A Qualitative Case Study of Multicultural Education in Turkey: Definitions of Multiculturalism and Multicultural Education[i]

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Abstract

The Republic of Turkey became more diverse than ever in its history. Multiculturalism and multicultural education, as part of Turkey's globalization efforts, may be the most appropriate approach for the Turkish educational system to form a synthesis of cultures and to help diverse groups build an interactive dialog with others regardless of local, national, transnational or international status. This qualitative case study aimed to examine Turkish teachers' and teacher candidates' views on and perceptions of multiculturalism and multicultural education in the Turkish context. For this study, the researcher gathered data and investigated the perceptions and results of a stand-alone graduate course referred to as MULT-500 Multicultural Education and its effects on teachers' and teacher candidates' thoughts, beliefs, understandings, and perceptions. This course is offered at an institution located in the Marmara Region. When referring to this university, the pseudonym *Alpha University* was used. The data were collected from semi-structured interviews, written documents, focus group interview, classroom observation and fieldnotes. According to the findings, all study participants had an idea of what multiculturalism and multicultural education were before the course. During the course, they improved upon and enhanced their understandings and thoughts; however, they still need to extend their perspectives so as to more fully understand what those concepts mean.

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INTRODUCTION

Today, nearly all societies include different cultures, ethnicities, religions and languages, and the differences associated with each of these needs to be explored in schools via a newly designed curriculum (Gorski, 2001; Maylor, Read, Mendick, Ross & Rollock, 2007). In modern countries, schools are an important part of socialization, and all schools need to be properly prepared to facilitate learning through the necessary components of institutional education – teachers, administrators and relevant course content – in order to address modern countries' complex societal structures (Chisholm, 1994; Chou, 2007). When schools and all components necessary to education are properly prepared and readily available, students will be able to discover the diverse society in which they live. Even when a society is not particularly diverse in its makeup, the children of that society should still be exposed to multiculturalism through school such that they have the ability to become part of more diverse societies and to become global citizens. Learning about different cultures, lifestyles, ethnicities and all other forms of diversity allow students a more comprehensive view of the world than they previously held and a more appropriate lens through which to examine others (Terry & Irving, 2010).

Turkey's population comprised of diverse ethnic groups has increased rapidly over the years, and integration regarding the backgrounds of these ethnic groups into the curriculum has become an increasingly important issue for the Turkish educational system. Recent growth of ethnic groups in Turkey, with regard to population, has demonstrated the need for increased awareness pertaining to future teachers' abilities to teach issues regarding diversity in diverse classroom settings and teaching multiculturalism via teacher education programs (Aydin, 2013).

A Review of Literature

A considerable amount of literature has been published with regard to the goals or functions of multicultural education. For instance, Banks (1993) identifies two major goals of multicultural education; these include making any necessary adjustments to schools such that they provide a more supportive education environment as well as high-quality educational experiences for all students regardless of their ethnicities, racial groups and social classes, and providing similar educational opportunities for both genders. In addition, along a similar line, Bieger (1995) mentions that multicultural education is an opportunity for students to experience a variety of cultural influences within the educational system regardless of social class and gender differences.

It has been shown conclusively that multicultural education has gained increased importance since the last 50 years. According to Banks, Banks and McGee (2010), multicultural education was born as a result of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement; until now, many scholars have emphasized the importance of multicultural education and have defined it so as allow others to more clearly understand what multicultural education entails. Many researchers have agreed that multicultural education is important in its ability to represent the structure of a given society. There are additional definitions of multicultural education put forth by other well-known researchers as well. For example, Banks (1997) states that multicultural education serves as the attempt to try to analyze all education systems so as to avoid racism. Hourihan and Chapin (1976) define multicultural education as "making educational institutions congruent with the cultural backgrounds of the students and, perhaps more importantly, [giving] the students an appreciation and positive valuation of their own cultural heritage" (p. 24). Sleeter and Grant (1994) claim that multicultural education serves to educate the children who come from diverse backgrounds in order to help them adapt into education systems. Nieto (1999) defines multicultural education as the means by which educators can foster academic perfection for all students. Further, Gay (2004) refers to multicultural education as "integral to improving the academic success of students of color and preparing all youths for democratic citizenship in a pluralistic society" (p. 30).

In addition to understanding what multicultural education is, in terms of its functions and goals, it is important to take note of the sorts of misconceptions that exist regarding this type of education. First, it is important not to confuse multicultural education with ethnic studies. The focus of

ethnic studies is generally gathered around historical and social components of diverse groups; multicultural education, however, is interested in determining the best teaching methods to teach all components as they pertain to culture and cultural groups. Multicultural education does not suggest either protecting or destroying a particular ethnicity; it does not make use of any approaches intended to divide the people into separate groups by stressing ethnic loyalty over national adherence. Rather, it advocates the teaching of all components associated with cultural groups so as to build a nationwide or a global society. Multicultural education does not intend simply to criticize the political, educational or economic systems of a country; however, it does analyze these sociocultural factors, as this plays an important role in both determining and addressing social conditions and increasing students' school achievements (Eryaman, 2007, 2009; Birkel, 2000).

Educating future teachers is an important part of improving awareness as it pertains to diversity; further, positive attitudes toward multiculturalism are important components of multicultural education (Chou, 2007). It has been suggested that teacher education programs in Turkey need to be revised such that they encourage teachers to become more sensitive to cultural differences (Coban, Karaman, & Dogan, 2010; Yavuz & Anil, 2010; Unlu & Orten, 2013; Tortop, 2014). Unlu and Orten (2013) investigated the perceptions of teacher candidates regarding multiculturalism and multicultural education. Their findings indicate that teacher candidates possess both true notion and false notion with regard to multiculturalism. Twenty-two teacher candidates out of 33 believe that multiculturalism has to do with cultural, language, religion, race and lifestyle differences and that these differences reflect individuals' strengths; however, eleven of the teacher candidates in the study believe that multiculturalism, as a project, serves to divide their country into several parts based on ethnic differences. According to the researchers, eliminating the false information may be possible via the integration of the instructional components of multiculturalism into teacher education programs.

