



## **Examining Intercultural Interactions from the Primary School Students & Teachers' Perspective of Ardakan City: A Comparative Analysis at the Spatial Level of Class and Individual**

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### **Abstract**

Migration has become an international challenge that has affected all social institutions, especially the educational system, in terms of changing the composition of the cultural context of students. Therefore, intercultural communication is the key to creating social harmony. The aim of research was to analyze intercultural interactions from the perspective of primary school students and their teachers in Ardakan City, using grounded theory method. The research field includes teachers and pupils of different ethnic groups in Ardakan City, and purposeful sampling methods (semi-structured interview & free group interview) for data collection and open, central, and selective coding methods for data analysis were used, respectively. The findings of the research point to three similarities between the views of teachers and students and two basic differences: Effectiveness of intercultural interactions makes students more prepared to accept and choose a transformational strategy and live in a multicultural society under the influence of age characteristics. In contrast, teachers' efforts to ignore and downplay cultural differences are based on emphasizing the national and systemic curriculum and devoting more time. The results of the research indicate that intercultural interactions in immigrant-accepting areas should be considered by policymakers and educational planners in order to reduce tensions and lead to intercultural synergy.

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## Introduction

During the 20th century and especially the last two decades of the new millennium, the world has witnessed an upward trend of migration from poor, underdeveloped and developing regions to rich, advanced and developing countries. Global estimates indicated that there were about 281 million international migrants in 2020, which is equivalent to 3.6% of the total world population (United Nations, 2022). Many research indicated that various economic, geographical, environmental, political and cultural reasons lead to the formation of distinct patterns for migration (Muus, 2003; Binder & Tosic, 2005; Bakewell, 2007; Czaika, & Reinprecht, 2022; Horwood, Frouws, & Forin, 2019). At the national level and within countries, the process of internal migration has expanded (Chan, 2008; Lall, Selod & Shalizi, 2006 ; International Organization for Migration, 2005; Lucas, 2015).

Immigration has many positive and negative consequences and affects all social institutions in both groups of immigrant-accepting and immigrant-sending countries. One of the first outcomes of immigration is change of social, cultural, ethnic, racial and linguistic context of the host society. For example, in many European countries, USA, Canada and Australia, the racial, ethnic, linguistic & religious diversity of the population is increasing (Baptiste, 2015). This change of social background is not limited to continents and countries, and it can be seen within

countries as well. When faced with demographic changes - and one of its primary consequences, that is cultural context change -, people demonstrate different reactions.(jahandide,2021). In this regard, Bennett (1986: 180-195) points to a six-stage process for cultural differences:

- First Stage: Denial of intercultural differences, which means avoiding acceptance of other cultures. It happens when a person thinks her/his culture is the only perfect culture and withdraws from other cultures.

- Second Stage: Defending the superiority and uniqueness of self-culture against intercultural differences. At this stage, the person considers her/his culture to be the only good culture that has been experienced.

- Third Stage: Minimization of intercultural differences, in the sense of universalizing one's own culture and trivializing others. It occurs when a person considers all her/his cultural elements as comprehensive and considers others as unimportant.

- Fourth Stage: Acceptance of intercultural differences through curiosity and respect for other cultures. It is when a person considers her/his culture to be only one of the existing cultures. At this stage, people are curious about cross-cultural differences and at the same time look at them with respect.

- Fifth Stage: Adapting to intercultural differences means adapting oneself to others, in which the experience of other cultures is

understood and creates appropriate behavior for the individual.

•Sixth Stage: Integration of intercultural differences means cultural change and shows the situation where the individual's experience of self develops to change inside and outside intercultural views.

Now, the main question is how this process of change occurs in the individual. It is obvious that the main social system responsible for preparing and educating people to live in a culturally diverse society is the educational system. In fact, one of the consequences of immigration that has received less attention from researchers is its effects on the educational system, schools, classes and students (Ohinata & van Ours, 2013). The entry of non-native pupils into the class and school is the first effective factor in changing the "conventional culture" of the society through the entry of immigrant cultures. Every immigrant has a different cultural, ethnic, linguistic and social background for the host society. While the policymakers of educational systems in many societies plan for schools without considering the diversity of cultures, migration shows the importance of attention to the racial, ethnic, cultural and linguistic characteristics of learners - and living in a multicultural society (Vertovec, 2023).

