicultural education, which suggest tailoring outcomes for students with cultural diversity.

4 Discussion and conclusion

According to the findings in the quantitative part of the study, it was found that teachers' attitudes towards multicultural education were generally positive. This finding is in line with the studies of Kılavuz (2023), Kozikoglu and Yıldırımoglu (2021), Töre (2020), Aslan and Kozikoglu (2017), Akman and İmamoglu Akman (2017), Tonbuloglu et al. (2016) and Taştekin et al. (2016).

In addition, no significant difference was found in teachers' attitudes towards multicultural education according to gender, nation, nationality, professional seniority, branch, degree of graduation and graduated institution variables. A significant difference was found according to age and region of assignment variables. Based on the age variable, significant differences were observed in the attitudes towards multicultural education among participants in the 22–25, 26–35, and 46–55 age groups compared to teachers in the 36–45 age group. Hargreaves' (2005) study revealed that young teachers at the beginning of their careers exhibit optimism and high adaptability, those in the middle years behave selectively with a growing sense of settledness, and teachers approaching the end of their careers experience emotional relief with the assurance of retirement. The findings of this study align with related research, showing that teachers in the 36–45 age group exhibited different attitudes compared to other age groups. In the study of Özözen Danacı et al. (2016), a significant difference was found for the age variable in line with the findings of this study. The significant difference found in the age variable in this study was in contrast with the results of Demircioglu and Ozdemir (2014), Çelebi and Atsayar (2015), Güngör et al. (2018), and Peköz (2018). The reason for this may be that primary school teachers working in the TRNC have had to cope more frequently with the increasing cultural diversity in recent history.

In this study, it was found that the multiculturalism attitudes of teachers working in Nicosia region were more positive than those of teachers working in Famagusta and Kyrenia regions. Teachers working

in Güzelyurt region also have more positive multiculturalism attitudes compared to teachers working in Kyrenia region. Nicosia, being the capital city, often experiences immigration, encounters cultural diversity earlier than other regions, and hosts inclusive activities related to cultural diversity. Therefore, it is anticipated that primary school teachers, the subjects of this study, working in Nicosia would have more positive attitudes towards multicultural education than those in other regions. Consistent with studies conducted by Özözen Danacı et al. (2016) and Yazıcı et al. (2009), a significant difference was found in the region of assignment variable. According to Yazıcı et al. (2009), teachers working in districts exhibited more positive attitudes towards multicultural education compared to teachers working in provinces. The results of this research align with those of the relevant study. Furthermore, the observation that teachers working in the Güzelyurt region, characterized by a smaller population and less cultural diversity than the Kyrenia region, have more positive attitudes towards multicultural education supports the findings of the related research.

In this study, it was determined that there was no significant difference according to the gender variable. The absence of a significant difference aligns with the results of a study conducted by Peköz (2018) with preschool teachers working in TRNC. This result is also consistent with the findings of studies by Karacabey et al. (2019) and Özdemir and Dil (2013) in the Turkish Republic. However, in Aslan and Kozikoglu's (2017) study, it was found that male participants had a more positive attitude towards multicultural education than female participants. This may be due to the cultural differences of the two countries. In TRNC culture, women's gender role is closer to the contemporary equalist role (Beidoğlu and Batman, 2014). Since women participate in social life at the same level as men in TRNC culture, it can be said that it may have differed from TRNC culture. As a result, it can be said that since women and men interact with multiculturalism equally in social life, there is no significant difference in their attitudes towards multicultural education.

No significant difference was found according to the nationality of the participants and the nation with which they identified themselves. Considering the changing population structure and the lack of population policy in the TRNC after the war in the recent history of Cyprus, it was expected that there would be a significant difference according to nationality and nation variables. However, the results of the research did not support the hypothesis. There is no similar study in the literature.

In this study, no significant difference was found according to the variable of professional seniority. The results of Aslan and Kozikoglu's (2017) study are in contrast with the results of this study. This research result is in parallel with the research findings of Peköz (2018), Taştekin et al. (2016), Yazıcı et al. (2009), Kaya and Söylemez (2014) and Özözen Danacı et al. (2016). It is important in terms of the consistency of this finding that the studies supporting this finding of the research have a wide scope of professional seniority. In addition, it constitutes contrary data to the thoughts and discourses that the time spent in the profession will negatively affect teachers' multicultural education attitudes.

In this study, we did not find any significant difference concerning the branch of study variable. Our findings are in line with what Yazıcı et al. (2009) discovered. On the other hand, Aslan and Kozikoglu (2017) found that teachers with a background in social sciences tend to have more positive attitudes towards multicultural education than teachers from other branches. Similarly, in Karacabey et al.'s (2019)

study, literature teachers showed more positive attitudes towards multiculturalism compared to teachers from other branches. The reason our research results may differ from related studies could be attributed to the fact that, in TRNC primary school education, a single classroom teacher often covers various branches.