Demirsoy (2013), and Demircioglu and Ozdemir (2014) completed their studies to determine pre-service teachers' perceptions; to complete their work, the authors of the studies gathered data from Marmara and Ege Universities, located in western Turkey. Demirsoy (2013) analyzed the opinions of pre-service social studies teachers regarding multiculturalism; the author also assessed how these teacher candidates approached this multiculturalism. Demirsoy (2013) conducted interviews with twelve candidates and reported major findings in his studies. All teacher candidates in this study agree that teaching students about different cultures and offering equal-quality educational opportunities are important components of multicultural education. However, all pre-service teachers believe that neither their programs nor their associated curricula had prepared them to teach multiculturalism; instead, the pre-service teachers improved their perceptions regarding multiculturalism by way of the media. Additionally, half of the teachers in this study believe that they are not ready to teach in multicultural environments or to teach multiculturalism. The other half believes that they have only a slight amount of information regarding multicultural education. In addition, Demircioglu and Ozdemir (2014) analyzed the perceptions of pedagogical formation students' with regard to multicultural education. The authors take into account a number of variables (gender, age, specification and settlement) in order to analyze 156 pedagogical formation students' thoughts. Their findings indicate that 156 participants have positive attitudes toward multicultural education regardless of their ages, genders, settlements and specifications. Based on these findings, regardless of gender, teacher candidates are willing to learn more about multicultural education.

Similarly, Coban and colleagues (2010) examined teacher candidates' perceptions in terms of various demographic variables. Their findings are similar to those of the previously mentioned study: teacher candidates have positive attitudes toward multiculturalism. An interesting finding from this research indicates that female teacher candidates have more positive attitudes than male candidates with regard to people's different political views. Additionally, the study has found that teacher candidates who grew up in urban areas have more positive attitudes than candidates who grew up in rural area with regard to different sexual preferences as a multicultural issue.

Problem and Purpose of the Study

Multicultural education has not yet found a valuable place among teacher education programs in Turkey, and universities remain skeptical about how to appropriately integrate multicultural education into the curriculum of teacher education programs (Demircioglu & Ozdemir, 2014; Tortop, 2014; Unlu & Orten, 2013). According to Aydin (2013), upon comparing Turkish teacher education programs to western countries' programs, it becomes apparent that Turkish teacher education programs are not sufficient to address the needs of diverse students in current schools. After graduating from teacher education programs, teachers and teacher candidates need to fill this gap with their knowledge and skills with regard to how to teach diversity and how to adapt their curricula based on diverse students' needs. Through their education, teachers and teacher candidates should learn how to integrate classroom content related to issues of diversity, provide equal educational opportunities to diverse populations, employ appropriate activities to increase academic achievement among diverse students, and increase students' levels of understanding with regard to the importance of pluralism in society (Aydin, 2013).

In rare cases, a few university professors offer courses, as electives, related to the foundations of multicultural education and dimensions of multicultural education in teacher education programs in Turkey. In addition to a lack of integration of multiculturalism into teacher education programs, there are also serious gaps with regard to the examinations administered to indicate what teachers and teacher candidates have learned after taking a course related to multicultural education (Polat & Kilic, 2013). Based on the detailed research, an examination of teachers' and teacher candidates' initial perceptions and the outputs of these scarcely offered courses (i.e., the new perspectives or attitudes these target groups have developed after completing the course) is rarely conducted. Generally, researchers have preferred to make use of surveys and questionnaires in order to analyze teachers' and teacher candidates' perceptions, etc.

This study aimed to examine Turkish teachers' and teacher candidates' views on and perceptions of multiculturalism and multicultural education in the Turkish context. For this study, I gathered data and investigate the perceptions and results of a stand-alone graduate course referred to as *MULT- 500 Multicultural Education* (pseudonym) and its effects on teachers' and teacher candidates' thoughts, beliefs, understanding and perceptions. Through the research, I explored ideas, opinions and beliefs held by teachers and teacher candidates with regard to multiculturalism and multicultural education, and if and how multicultural education might be useful in the Turkish context.

Research Question

How do teachers and teacher candidates define multiculturalism and multicultural education before and after taking the graduate course in a public university in Turkey? In other words, what are their understandings of these concepts?

Conceptual Framework

In order to derive the conceptualization of teachers' and teacher candidates' perceptions, understandings, and beliefs regarding multiculturalism and multicultural education, Nieto's (1994) "levels of multicultural understanding," and Sleeter and Grant's (2007) "goals of multicultural education" are used to frame this study.

Levels of Multicultural Understanding

Nieto (1994) developed four levels of multicultural understanding that serve to embrace all students in the classroom. According to the author, tolerance, acceptance, respect, and affirmation solidarity and critique are the levels of understanding associated with multiculturalism. While tolerance is the lowest level of multicultural understanding, affirmation solidarity and critique is the highest level.

Tolerance. Nieto (1994, 2004) claimed that tolerance is the first level of supporting pluralism; at this level, differences are endured. According to the author, "this level of support for multicultural education stands on shaky ground because what is tolerated today can too easily be rejected tomorrow" (p. 3). She claimed that if teachers were at this level, they would acknowledge students' differences, but they would be unable to fully notice "why some students are more successful than others" (p. 4).

Acceptance. The second level of multicultural understanding is "acceptance." According to Nieto (1994), the acceptance level of multicultural education "implies that differences are acknowledged and their importance is neither denied nor belittled" (p. 4). At this level, school administrators and teachers make students' diverse backgrounds "visible" if they are allowed (Nieto, 2004).

Respect. The third level of multicultural education support is respect. At this level, teachers should hold differences in high esteem, and students' diverse backgrounds do not serve exclusively as bridges to the mainstream culture of the class; rather, at this stage, teachers should support students and their education by understanding and relating to the students' diverse backgrounds. This level requires more interaction among parents, teachers, and schools, and students' experiences are used more frequently to enhance their schooling (Nieto, 1994; Nieto, 2004).

Affirmation, solidarity, and critique. According to Nieto (1994, 2004), this level of multicultural education provides the highest level of support for diversity. At this level, "conflict" is an important part of learning. In addition, at this level, multicultural education is concerned with "equity and social justice" (Nieto, 1994, p. 5). According to the author, students' diverse backgrounds and families are "embraced and accepted as legitimate vehicles for learning" (Nieto, 1994, p. 5). Further, at this level of multicultural education, teachers are responsible for supporting students' efforts to critique their own cultures and others' cultures in order to understand the differences.

Goals of multicultural education

According to Sleeter and Grant (2007), goals of multicultural education have two major components, which are cultural pluralism and equal opportunity.

Cultural pluralism. According to Sleeter and Grant (2007), cultural pluralism entails "balancing diverse culture and identities within one nation, encouraging a 'both-and' stance toward difference and unity" (p. 152). The researchers claimed that the pluralist point of view allows people to be proud of their diverse backgrounds, and it advocates that diversities in society are not a problem that needs to be overcome. Global immigration of people increases each year and this has made countries more diverse than ever. The idea of cultural pluralism will prepare people "to work constructively with, communicate with, and respect diverse people of the world" (p. 154).