The main issue of the current research is that Iran's society has been severely affected by the phenomenon of immigration during the last four

decades. From the perspective of this phenomenon, Iran has an exceptional situation among the countries of the world in three aspects: First, it is a country that accepts immigrants in such a way that thousands of people from Afghanistan and Iraq have entered it as refugees over the past four decades (UNHCR, 2021); Secondly, it is an immigrant-sending country in such a way that according to informal statistics, about 10 million Iranians have resided in other countries and the trend of Iranian immigration has been upward without exception during the last four decades (Halajzadeh, 2017) and thirdly, internal migration has been a terrible acceleration from border areas to central regionals and from villages to cities, so that on average, about one million people have migrated from poor districts to prosperous areas every year (Mohamedian & Mohammadiani, 2018).

Internal migration in Iran is strongly affected by its social context. In fact, like many countries, Iran has a population with a lot of ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious diversity; collective identities such as Lor, Baloch, Turkmen, Turks, Arabs, Kurds, and Persians. Except for the Persians (who as an ethnic majority mainly live in the capital or central regions of the country & big cities), the rest of the ethnic groups live in the border regions and provinces, geographical areas that in terms of economic variables - such as the type of livelihood (agriculture, industry,

services), level of income, wealth & employment and degree of development - compared to the central regions have a weaker position. The consequence of this situation is the intensification of internal migrations. For example, according to the results of the latest population & housing census, Tehran and Yazd provinces - two provinces that have a better situation in terms of economic variables - have accepted the largest number of internal immigrants (Iran Statistical Center, 2015). According to the same census, the number of internal immigrants entering Yazd province is 82,203 people, which accounts for more than 7.2% of the total population of this province (Ali Mandegari, 2018). In the meantime, Ardakan city with a population density equal to 3.3 in the period of 2006-2011 and with a net amount of internal migration equal to 6.2 is one of the areas with high immigration acceptance in this province (Shawazi & Asgari 2018). The director of Ardakan Education Department, announced that schools have accepted students - according to the national code - from 163 different cities of Iran (A.Kargar, group speech, 1401). In recent years, this city has seen an increase in the presence of non-native workers, especially from the western regions of Iran with different ethnic & linguistic background, due to lack of labor force for industrial factories (steel, tile, glass, textile, lime baking, asphalt, brick and sand production industries) (Shahabizad, 2019). Naturally, this demographic

change has various social consequences. One of the outcomes is changing the cultural context of schools through the arrival of immigrant students with different cultural backgrounds. In this situation, the interaction of parents with the school, students with each other, and students with the teacher & school principal are affected by the new cultural context. Empirical evidence as well as the lived experience of the principal researcher - as an Ardakani and teacher - indicates the impact of the migration phenomenon on both groups of teachers and students in the primary schools.

Undoubtedly, the recognition of cultural diversity is one of the most basic functions of modern education systems (UNESCO, 2014). In order to reduce the challenges resulting from demographic changes and difficulties arising from living in a multicultural society, the first step should be to identify and analyze cultural interactions based on the lived experience of members - such as teachers and students. Before stating the problem of the current research, let us take a look at the findings of previous researches regarding the effects of the multicultural phenomenon on teachers and students:

Mamat, Hashim, Razalli, & Awang (2022) in their research "Strengthening relations between multi-ethnic students in Malaysia" found that when children are exposed to elements of different cultures, they can develop a sense of acceptance and a tolerant attitude.