In the study, no significant difference was found based on the graduation degree variable. This result goes against the hypothesis that teachers with master's degrees may develop more positive attitudes towards multicultural education. While this finding aligns with [Özdemir and Dil's \(2013\)](#) discovery that teachers' attitudes towards multicultural education do not vary with the level of education, it contradicts [Peköz's \(2018\)](#) finding that teachers with master's degrees exhibit more positive attitudes compared to those with bachelor's degrees. One possible explanation for this contrast is that preschool and primary school teachers undergo postgraduate education in different branches, and these branches may influence their attitudes towards multicultural education differently.

In this study, no significant difference was observed based on the graduated institution variable. The sole state institution in TRNC that educates primary school teachers is Atatürk Teacher Training Academy (AÖA). A majority of primary school teachers working in the region are AÖA graduates, where only TRNC citizens are enrolled. Additionally, individuals who have graduated from private universities in TRNC or from education-related departments in foreign universities and have been appointed by the ministry as 'temporary teachers' for 36 months can acquire a pedagogical formation certificate from AÖA and become primary school teachers. Despite the anticipation of a significant difference based on the institution of graduation variable, considering the higher cultural diversity in private and foreign universities in TRNC compared to AÖA, the study's results did not support this hypothesis. [Demircioglu and Ozdemir's \(2014\)](#) study found no change in participants' attitudes towards multicultural education based on the faculty of graduation variable, aligning with the results of [Peköz's \(2018\)](#) study.

The second sub-problem of the research addresses the views of primary school teachers regarding their understanding of multicultural education. More than half of the teachers exhibited misconceptions, perceiving multicultural education solely as instruction for immigrant students. Additionally, less than half of the teachers believe that the scope of multicultural education extends to include students from all disadvantaged groups, such as those based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disabilities, language, and religion. [Moore et al. \(2008\)](#) identified two distinct groups in teachers' understanding of multicultural education: the first group directly associates it with immigrant students, while the second group perceives multiculturalism in a broader context, not limiting it solely to immigrant students. In [Taştekin et al.'s \(2016\)](#) study, teachers displayed positive attitudes towards multicultural education, although their evaluation was primarily framed within the context of ethnicity. [Tonbuloglu et al.'s \(2016\)](#) research revealed that teachers have sufficient knowledge of multicultural education but harbor misconceptions and prejudices about it. [Aslan \(2019\)](#) also found that the majority of teachers perceived multicultural education as education offered to individuals with different ethnic identities. The emergence of misconceptions in teachers' understanding of multicultural education in this study is in line with the results of the above studies.

Nearly all participating teachers expressed the belief that primary school education in TRNC does not adequately address

multiculturalism. Approximately half of the teachers attributed this deficiency to the unpreparedness of the Ministry of Education, while less than half pointed to societal unreadiness for multiculturalism and an exclusionary attitude towards immigrants. Almost half of the teachers emphasized the necessity of providing Turkish education to foreign students, while less than half suggested that addressing multiculturalism could be achieved through the reorganization of textbooks. This indicates that teachers' conceptualization of multicultural education is predominantly focused on the education of immigrant students. In [Kozikoglu and Dilek Cavak's \(2023\)](#) study, a consensus among almost all teachers emerged, indicating that the current education system is insufficient to meet the needs of students with cultural differences. This aligns with the findings of the present study. [Çiçek's \(2017\)](#) research echoed similar sentiments, as teachers noted that the children of families who immigrated to TRNC introduced multiculturalism into educational environments, yet the education system was unprepared for this reality. The current study's result, indicating a lack of attention to multiculturalism in primary school education, corresponds with the findings of [Çiçek's \(2017\)](#) study.

All of the teachers in the study are of the opinion that students and parents have problems in the context of multiculturalism in primary school. While less than half of the teachers reported the problems experienced by students and parents as communication problems, more than half of the teachers revealed that the problems experienced were due to various reasons. These reasons include the inability to internalize the rules of the schools, grouping of immigrant students among themselves depending on the language they speak, marginalization of immigrants by locals, aggression of immigrant students who cannot explain their problems due to not knowing Turkish, exposure to verbal or physical violence by foreign students due to their appearance, and having trust problems. In the study conducted by [Takır and Özerem \(2019\)](#) with guidance counselors and administrators on the problems experienced by foreign students, language, cultural differences, not being interested in the lesson / disengagement from education and adaptation problems were cited as the main problems encountered. In [Aslan's \(2019\)](#) study, teachers stated that they mostly encounter problems arising from students while implementing multicultural education. In [Çiçek's \(2017\)](#) study, all participants stated that there is no standard program or practice regarding the problems that immigrant children face or are likely to face in the preschool period. The results of this study are in line with the results of related studies. However, in this study, additional problems experienced by teachers in the context of multiculturalism were also identified. The inability of immigrant students to internalize the rules of primary schools in the TRNC, grouping of students among themselves depending on the language they speak, marginalization of immigrants by locals, aggression of immigrant students who cannot explain their problems due to not knowing Turkish, exposure of foreign students to verbal or physical violence due to their appearance and having trust problems are among the innovations that this research adds to the literature.