Equal opportunity. Sleeeter and Grant (2007) claimed that equal educational opportunity should mean that,

> Classrooms accommodate a wide enough spectrum of human diversity so that students do not find themselves disabled by factors such as teaching processes that ignore what they know, use of a language they do not understand, or adaption of teaching strategies that do not work well for them. Nor would students feel ostracized or unwelcome because of their color, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, or physical characteristics. Classrooms would enable all students to choose and strive for a personally fulfilling future, and develop self-respect, in a way that builds on their home culture and language. (p. 155).

According to the researchers, these two major components of multicultural education have the following goals: "(a) promoting and understanding cultural diversity, (b) promoting alternative choices

for people without negation of their own race, gender, disability, language, religion, sexual orientation, and social class background, (c) helping children to achieve academic success, and (d) promoting awareness of social issues involving unequal distribution of power and privilege that limits the opportunity of those not in the dominant group" (p. 178).

Methodology

An appropriate selection of research methods is essential to any research. This qualitative inquiry used qualitative case study model designed to examine beliefs, opinions and perceptions of teachers and teacher candidates with regard to multiculturalism and multicultural education, and to investigate the effects of obtaining knowledge regarding multiculturalism and multicultural education in a Turkish public university teacher education program. A qualitative case study model provided in-depth opportunity to gather data via events that occur within a bounded system as a natural setting for the study.

Participants

In the spring of 2016, nine teachers and teacher candidates were registered to the course. Previously, teachers in public and private schools, as well as teacher candidates who had already graduated from teacher programs but had not yet started working in schools, took this class to complete their elective requirements for their master's degree in education. Further, previous students who took MULT-500 were often teachers with various years' worth of teaching experience, of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and teacher candidates who came from culturally and ethnically diverse backgrounds. During the spring semester 2016, similar types of students – with their respective diverse backgrounds –enrolled in the course (Table 1).

I sought the necessary permission from the university and the instructor before meeting with the participants, and I explained the purposes of the study during the first day of the MULT-500 Multicultural Education course. After completing the necessary steps, I provided the Study Information Sheet to the students who volunteered to be a part of this study. Students who wanted to participate in the study signed and returned the Study Information Sheet during the first day of the course. All of the students who took the course (nine teachers and teacher candidates), as well as the course instructor, volunteered to participate in the study. In order to conceal the identities of the participants, pseudonyms were used instead of their original names.

Table 1. Participants of the Study

Participants (*pseudonyms*)	Gender	Ethnicity	Educational Background	Years of Experiences	Region of Origin
Mete	Male	Turkish	BA in Elementary Education	1 year in a special education class (*temporary appointment*)	Marmara Region
Ayse	Female	Turkish	BA in Elementary Education	1 year in a public school (*permanent position*)	Central Anatolia Region
Fatma	Female	Kosovo-Turkish	BA in Early-Childhood Education	Candidate (Not working yet)	Kosovo (Europe)
Harun	Male	Turkish	BA in Turkish Language Education	2 years in a public school (*permanent position*)	Black Sea Region

Zeliha	Female	Circassian	BA in Elementary Education	1 year in a public school (Candidate-*temporary appointment*)	Marmara Region
Nalan	Female	Turkish	BA in Elementary Education	2 years in a special education class (*temporary appointmen*t) 4 months in a public school (*permanent position*)	Black Sea Region
Olcay	Female	Turkish	BA in Elementary Education	1 year in a public school (Candidate-*temporary appointment)*	Black Sea Region
Rana	Female	Kurdish	BA in Elementary Education	3 years in a public school (*permanent position*)	Southeastern Anatolia Region
Gokhan	Male	Turkish	BA in ESL	4 years in a Military School	Marmara Region
Mehmet (the course instructor)	Male	Turkish	Ph.D in Educational Leadership	5 years in a public school 15 years in a public university	Central Anatolia Region

Data Collection

According to Creswell (2007), qualitative case studies generally require different types of data collection methods that lend themselves to more meaningful data. For this qualitative case study, data was collected from semi-structured interviews, participants' written documents, classroom observation notes, transcriptions of audio and video recordings created via the discussions in class and focus group interview, and fieldnotes. Additionally, in class discussions, interviews and focus group interview were in Turkish; Turkish responses were translated into English.

Data Analysis

During coding and while finding emerging themes and categories, I mainly followed the following steps:

a) Coding the data and finding themes,

b) Collecting similar themes under a single category,

c) Determining how the results of the coding relate to the initial research questions.

The data analysis of a qualitative study must be systematic and verifiable (Kruger, 1994). Before beginning data analysis, demographic questions of interviews were analyzed and reported in order to indicate participants' demographic structures and diverse backgrounds. All video records were saved on the computer and on a flash drive to protect them and allow for a backup of the data, which

ensured that they are securely protected. Then, after the necessary tools, such as a headset, are procured, I listened to all of the responses multiple times so that they can be transcribed. As mentioned previously, the interviews, in class discussions and focus group interview were in Turkish.

I examined both significant comments made during the interviews, exams, records of in-class discussions, focus group interview and identified major ideas shared by the teachers and teacher candidates who were part of the study. Code mapping was used to divide data into categories. First, transcriptions were read multiple times, and data were coded such that they reflect major topics. According to Merriam (2009), coding is "assigning some sort of shorthand designation to various aspects of your data" (p. 173). Then, I determined the main themes in order to get a general view of what has been discussed. For this determination, I used QSR Nvivo to create word clouds.

When the QSR Nvivo program creates a word cloud from the generated codes, it distributes the more frequently generated codes to the center of the cloud and represents them using a larger font size, while the less frequently generated codes are displayed along the edges of the cloud. Thus, while the themes are created after the encoding process is complete, the names given to the themes related to the multiplicity of codes at the cloud's center are similar to the names of these codes.

After emerging themes were identified, they were classified the responses. Additionally, all emerging themes from participants' responses were categorized based on their similarities and differences. Finally, when responses were organized, they were organized with regard to their relationships to the research questions.

FINDINGS

The research question focused primarily on determining what the course instructor and nine participants believed multiculturalism and multicultural education, as concepts, meant; the question also aimed to determine whether and how these participants' understandings of the concepts changed by the end of the course.

All class sessions were held during the 2016 spring semester. Further, the course instructor provided most of the course instruction, making the course instruction teacher-centered rather than being the result of class discussion among participants. There were, however, student presentations held near the end of the semester. Generally, the course instructor would ask students short-answer questions that would enable him to briefly hear their definitions or thoughts regarding the concepts being discussed. Because the instructor provided most of the instruction and did not allow for much discussion among class participants, it was sometimes difficult to gather satisfactory data with regard to participants' thoughts and comments about the topics being discussed (fieldnotes).