Metzner et al. (2022) examined "experiences of discrimination and everyday racism among children & adolescents with a migrant background: results of a systematic literature review on the impact of discrimination on the development of minors around the world" concluded that racial discrimination experienced by children is a negative predictor related to their mental and physical health. This research could not find a clear and obvious connection between discrimination and racism with academic performance. Grütter et al. (2021) in the research "Beyond Diversity: Caring Role of the Teacher in Interethnic Relations" and based on social network analysis highlighted that if the teacher's care is low, there is more in-group favoritism among German students. In addition, these researchers found that distance was more closely related to in-group prejudice, although this relationship was moderated by teacher care. Zamroni, et al. (2021) in research entitled "Intercultural Competence in Multicultural Education in Indonesian and New Zealand High Schools" shows that the intercultural competence of Indonesian and New Zealand students is quite similar, even though the multicultural education practices in these countries are different. Sari & Yüce (2020) by "investigating the challenges of classrooms with multicultural students" pointed out the problems that teachers, students and parents experience and believe that these multicultural problems challenge

the goals of curriculum.

Velarde, Adams, & Ghani (2020) emphasized leadership role of multicultural secondary school principals in Malaysia and believe that principals with cultural intelligence can help maintain a positive learning environment. According to these authors, the high level of cultural intelligence of school principals can be explained through the following characteristics: Interaction with people of different cultures; knowledge of values, religions & customs; adjustment of cultural knowledge; awareness of cultural knowledge; and changing verbal & non-verbal language. Arifin (2019) in research conducted in Indonesia under the title "Role of Citizen Education in the Formation of Diversity Attitudes" found that civic education can play an important role in the formation of tolerance attitudes in students' social interactions and creating tolerance in their relationships. This can be done by professional teachers. Nishina, Lewis, Bellmore, & Witkow (2019) in research entitled "Ethnic Diversity and Inclusive School Environment" admit that job needs have caused changes in the ethnic context of schools. These authors have suggested four to facilitate friendly relations between students with different backgrounds: 1. Diverse texture in the classroom; 2, creating a positive ethnic identity for minorities; 3, Multicultural education and collaborative learning and 4, promoting social competence and social behaviors. Glock, Kovacs, &

Pitten Cate (2019) in the research "Teachers' Attitudes towards Ethnic Minority Students: Effects of Cultural Diversity in Schools" showed that teachers who work in ethnically diverse schools and deal with students of different ethnicities have an implicit attitude were less negative about these students, while teachers who only have an idea of schools with more ethnic diversity have more negative implicit attitudes, and the challenges and negative stereotypes of these teachers are related to their ideas of culturally diverse schools. Juvonen et al. (2019) in the article "Promoting Social Inclusion in Education Environments: Opportunities & Challenges" to facilitate inclusion which includes (acceptance of peers and friendships between groups) recommend that teachers and school administrators should be aware of group and interpersonal dynamics. Also, teachers should understand that common but old ways of teaching highlight the differences and widen the gaps. The need for professional training and development of teachers is the most important result of this research. Yasmin Ahmad et al. (2018) in research entitled "Mutual Ethnic Friendship between Multi-ethnic Students and Teacher's Role in Supporting Cultural Diversity in the School" highlighted that ethnically diverse schools help students to have more friends and leads to reducing prejudice, strengthening the sense of common identity and intimacy among people. Thijs & Verkuyten

(2014) by examining "School Ethnic Diversity and Students' Inter-ethnic Relations" found that ethnic diversity in schools is not enough to promote inter-ethnic tolerance and the role of factors such as multicultural education, teacher-student relations, peer norms and role of parents should be considered. According to Fass (2013) in the research "Ethnic Diversity and Education in National Educational Systems: Issues Related to Politics and Identity", ethnic diversity is one of the major challenges of education in countries, especially in societies that are changing in terms of cultural diversity. Banks (1997) explains in the article "Multicultural Education: Features and Goals" that in multicultural schools, all pupils should have equal opportunities to succeed. In his opinion, teachers who focus only on the experiences of the dominant culture in their teaching and ignore the cultural experiences of other ethnic, racial & linguistic groups have negative consequences for both groups of students of the dominant culture and minority students.