In the study, it was observed that none of the teachers incorporated multicultural education into their teaching methods. Half of the teachers indicated that introducing the characteristics of cultures different from the local culture to their students was considered multicultural education. However, less than half of the teachers regarded implementing practices for values such as tolerance,

empathy, and respect for differences, which fall under values education—a component of multicultural education, as constituting multicultural education. The misunderstanding in teachers' perceptions of multiculturalism indicates a gap between their conceptualization and practical integration of multicultural education. [Ates and Sahin's \(2021\)](#) study, which found that participant preschool teachers overlooked the cultural diversity of the province where they worked in their teaching processes, aligns with the results of this study. However, [Yusof et al.'s \(2015\)](#) study reported multicultural education practices by teachers that were not consistent with the findings of this study. This difference may be attributed to the cultural distinctions between the two countries.

In the study, almost all of the teachers were of the opinion that they did not find themselves sufficient in terms of multicultural education practices. In addition, almost all of the teachers stated that they would participate in in-service training on multicultural education. The finding of this study is in line with the finding of [Muhamad Pilus and Nguyen \(2023\)](#) that teachers still need more information about multicultural education. In [Çiçek's \(2017\)](#) study, teachers stated that they support the organization of in-service training, seminars and conferences and the provision of knowledge and experience on this subject by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Due to this similarity, the findings of this study are in parallel with the findings of the related study.

Almost all of the teachers in the study believed that primary school education fulfills its purpose and that all students can attain the outcomes. More than half of the teachers expressed the view that primary school education should not impose common goals and expectations on all students, emphasizing the importance of individual differences. In contrast, less than half of the teachers argued that, given that we live in the same society, achieving the same outcomes is essential. Teachers advocating for the prioritization of individual differences can be considered to hold a positive attitude towards multicultural education. The obtained result leads to a contradiction in terms of multicultural education practices. This is because multicultural education practices emphasize the necessity of determining different outcomes for students with cultural differences. However, the assertion made by teachers in this study, stating that common outcomes are achieved by all students, is not acceptable from the perspective of multicultural education, which advocates for tailoring outcomes for students with cultural diversity. As there are no other studies on attitudes towards multicultural education at the primary school level in TRNC culture, a comparison with this result is not possible.

As a result, the synthesis of quantitative and qualitative data indicates that teachers hold positive attitudes towards multicultural education, yet they still harbor misconceptions, as mentioned earlier. The quantitative part of the research revealed that the average attitude scores of teachers towards multicultural education were positive but not at a sufficient level. The qualitative findings of the study support the quantitative results. The fact that the majority of teachers could not define multicultural education correctly in the qualitative part supports the quantitative finding that their attitudes are not at a sufficient level. Furthermore, the qualitative part of the research, indicating that teachers do not incorporate multicultural education into their teaching processes and that primary education does not address a multicultural structure, aligns with the quantitative finding that teachers' multicultural attitudes are not at a desirable level.

Based on the findings of the research, it can be generally stated that there is a long way to go in terms of multicultural education in primary education in Northern Cyprus. Both qualitative and quantitative findings indicate that teachers have not internalized the concept of multicultural education adequately and have not reflected it in their teaching processes. Considering the possibility of teachers' multicultural attitudes affecting students, this situation may lead to the neglect of the needs of individuals with different cultural characteristics and result in unequal opportunities. As a general result, students from different cultures are likely to continue being excluded and marginalized. The research is expected to contribute to policymakers in primary education in Northern Cyprus. Based on the research findings, it can be stated that including multicultural education in teacher training is essential. The knowledge level of teachers about multicultural education should be increased rapidly. When the knowledge gap of teachers about multicultural education is filled, the likelihood of their attitudes improving will also increase. Teachers whose attitudes towards multicultural education reach a sufficient level are more likely to incorporate multicultural education into their teaching processes.

Given the multicultural demographic structure of TRNC society, it becomes imperative for the Ministry of Education and the state to undertake initiatives aimed at dispelling these misconceptions, both at the conceptual level and within the teaching process. To achieve this, the following suggestions could be considered: The TRNC Ministry of Education should enact the necessary legal measures to ensure that primary school education addresses a multicultural structure. Additionally, it may be beneficial to introduce supplementary courses in primary schools tailored for immigrant students, who constitute a pivotal element of multiculturalism. In-service courses on multicultural education could be organized by the Ministry of Education for teachers. Integrating a course on multicultural education into the Atatürk Teacher Training Academy classroom teacher training program, which educates primary school teachers, may contribute to enhancing the awareness of future teachers and fostering a positive shift in their attitudes towards multicultural education. Under the guidance of the Ministry of Education, informative activities, including teacher-parent interviews, could be initiated to address the societal marginalization issue. Researchers focusing on multicultural education can conduct quantitative and qualitative research involving educational stakeholders, such as teachers, administrators, and parents. The results of these studies can be compared with the findings of this research, providing valuable insights for further development.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

Ethical approval was not required for the study involving human participants in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. Written informed consent was obtained from the individual(s) for participation in the study and for the publication of any potentially identifiable images or data included in this article.

Author contributions

AE: Conceptualization, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Resources, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft. KB: Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Methodology, Project administration, Supervision, Writing – original draft. CK: Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Software, Writing – original draft.

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The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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