In order to enrich the data and generate meaningful responses to the first research question, I employed multiple data sources (i.e., fieldnotes, reflective notes, and the first and final interviews). For the research question, I divided the findings into four categories: (1) the initial definitions of multiculturalism, (2) the initial definitions of multicultural education, (3) the final definitions of multiculturalism, and (4) the final definitions of multicultural education. I then created a data Table 2 to better articulate the findings associated with the initial research question.

Table 2. Overview of the Findings for the Research Question

Research question	Pre-interview		Observation
How do teachers and teacher candidates define multiculturalism and multicultural education before and after taking a graduate course in multicultural education in a public university in Turkey? In other words, what are their understandings of these concepts?	*Pre-definitions of multiculturalism*	*Pre-definitions of multicultural education*	*Definitions of multiculturalism*
	Theme(s) Acceptance / Respect / Coexistence of sub-cultures	**Theme(s)** Equality of opportunity / Integration of differences	**Theme(s)** Acceptance of differences / Living together / Cultural pluralism
	Post-interview		
	Post-definitions of multiculturalism	*Post-definitions of multicultural education*	
	Theme(s) Cultural pluralism / Unity in diversity / Creating a mainstream culture	**Theme(s)** Equal access to educational opportunities / Beyond multilingualism and ethnic structure / Explanation of cultural differences	

The Initial Definitions of Multiculturalism

Fieldnotes and the initial interviews served as the primary sources for answers to the first part of the research question, which examined the definition of multiculturalism.

Findings regarding multiculturalism, as defined in class. During the second week of class sessions, the course instructor and the participants sometimes tried to create a common definition for both multiculturalism and multicultural education. The findings related to the first part of the research question were generated via the fieldnotes made during this time.

When the course instructor asked students to draw on the readings and provide their own definitions of multiculturalism, only a couple students were able to come up with unique definitions. Based on the participants' responses, the definitions of multicultural education were placed into three themes: (1) acceptance of differences, (2) living together, and (3) cultural pluralism. For instance, one participant defined the theme by saying; "I can describe it as a person who has more than one sub-culture or an environment where more than one sub-culture exists" (*cultural pluralism*) (Gokhan, fieldnotes, February 29, 2016). Then, the instructor asked another student for her definition of multiculturalism, and after the student hesitated and thought about it, she said that she would define the term in the same way that the prior student had. She described multiculturalism as "the presence of different social classes, including different ethnic structures and different cultures" (*cultural pluralism*) (Zeliha, fieldnotes, February 29, 2016). In defining the concept, another participant stated, "multiculturalism can be defined as a means of refusing to assimilate and instead supporting diversity" (*acceptance of differences*) (Harun, fieldnotes, February 29, 2016).

The results of my analysis of fieldnotes showed that the participants were mostly in agreement with regard to the following instructor-generated definitions of multiculturalism:

- Multiculturalism means that everyone lives according to his or her own sub-culture. (*Acceptance of differences* and *living together*)

- Multiculturalism is the acceptance of differences in the natural coexistence of sub-cultures. (*Acceptance of differences*)

- Multiculturalism is an opportunity to allow people of different religions, languages, races, and sects to live together. (*Acceptance of differences and cultural pluralism*)

- The idea of multiculturalism suggests that everyone can live or express his or her own culture as desired (*living together*). (fieldnotes, February 29, 2016)

These definitions indicate that the study participants already had some ideas about diversity issues, differences, and multiculturalism. They knew that multiculturalism had to do with, for example, religion, language, racial differences, and the concepts of sub-cultures and mainstream cultures. Following are the results from the interviews, which are required for the detailed examination of the study participants' understandings of the meaning of the concept of *multicultural*.

Findings regarding multiculturalism, as defined in interviews. Although the study participants came up with different definitions of multiculturalism during their first semi-structured interviews, was able to categorize the definitions as the following three themes: (1) coexistence of cultures, (2) acceptance, (3) and respect. Within these themes, the definitions gathered primarily around the first theme of multicultural understanding, which is "coexistence of sub-cultures." Including the course instructor, five participants' defined multiculturalism such that their definitions were placed in this group.

Coexistence of sub-cultures. I began by examining the course instructor's definition of multiculturalism. In his first interview, the course instructor, Dr. Mehmet, mentioned that he had been teaching the course once a year since 2009, and he had around 15 years of experience teaching courses related to issues of diversity. During this teaching period, he said that he always thought about the definition of multiculturalism and multicultural education, and year-by-year, his definition evolved based on his teaching experiences at the university and social development that had taken place in Turkey and the world. Dr. Mehmet said that his initial understanding of multiculturalism was influenced by experiences he had in his family. He noted that these various experiences were fundamental elements in his formation of the definition of multiculturalism. This was largely due to a large gap in age between Dr. Mehmet and his eldest brother as well as the fact that he was the only person studying at the university on a very limited budget. In his definition, Dr. Mehmet focused primarily on how mainstream cultures can be shaped by sub-cultures. He thought that using communication-based tools and traveling around the world had served as means of increasing awareness regarding diversity and have helped to establish a multicultural society. He said;

> Multiculturalism is a combination of different sub-cultures in societies. People whose subordinate identities are similar create a culture over time. A mainstream culture is formed from the composition of these sub-cultures. If these sub-cultures come together and build a diverse society, which is inevitable, then it becomes impossible to talk about just one culture existing in the world. The awareness of these different cultures has increased with the increased use of transportation facilities and technology, and the increase in migration. (Mehmet, first interview, March 7, 2016)

Adding to this definition, most of the other participants in this group focused on the coexistence of diverse communities within a society. For instance, one participant defined multiculturalism as "the coexistence of different ethnic groups" (Fatma, first interview, March 1,

2016). Coming from a different country that is home to many ethnicities shaped Fatma's understanding of how diversity among ethnic identities constitutes a big part of multiculturalism. When Fatma was four years old, the Kosovo War was underway, and she said that this enabled her to become aware of, for the first time, concepts or terms related to other people's ethnicities, which included *Albanian*, *Turkish*, and *Serbian*. She believed that such distinctions existed before the war began, but she was unaware of them. Fatma also stated that, during elementary school, secondary school, high school, and even in college, she became friends with classmates who came from every ethnic group in her country and who had very different religious backgrounds.