Many researches have also been conducted in Iran. For example, Bagher Najad et al. (2021) in research entitled "Challenges and Necessities of Realizing a Multicultural Curriculum in a Centralized Educational System" criticized the Iran educational system for changing the curriculum in favor of multicultural education and respect for traditions and customs of different ethnic groups. Safarieh & Rezaei (2019) by examining the challenges of teaching

Persian language in multicultural classrooms point out the most important challenges for teachers are as follows: Lack of interaction between first and second languages, lack of a suitable curriculum for multicultural students, and lack of mastery of learners in formal language. Hamidzadeh, Fathi Vajargah, Arefi & Mehran (2016) in a research entitled "Systematic Analysis of Teachers' Perception of Multicultural Education" showed that despite teachers' interest; their knowledge about multicultural education is little. Sadeghi (2013) believes that the policies related to the implementation of the "National Curriculum Document of Iran" lack the characteristics and components of multicultural education. Iraqih, Fathi Vajargah, Foroughi Abri & Fazali (2013) in their research namely "Evaluation of Ethnicity in the Hidden Curriculum" show that schools with non-curricular programs seek more integration and the plurality of interests and cultures has no place in them.

As mentioned in the previous paragraphs, in recent years, immigrants - as workers - have migrated to Ardakan city with their families. Most of these workers are ethnically and linguistically different from the native people. While the people of Ardakan are ethnically Farsi and their mother tongue is Farsi ; migrant workers are Arab, Kurd and Lor (in terms of ethnicity) and their mother tongue is Arabic, Kurdish and Lori. Naturally, the presence of children of these workers in schools has changed the cultural context of the school from

both ethnic and linguistic aspects. According to what was said, the main problem of the present researchers is to what extent the interactions between students and teachers are affected by the change in the cultural context of the society. In fact, what new conditions are these two groups facing, what is the competing phenomenon for the monoculture's society, what strategies have students and teachers adopted in facing these conditions, and what are the consequences of the classroom and school. Based on this, the main goal of the research is to analyze the intercultural interactions between two groups of students and teachers of primary schools in Ardakan city (as one of the immigrant-accepting cities of Yazd province) through the analysis of their lived experience at the level of regional comparative analysis.

### **Research Method**

The current research is applied in terms of goals. In terms of approach, it is a qualitatively comparative study using grounded theory. This method is carried out through the organized collection of data and their inductive analysis in order to answer new questions - in fields that lack sufficient theoretical foundations to formulate hypothesis and test (Corbin, & Strauss, 1990). The level of observation and analysis based on the model of Bray and Thomas (1995) includes two levels of class (students' group) and teachers (individual). The research population includes all primary school teachers and pupils of Grade 6 in Ardakan city using

purposeful sampling method for selection of sample which researchers have determined through theoretical saturation. To collect data, a semi-structured interview was used for teachers (with an average of 43 minutes) and an open group interview was used for pupils (with an average time of 40 minutes through the presence of the main researcher in the classroom). The method of selecting the research sample - teachers and students - was done as follows:

After the purposeful and non-random selection of the geographical area (Ardakan city), in the second step, according to the statistics obtained from the Department of Education, a list of the names of all the schools was prepared and according to the facilities and capabilities of the main researcher, in a simple random manner, five primary schools were selected (3 boys' schools and 2 girls' schools). In the third step, only one class of Grade 6 from each school was selected using simple random method and 4 teachers were selected in the same way from each

school. Thus, the research sample size for teachers was 13 people (8 male teachers and 5 female teachers in different grades from grades 1-6) and for students, it includes five classes (three classes for boys and two classes for girls of Grade 6) with an average of 30 pupils (total 150 students). It should be noted that the selected teachers had an average of 6 years of teaching experiences in different grade of primary school. Also, for two reasons, the student population was limited to students of Grade 6: First, their older age compared to other pupils and naturally their ability to communicate more effectively with researchers and second, the six years of lived experience of these students in school. To analyze the data, the coding method was used (determining codes, concepts and categories). In addition, to advance the research process in the three main axes of open coding, axial coding and selective coding, after recording the voice of the interviewees, the text transcription method was used.



Table 1: Demographic table of research

Residence period of non-natives	Non-native teacher's length of service		Native teacher's length of service		Participant code	Age	Gender		Native	Non-native	No.
	Male	Female	Male	Female			Male	Female			
				20	1	42	5	8	7	6	13
				2	2	30					
				5	3	31					
5		7			4	30					
12	8				5	40					
5		16			6	44					
10	5				7	29					
			4		8	27					
2	4				9	34					
			3		10	26					
				2	11	25					
				4	12	29					
7		4			13	30					

## Results

As stated in the introduction section, the main question of the research was how two groups of teachers and students of primary schools understand and interpret cultural interactions between each other. Based on this, three basic questions were raised in the interviews: First, how do you describe the relationship between teachers and students according to cultural differences (attempt to identify the causal, contextual and intervening conditions); Second, what are the actions and reactions of native and non-native teachers and students (trying to

identify the competing phenomenon and strategies); and third, what are the most important consequences of the interaction between teachers and students regarding the interaction of native culture with non-native culture. The findings from the interviews show that 48 primary concepts were extracted in the open coding stage, 12 major categories were extracted in the central coding stage, and 1 core concept was extracted in the selective coding stage. Tables 1 and 2 show examples of the coding process and Table 3 shows the results of the three stages of open, central and selective coding:

**Table 2: Open coding process in analyzing the situation of intercultural interaction from the teachers' point of view**

Concepts	Sub-categories	Main concept
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•My colleagues make fun of me if I speak standard Farsi.</li> <li>•It is not in my honor to change my accent at this age.</li> <li>•I know a teacher who makes fun of children's accent and laughs.</li> <li>•We speak in Farsi, students must learn the dominant language.</li> <li>•As a teacher, parents expect me to learn the local accent.</li> <li>•In the meetings of the Department of Education, everyone speaks with an accent.</li> <li>• Some parents hardly speak Farsi.</li> </ul>	<p>Language conflicts</p> <p>Superior self of the cultural concept</p> <p>Reluctance to interact</p>	Prejudice

**Table 3: Process of open coding in analyzing the situation of intercultural interaction from the students' point of view**

Concepts	Sub-categories	Main concept
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Children call me Afghani, while I am Iranian.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> I try to make friends with the children of my hometown.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> I don't have any friends at school, I go and talk to kids who are not from Ardakan.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The vice principal of the school is very kind and asks us to read Kurdish poetry in front of the queue.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> I took a souvenir of our city to the class and presented it to all the children.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Our teacher talked about Iranian ethnic groups in detail in class.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rejection</li> <li>- Isolation</li> <li>- Sympathy</li> <li>- Absorption</li> <li>- Reception</li> </ul>	Interaction strategies

**Table 4: Results of the three stages of open, central and selective coding**

Concepts	Categories	Core category
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Inability to communicate</li> <li>2. High and low self-esteem</li> <li>3. Lack of self-expression</li> <li>4. Self-deprecating thoughts</li> <li>5. Excessive dependence on others</li> <li>6. A feeling of fear</li> <li>7. Feeling helpless</li> <li>8. Feeling discriminated</li> <li>9. Judgment and prejudice</li> <li>10. Native / non-native stereotyping</li> <li>11. Generalization except to the whole</li> <li>12. Lack of communication skills</li> <li>13. Reluctance to interact</li> <li>14. Physical conflicts</li> <li>15. Ability or inability to manage matters</li> <li>16. Personality inflexibility</li> <li>17. Lack of feeling of environmental belonging</li> <li>18. Lack of intergroup interaction</li> </ol>	Causal conditions: Lack of knowledge related to life in multicultural societies	Relative strength and weakness in intercultural interactions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Class difference</li> <li>2. Family challenges</li> <li>3. Parents' literacy level</li> <li>4. Inflation and economic recession</li> <li>5. Lack of training time</li> <li>6. Centralization of the educational system</li> </ol>	Background conditions: Economic system Education System	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ministry of Education</li> <li>2. Family</li> <li>3. School Management</li> </ol>	Intervening conditions: Official institutions Informal institutions	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Highlighting ethnic conflicts</li> <li>2. Cultural injustice</li> <li>3. Cultural fusion</li> </ol>	Phenomenon: Competition Friendship	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Empathy</li> <li>2. Isolation</li> <li>3. Rejection</li> <li>4. Rumor spreading</li> <li>5. Labeling</li> <li>6. Recruitment &amp; acceptance</li> </ol>	Strategy: Transformational Aggressive Defensive	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Hiding needs</li> <li>2. Frequent absences</li> <li>3. Negative attitude towards others</li> <li>4. Self-superiority</li> </ol>	Consequences: Positive Negative	