Another participant, Harun, offered a definition for the concept of multiculturalism that was very similar to the one that Fatma provided. The only difference is, while Fatma specifically mentioned different ethnic groups in her definition, Harun focused primarily on the "*bir arada yaşama*" ('coexistence') of different cultures without specifying what might define those cultures. Harun mentioned that the graduate program he had completed before beginning the current program had shaped his ideas about multiculturalism. He talked about his previous education in the language and literature department, which involved studying and debating many foreign authors' works and the subjects about which they wrote. Harun said that since these books focus primarily on the existence of multilingual issues in society, multilingualism is, in his mind, central to the definition of multiculturalism. He also stated that he has often heard the terms "*çokkültürlülük*" ('multiculturalism') and "*çokdillilik*" ('multilingualism'), but he said that he had never distinguished between these two terms. According to Harun, multiculturalism is the coexistence of "different cultures" (Harun, first interview, March 5, 2016).

Gokhan and Olcay both considered the concept of multiculturalism a little differently than the aforementioned participants. These participants suggested that differences in people's characteristics account for multiculturalism within society. Gokhan, for example, defined multiculturalism as "the environment in which people who have more than one culture coexist" (Gokhan, first interview, March 7, 2016). Gokhan works in a military school where everyone looks the same thanks to the fact that they all wear the same uniform. Because of this, he did not initially consider people's individual differences. Over time, however, he realized that the students at the school all had different socioeconomic status. It eventually occurred to Gokhan that, despite the level of equality that the school uniforms afforded the students, the students were different in terms of the regions from which they came, their socioeconomic status, their ethnic structures, and their sects. This led Gokhan to the idea that school is a multicultural environment.

In offering her definition, another participant said,

"Multiculturalism is the coexistence of people who have different characteristics within a society. It can be ethnicity, language, religion, skin color, eye color, anything that is different. Diversity is multiculturalism for me. (Olcay, first interview, March 9, 2016).

Olcay was the first person to specify people's personal characteristics as a means of establishing diversity in society. Before taking the course, Olcay understood that she was an individual from the dominant culture in Turkey, but she also began thinking about multiculturalism and individual differences. During her interview, she talked about her experience with conflicts between two different students' groups, one group of children from a community whose members are only slightly represented in Turkey and a group of other students whose members are well represented in the country. According to Olcay, very serious problems emerged as students did not want to approach the minority students and felt prejudice toward them. She said that she began to focus on these issues for the first time when she noticed that the students from the different groups refused to work on school activities together. She believed that spending time letting the students know that there is beauty in differences and that differences do not make people bad would prompt her students to begin to view differences via a more positive lens. While Gokhan's and Olcay's definitions seem similar to those of Fatma and Harun, they are more evolved perhaps in that they take into account the personalities of the people who make a society and that shape the multicultural environment.

One participant, Rana, came from an especially diverse family and had more diverse experiences throughout her life. She concluded that her diverse background helped her to come up with a more appropriate definition of multiculturalism. She defined it as the

> Coexistence of different ways of thinking, different ethnic backgrounds, different socio-economic situations, and gender. My definitions might be affected by how my parents raised me. They have always taught me to respect differences and to love people simply because they are human beings. (Rana, first interview, March 10, 2016).

Rana said she always noticed that when she left the region of Turkey where she lived, people tended to behave differently toward her because of her ethnic background. She first experienced this when she was in the 5th grade and one of her friends said that she had a different sectarian background. Rana did not understand why her friend noted the difference between them, and this was because Rana's family "never discussed the differences among people but taught respect" (Rana, first interview, March 10, 2016).

Acceptance. Some participants' initial definitions of multiculturalism were grouped together within the acceptance theme. Two study participants suggested that respectfully accepting differences is the important element of internalizing the diversity in Turkey. For instance, one participant stated, "Multiculturalism is the respectful acceptance of the existence of various groups of people" (Zeliha, first interview, March 4, 2016). She said that she first became aware of people's differences when she was in the 2nd grade. Having moved to a new city after the earthquake of 1999, Zeliha had the opportunity to get to know people who were very diverse culturally and who were from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

According to Zeliha, a family who emigrated from Iran to Turkey made the biggest impression on her. She was very surprised by their lifestyle and their clothing styles, which were unlike any she had seen before. Zeliha believed that the development of her view regarding multiculturalism has been greatly influenced by her education at a private university in Istanbul. She mentioned that having many friends from different countries, from east and west of Turkey, allowed her the opportunity to get together with people associated with different orientations and different cultures. Further, she stated that talking to these people and becoming familiar with them and their ways of life helped her to both recognize them for who they are and find commonalities among them. She mentioned that her 4-year university education helped her to assume an even more positive outlook with regard to people's differences. Zeliha also said that she learned to become more tolerant of her family. Finally, she noted that she has not had any difficulty in accepting people's differences because she grew up in an environment where no one was alienated.

Similarly, Nalan, another participant stated, "If culture is everything a person does, multiculturalism is the result of accepting and respecting all of these different people" (Nalan, first interview, March 3, 2016). She said that she really began to understand differences among people when she was a first grader and noticed that boys and girls were often separated because of gender. Nalan noted that her societal observations are central to her definition of multiculturalism. She believed that Turkey is a country where some ideas dominate other ideas. She believed that she might have enough information about the differences in Turkey. In addition to being aware of people's differences, Nalan said that she spent a lot of time thinking about how differences should be integrated into life in general.

Respect. Under this theme, two students focused primarily on respecting differences in their definitions. One participant, Mete, defined it as "having respect for different cultures, being non-discriminatory, accepting all differences, and behaving equally with regard to all cultures"(Mete, first interview, March 9, 2016). Mete stated that, since his childhood, his family advised him to not discriminate against people. For example, when there were students from different ethnic and religious backgrounds in a classroom, they usually had only small groups of friends, but no one in Mete's family discussed the differences. They were, however, discussed in friends' homes because those

friends were aware of these distinctions. Mete believed that having his family to provide this sort of education helped to shape his understanding of multiculturalism.

In addition, another participant, Ayse, combined ideas about having respect and living together such that she was able to offer a more advanced definition of multiculturalism. She said, "Multiculturalism means to me to respect differences. People can be completely different with regard to their outer appearances, their spirits, etc., but people should be able to live together and respect one another regardless of their differences" (Ayse, first interview, March 10, 2016). Ayse stated that she found it unfortunate that she had learned about the existence of differences in Turkey thanks to bad experiences in elementary school. Especially in primary school, Ayse had a number of friends who came from the east part of Turkey, and they felt that their teachers behaved differently toward them than they did toward their peers; they believed that their teachers mostly ignored them. This caused other students to begin to ignore them, and Ayse eventually noticed this and saw that it was wrong. According to Ayse, one of the reasons behind why the students adopted these attitudes had to do with the teachers' attitudes. Ayse stated that she grew up in a place where most of the people were the same and there were few differences.