5. Positive or negative attitude to change		
6. Quarrel		
7. Dissatisfaction		
8. Discrimination		
9. Sacrifice and sacrifice		
10. Equality and equality		
11. Respect for civil rights		
12. Recognition of social distinctions		
Number of concepts and categories: 48	12	1

### Causal Conditions:

These conditions mainly refer to the current state of interaction between native and non-native cultures in the relationships between students and also the relationships between teachers and students (18 concepts in total). What has happened in the scene is the migration of the labor force mainly from the border provinces of Iran to the central regions that have factories and industrial centers. The demographic composition of Iran's border regions is mainly composed of Kurds, Lors, Turks, Baloch and Arabs, whose language, customs, and sometimes their religion are different from the central regions. Parental migration has increased the non-native student population in schools. Therefore, classes have become a stage for contact, interaction and cultural conflict. Sometimes the teachers do not belong to the native society and their cultural background is also different from the native pupils. The analysis of the data obtained from the interview revealed that cultural interactions have created conditions that can be characterized by a general causal condition under the title "Lack of

knowledge related to life in multicultural societies". Here it is necessary to mention some of these conditions:

The first causal condition resulting from the cultural interaction between both groups of teachers and students is the "inability to communicate" with each other. For example, one non-native teacher says:

"If I speak with an accent, my colleagues make fun of me, while it is not possible for me to change my accent at this age" (Interviewee no. 5)

This problem also exists for non-native students. In response to the question "Do you speak with your accent and mother tongue in class", one of the pupils says:

"If I speak a word with an accent, some children quickly go and tell the manager that he is cursing. Whenever we have a discussion, they quickly make fun of my language."

This space has caused a kind of mental stereotyping based on the division of behavior, moods and personalities into native and non-native. One of the teachers says:

"These strangers always come a

week after the *Eid* holidays. Most of their families have a night out, which causes the children to fail in their studies....while in our city, we only get together on Fridays. I think. Most of the non-natives are not worried about their children's education and future" (Interviewee no. 11)

At the same time, the interaction between the teacher and students has resulted in conflicting perceptions and judgments. For example, one of the teachers believes that non-native students:

"In addition to doing their homework, they help their parents at home. They don't need anyone to confirm them... They are stronger and less dependent on their family" (Interviewee no. 13).

While these praise-based statements are heard, another teacher echoes parents' opinions about non-native students:

"Ardakani parents do not like their children to sit next to children of certain ethnic groups. In their opinion, most of them do not know the manners of urban life. For this reason, when registering their child in school, they ask the principal how many non-native students there are (Interviewee no. 13)

#### **Context conditions:**

These conditions refer to the effect of the total factors that sometimes occur under the influence of multiple objective demographic variables, and it is not possible to fix their effects in the short term. In this regard, we can mention the impact of economic system and educational system on cultural

interactions. Class difference is one of the important conditions in shaping cultural interactions between students of different ethnicities in the school environment. In this regard, one of the teachers says:

"Many non-native people belong to the working class. It is very difficult to rent a house in this city and the rents are high, and they have to rent a house on the outskirts of the city, while the economic situation of the native people is much better (Interviewee no. 4)".

Family and educational problems have also added to the normalization of cultural exchanges. The analysis of the data obtained from the interviews indicated that many parents of non-native students do not have a high level of literacy, and unemployment and addiction also affect their lives. On the other hand, the centralized structure of Iran's educational system and educational activities based on the "book-based" curriculum have caused that not much training is given to students and parents about living in a multicultural environment. One of the students says:

"Our teacher once talked about the tribes and ceremonies and the language and dialect of different people of Iran, but he doesn't have much time and most of our time is just teaching."