The Initial Definitions of Multicultural Education

Based on the participants' responses, the definitions of multicultural education were placed into two themes: (1) integration of differences and (2) equality of opportunity. The results indicate that, within these groups, the definitions of multicultural education were mostly aggregated within the theme of integration of differences.

Integration of differences. Ayse believed that teachers should be capable of integrating students' diverse backgrounds into the education system. She said, "Multicultural education is the use of differences in education. It refers to the education of students by tending to these differences and paying more attention to them" (Ayse, first interview, March 10, 2016). Although another participant, Harun, stated that schools need to provide equal opportunities for all individuals within sub-cultures, he believed that the first role of the school must be to properly integrate those differences into the education system. He said, "The school environment must be organized accordingly such that multicultural education can take place. Multicultural education aims to recognize different cultures, respect them and integrate them" (Harun, first interview, March 5, 2016). According to Harun, this integration helps to create a mainstream culture that makes for a multicultural country where sub-cultures are represented on equal footing and there is no one sub-culture that dominates others.

Nalan also believed that integration of differences would positively affect students' behaviors. When diverse groups begin to interact, and get to know one another, they are more likely to decrease their levels of prejudice. In her definition, Nalan said,

> People who come from diverse backgrounds can be educated with others. I define multicultural education as cultural exchanges, interactions, and learning about the cultures of others. Students should not be educated on a single line; they should be educated in different directions. (Nalan, first interview, March 3, 2016)

Rana's definition, however, was largely centered on the integration of students who come from different races, cultures and socio-economic classes. According to Rana, multicultural education can be defined as "introducing the characteristics of students to each other, integrating these characteristics into education, and offering opportunities for students from different races, cultures, and socio-economic environments" (Rana, first interview, March 10, 2016). According to Mete, eliminating inequity from all educational institutions might be the main purpose of multicultural education. He said,

> Multicultural education aims to eliminate discrimination and support the understanding of the culture, to facilitate communication among different groups, to ensure that

individuals are self-confident, to live within a common culture, and to create a common culture by integrating these various cultures. (Mete, first interview, March 9, 2016)

This response indicates that a connection among all minor groups of people is important to the creation of a national-wide culture in Turkey.

Equality of opportunity. According to Dr. Mehmet, the main purpose of multicultural education is to design curriculum for all people in order to offer equal access to educational opportunities and their benefits. He said, "Multicultural education is an educational philosophy that supports understanding different cultures and providing justice and equal learning opportunities for all. I think it is an approach to better facilitate teaching activities"(Dr. Mehmet, first interview, March 7, 2016). Olcay and Gokhan provided definitions similar to that of Dr. Mehmet. They defined multicultural education as a means of providing equality for all students. Olcay stated, "Multicultural education is the education of individuals from different cultures in a society where many cultures coexist. In multicultural education, equal opportunities are provided for all cultures, and students are introduced to other cultures"(Olcay, first interview, March 9, 2016). In addition, Gokhan defined multicultural education as "[multicultural education is] an education that will enable students to benefit equally from all possibilities in an environment where people with more than one culture exist" (Gokhan, first interview, March 7, 2016). Although Fatma briefly made note of several aspects of multicultural education, such as having respect and reducing prejudice, she essentially focused on the equality of diversity in the classroom. According to Fatma, multicultural education is

[multicultural education is] an approach that tolerates differences in the education system and provides equal opportunities. Multicultural education should ensure that those who receive education establish and maintain a sense of respect for differences, discard their prejudices, accept those who are different, and recognize that these differences are not something people can choose. (Fatma, first interview, March 1, 2016)

Final Definitions of Multiculturalism

At the end of the course, I conducted another semi-structured interview with each participant to learn his or her final thoughts about multiculturalism and multicultural education. Though there may be some similarities between the participants' initial definitions and their final definitions, some participants came up with slightly different definitions or expanded on their earlier definitions of multiculturalism. Based on these definitions, I created three themes: (1) tolerance, (2) cultural pluralism, and (3) creating a mainstream culture.

Unity in diversity. One participant, Fatma, defined multiculturalism as the "interactions of more than one culture and people from more than one culture living together peacefully" (Fatma, final interview, June 17, 2016). Unlike her earlier definition, Fatma's final definition of multicultural understanding is rooted in unity. In addition, Fatma, referring only to the unity of differences in her first definition, refers to the importance of living in peace in her final definition. Another participant, Olcay, emphasized the importance of accepting differences as a normal thing. She defined the concept as "a place where one or more cultures live together and accept one another's differences as normal human differences" (Olcay, final interview, July 9, 2016). As she did in her first definition, Olcay based her final definition on the concept of unity. In her first definition, however, Olcay suggested specific differences, but in her second definition, she generalized by referring to humanity as a whole.

To create a strong definition, one participant, Rana, named many possible sub-cultures when making reference to differences. According to Rana, multiculturalism is

The societal diversity that occurs when people from different races, religions, languages and cultural groups come together to live, work, trade, participate in political life and engage in cultural interaction. In other words, it is a society in which

individuals of different ages, sexual orientations, disabilities, social classes, ethnicities, religions, languages, and cultural characteristics live together. (Rana, final interview, June 23, 2016)

Rana was the only person who adhered to her first definition when providing her final definition. Both definitions suggest very similar understandings and are rooted in concepts such as respecting differences and living together.

Gokhan noted the importance of equality between two or more cultural groups, and he also made an important distinction between *creating a monotype* and *creating a mainstream culture*. Gokhan stated, "Multiculturalism refers to the positive, equal-gratification and glorification of cultural diversity. Advocates of multiculturalism should be opposed to the assimilation of different groups and of a monotype society" (Gokhan, final interview, August 15, 2016). It is obvious that Gokhan expanded on his understanding of multiculturalism and thus expanded on his earlier definition. In his first definition, he referred to the coexistence of different cultures, and his later definition referred to multiculturalism as the equality of differences and being against assimilation politics.

Cultural pluralism. The second theme in this section is cultural pluralism. Two participants defined multiculturalism such that their definitions were categorized into this theme. One participant, Mete, mentioned that multiculturalism should not serve as a means of dividing the country. According to Mete, multiculturalism involves "differences are not a sort of tension; it is the idea of considering all people in terms of cultural and moral richness such that our horizons are broadened and laws are formed via the pluralistic environment in which we live" (Mete, final interview, August 13, 2016). In his first interview, Mete's definition mostly had to do with respect for differences. However, at the end of the course, he added some new notions and understandings to his definition of multiculturalism, and he made it accountable for a pluralistic society.

In her definition, another participant, Ayse, focused primarily on resistance to assimilation. According to Ayse, multiculturalism means that

Sub-cultures in society, such as those related to different ethnicities, languages, races, religions, economic levels, sexual orientations, are accepted and that society is sensitized to them. We can say that it is a state of being multicultural. It has emerged against assimilation policies. Our main goal is to give cultural diversity the opportunity to grow strong and to thrive. (Ayse, final interview, June 22, 2016)

Compared to her first definition, Ayse's final definition could be considered more controversial in terms of the topics it addresses such as sexual orientation and religion. She expanded on her definition of multiculturalism such that it came to be more than simply having respect. In her final definition, she noted that assimilation policies would not be helpful to Turkey; rather, accepting differences would help to make the country more culturally rich.

Creating a mainstream culture. In the final theme, two participants defined multiculturalism related to creating a mainstream culture within society. One participant, Harun, wrote that people could create a multicultural society without interactions between social and cultural groups. According to Harun, "Even if sub-cultures (e.g., those related to race, gender, socio-economic status, age) do not communicate with each other, they can live together by creating a mainstream culture" (Harun, final interview, August 2, 2016). In his final definition, Harun thought that people should be gathered around a generally accepted mainstream culture regardless of their diverse backgrounds. According to the participant, communication is not necessary to create a common mainstream culture. His first definition noted primarily the importance of living together; however, he added to this the idea that, beyond living together, people should create a mainstream culture.

Another participant, Zeliha, believed that recognizing cultural differences is the best way to go about creating a mainstream culture within society. She defined multiculturalism as follows:

More than one culture should be accepted. Multiculturalism is the recognition of various cultural elements, such as race, language, sexual orientation, gender, age, social class, education, religious orientation, and the continuity of the lives of individuals with different cultural characteristics. In other words, multiculturalism is a mixture of cultural elements that constitute a social phenomenon and is formed via the common values they share. (Zeliha, final interview, July 13, 2016)

Although Zeliha grounded both her first and final definitions of multiculturalism in the acceptance of existing groups of people in society, she was more specific regarding the different groups, such as those related to race, language, gender, and age, in her final definition. According to Zeliha, multicultural education is a concept that goes beyond "accepting differences in people; it is also a social phenomenon created by these diverse groups of people" (Zeliha, final interview, July 13, 2016).

Final Definitions of Multicultural Education

The findings related to final definitions of multiculturalism and multicultural education has been divided into three themes.

Beyond multilingualism and ethnic structure. One participant, Mete, noted that whether or not students come from the dominant culture in a society, they should have access to equal opportunities. According to Mete,

[Multicultural education is] an education given to all students from different racial, ethnic and social groups to create equal educational opportunities, to organize the school environment according to the students, to recognize differences based on cultural characteristics, to accept differences as normal, and to respect and tolerate these differences. (Mete, final interview, August 13, 2016)

Mete stated that multicultural education calls for policies that enrich cultural awareness in schools. In both of his definitions, he mentioned the importance of diverse groups of people being able to live together.

Harun believed that this course provided him with an opportunity to see that multiculturalism and multicultural education do not only mean educating people who know more than one language. He said,

Before the course, multiculturalism and multilingualism were one and the same to me. I now understand that differences are more than this, and some things that I did not previously think of as differences are indeed differences, and people should be educated together regardless of their differences. (Harun, final interview, August 2, 2016)

As Harun mentioned, his new definition goes beyond the concept of "multilingualism," and he began to recognize that multicultural education is not only a means of bilingual education; rather, it also encompasses the many different aspects of diversity as it exists in society.

"I understood that the concept of multicultural education is not only rooted in ethnic differences; it can depend on many things" said Olcay. She believed,

[There is] no single culture that can or should shape the truth in a given society. And multicultural education can effectively lead students to understand cultural differences and thus eliminate misinformation regarding those differences.(Olcay, final interview, July 9, 2016)

Instead of defining multicultural education, Olcay talked about the possible functions of multicultural education in society. Thought she defined it in her first definition as providing equal opportunities for people associated with different cultures, her final definition consisted primarily of discussion regarding the elimination of misunderstandings regarding differences as a function of multicultural education.

Another participant, Zeliha, talked about how the structure of schools should change and how new policies should be made in order to support diversity in schools. She said:

> Multicultural education not only has to do with respect for differences, but it also involves transforming educational services and policies so that they account for these differences and produce a system that appeals to everyone. It is an education that considers the differences and restructures the education system starting from the physical structure of the school, the ideas of the people, the curriculum used, and the content of the education. (Zeliha, second interview, July 13, 2016)

According to one participant, Rana, multicultural education has to do with more than racial and language differences. She said,

> This concept used to make me think only of racial or language differences. I have learned, however, that there are different parts of multicultural education, not just teaching differences as they pertain to race, language or religion. I see that age groups, sex, and gender orientation are also related to multicultural education. (Rana, final interview, June 23, 2016)

She added new categories to her final definition. She said that multicultural education is not only for the people from diverse racial and language backgrounds; rather, she believed that other differences, such as those related to age, gender, sex orientation, should be a part of education. However, she mentioned only what issues might be related to multicultural education; she did not fully define what the function of multicultural education is or how it would be implemented.

Explanation of cultural differences. Nalan believed multicultural education to be the best means of incorporating differences into the education system in order to create an environment conducive to teaching about cultural differences. According to Nalan, "Multicultural education is to wonder about the differences and to adapt them to education" (Nalan, final interview, July 2, 2016). Nalan's pre-course and post-course definitions are similar, but her final definition places greater emphasis on the importance of creating culturally diverse environments.

Gokhan made a distinction in his knowledge between the theoretical and practical foundations of multicultural education. He said:

> I thought I had some ideas about these concepts in theory and in practice in terms of respect for different cultures, intercultural understanding and tolerance, but since completing this course, I can see how useful and necessary these concepts are, especially when I look at the dimensions of education. Of course, when we assess this through this lens, we are able to better see the various political and social perspectives regarding the many problems that exist in Turkey. We are experiencing intercultural conflict, and I think that this lesson will serve as a good foundation upon which to learn the causes of the conflict and to generate possible solutions. (Gokhan, final interview, August 15, 2016)

Gokhan's more in-depth, post-course explanation of multicultural education referred back to some components of his previous definition. In addition, he believed that multicultural education might also be the best way to find solutions for social problems and intercultural conflicts that exist in Turkey.

Equal access to educational opportunities. The definitions of multicultural education have also been separated into a theme referred to as "equal access to educational opportunities". Ayse suggested that schooling components (e.g., curricula, teachers) should be arranged based on students' cultural differences such that all students are privy to the same educational opportunities. She said:

> Multicultural education, as an applied concept, is expected to have a positive impact on school curricula, educational strategies, even teachers', students' and parents' relations with each other, supporting critical pedagogy and democratic bases of justice. The main objectives of an educator adopting this idea are to remove the inequalities that stem from cultural differences and help the students to develop positive intercultural behaviors, perspectives and attitudes. It is a philosophy based on respect for diversity that requires more empathy for diversity in society. (Ayse, final interview, June 22, 2016)

According to Ayse, multicultural education is a concept that involves encouraging students to assume positive attitudes with regard to diversity. Although her previous definition focused on the utilization of differences in education, her final definition included additional elements such as establishing intercultural understandings, empathy development, and promoting equality in education.

Finally, another participant, Fatma, notes that multicultural education is comprised of multiple dimensions that allow for equal educational opportunities. She defined multicultural education as a means of promoting "respect for individuals in order to increase tolerance and equality, improving justice and empathy, and reducing prejudice and discrimination" (Fatma, final interview, June 17, 2016). Fatma was the only participant who defined multicultural education very similarly before and after the course. However, her first definition centered on providing equal opportunities for diverse groups of people, while her final definition centered on reducing prejudice and creating empathy for diversity.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

According to the findings, all study participants had an idea of what multiculturalism and multicultural education were before the course. During the course, they improved upon and enhanced their understandings and thoughts; however, they still need to extend their perspectives so as to more fully understand what those concepts mean.

According to Nieto (1994), individuals may understand the concepts of multiculturalism at four levels: tolerance, acceptance, respect, and affirmation, solidarity and critique. While they did not seem to fully understand the concept of multiculturalism via the first and final levels, the study participants did seem to understand the concept per Nieto's other two levels. Nieto (1994) claimed that if teachers are in the first level of multicultural understanding, the tolerance level, then they can acknowledge students' differences, but they are not yet able to fully notice "why some students are more successful than others" (p. 4). If the teachers are in the second level of multicultural understanding, the acceptance level, then they can acknowledge students' differences, and their differences would thus never be denied nor belittled. In the third level of multicultural understanding, the respect level, teachers should hold in high esteem the differences and diverse backgrounds of the students, and not just try to help the students to adapt to the mainstream culture in the classroom; it should also support the teachers throughout their education. It requires more interaction between parents, teachers, and schools, and students' experiences (Nieto, 1994; Nieto & Bode, 2008). Finally, the last level of multicultural understanding, the affirmation, solidarity and critique level, requires teachers to assume responsibility and support students in critiquing their own cultures as well as those of others in order to understand the differences.

When teacher and teacher candidates' definitions of multiculturalism were examined, it was concluded that their understandings of the concept were most aligned with Nieto's acceptance and respect levels. Further, findings indicate that study participants are more aware of their students'

diverse backgrounds and that they are beyond the tolerance level of multicultural understanding even though, prior to this course, they never took any formal education courses related to multiculturalism or multicultural education.

At the end of the course, however, it appeared that the participants' understandings of multiculturalism had not reached the affirmation, solidarity and critique level, which is the last level they must reach in order to fully understand and apply the concept of multiculturalism. Without reaching this level, Nieto (1994) claimed that one's understanding of multiculturalism would remain at the romantic stage, which does not allow teachers to criticize their own or others' cultures.

Nevertheless, when we examine participants' definitions of multicultural education, we see that their definitions included concepts associated with Nieto's (2004) definition of multicultural education, which was used for this research. According to Nieto's (2004), multicultural education is to redesign the school to appeal to all students, to ignore all racist ideas in school culture, and to develop a pluralist thought system in students. Further, per Nieto, starting from this pluralist system of thinking, multicultural education is also defined as the reconstruction of the curriculum that will be strengthened by the connection among teachers, schools, students, and families. When we look at the definitions participants provided at the beginning of the study, we could see that the first perceptions of multicultural education were primarily shaped by the integration of differences into the education system and the reorganization of educational opportunities to offer equal opportunities to all kinds of differences in schools. Despite the fact some participants' definitions of multicultural education included some concepts introduced by scholars, it was observed that at the beginning of the study, there were still deficiencies in participants' abilities to explain this concept.

In addition, with regard to the definitions of multicultural education that the participants shared at the end of the study, we can see that the participants further elaborated on their definitions; that is, they provided more specific examples that served to strengthen their definitions and make them increasingly similar to Nieto's definition of the concept. While explaining their latest perceptions of multicultural education, participants were found to have broadened their definitions beyond those they shared earlier in the study. According to a number of participants, their definitions of multicultural education were reshaped, and this kind of educational system is not merely a necessity of multilingualism and ethnic difference, but it is the integration of every kind of difference that is considered to exist in society in within the educational environment. There are also participants who think that this concept is a way to teach to others the range of cultural structures that exist within and among individuals. Lastly, the issue of equal access of all individuals to educational opportunities, which is an issue that participants noted during their first interviews, was discussed again in the final interviews; in their final interviews, participants suggested that multicultural education is a way to equalize access to these opportunities.

Further, when we assess participants' final definitions of multiculturalism and multicultural education, we can say that the teachers and teacher candidates who participated in the study have also developed similar understandings regarding the aims of multicultural education created by Sleeter and Grant (2007). According to Sleeter and Grant, allowing for cultural pluralism and providing equal access to opportunities are the primary components of the goals of multicultural education. Most of the participants mentioned that multiculturalism is an indispensable system of thought for a society designed according to the concept of pluralism. Thus, after establishing a society in which the idea of pluralism has been established, they argued that it is inevitable that the education system should become a structure that provides individuals with equal access to equal opportunities. Additionally, with regard to the provision rooted in pluralism that ensures equal access to opportunities for all regardless of background, nearly all of the participants argued that society will create a common culture and protect the structure of unity. It is evident that these ideas broadly overlap with the goals of multicultural education set out by scholars such as Sleeter and Grant, and Nieto, who have had a say in multicultural education and have framed this study.

This study specifically examined the understandings of multiculturalism and multicultural education among teachers and teacher candidates enrolled in a MULT-500 graduate level course. The research findings suggest that teachers' and teacher candidates' understandings of multiculturalism and multicultural education have been shaped via their previous experiences related to diversity, their classroom experiences, and the MULT-500 course instruction. Future studies can examine these two target groups separately and compare the findings with those from this study.

The research findings also indicate that participants' understandings did not reach the highest level of multicultural understanding. Having less teaching experience and being new graduates not assigned to a classroom could affect their understanding. It would be worthwhile to conduct a study with experienced teachers in Turkey. Their rich experiences and the challenges they face may add deeper perspectives to the literature.

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