Of course, cultural interactions have affected the families of students of both native and non-native groups. This issue shows that in a slow but continuous process, intellectual change and transformation emanating from

multicultural life affects the traditional layers of the host society. It is evident in the words of many teachers and students. For example, one of the teachers says:

"A native student has asked his mother to come to school with makeup and fashion. Some parents complained that non-native students told their children that your mother is old-fashioned. Of course, some non-native children's mothers come to school with makeup." (Interviewee no. 10)

In this regard, another teacher says:

"Many native parents tell us that cultural diversity is useless except for trouble. Many non-native people do not respect our traditions. Non-native mothers also tell us that managers often warn us to wear *Hijab* and mention in meetings that the native students asked their mothers to dress up, make up, and let their hair out" (Interviewee no.9).

#### **Intervention conditions:**

These intervening conditions refer to the influence of a set of institutions and organizations that in a natural process should cause the growth and development of cultural interactions. In this research and through the speech of the interviewees, at least three institutions can be mentioned under the title of Ministry of Education, Family, and School Management. The Ministry of Education, through the uniform curriculum for the ethnic groups of the country and also determining the Persian language as the only formal language of instruction, does not do much to increase the awareness of

students to live in multicultural environments. The family system is often plagued by its own problems and does not have the opportunity to learn and teach the young generation. Also, this system has a positive and negative role in facilitating cultural interactions between native and immigrant students. The management of schools is also involved in administrative bureaucracy and implementation problems, and does not have many possibilities to change the existing situation. For this reason, there are no basic conditions for the development of intercultural relations of different ethnic groups in the host society. The following examples, selected from the words of the teachers, support this issue:

"The majority of parents of non-native pupils do not participate in the parent-teacher association meetings. Also, they do not cooperate in the extracurricular activities of the school. We said that we want to take the children on a field trip, and most of the non-native students did not bring consent letter from their parents" (Interviewee no. 7)

"The teacher has a lot of worksheets, exercise book and other activities to correct. We have to complete the work folder and classroom management notebook. We have little time. Furthermore, we deal with all the paperwork and time-consuming activities. Therefore, we do not have the opportunity to address the cultural differences of children" (Interviewee no. 6).

**Phenomenon:**

It refers to the general atmosphere governing cultural interactions between students and teachers in a multicultural society. The data analysis shows three common phenomena in the host society (Ardakan city): First, the highlighting of ethnic conflicts; Second, cultural injustice, and third, cultural fusion. The following examples show these three phenomena:

"It would have been better to familiarize them with our culture before they were allowed to enter our city (highlighting ethnic conflicts)" (Interviewee no. 5)

"Ms. allow me... we don't understand what they are saying at all. The things they do and the things they say are strange to us (students' laughter) (highlighting ethnic conflicts)" (Student)

"There is no program for cross-cultural acquaintance. We are encouraged by our colleagues not to pay too much attention to the lullaby of strangers (cultural injustice) (Interviewee no. 8).

"If we learn that this diversity contributes to peaceful coexistence. We can teach children about differences, this is an opportunity. Non-native children have more courage to contact and communicate with strangers, unlike native students who are shy. We can use the power of expression and self-expression of non-native children to teach natives" (cultural fusion) (Interviewee no. 12).

**Strategy**

It can be defined as an unplanned, temporary but purposeful effort of teachers and students to build the future according to the lived experience in cultural interactions. The strategies are based on the interviewees' understanding and interpretation of predicting the impact of cultural interactions on themselves and possible solutions for solving problems or choosing appropriate behaviors or actions. Based on this, in contrast to the current situation, the strategies adopted by teachers and students can be placed in three general groups: transformational, offensive and defensive. Transformational strategy means that the interviewees admit that nothing can be done against the force and impact of cultural differences, and the resulting changes must be accepted and reconciled through empathy and absorption. In this case, acceptance means peaceful coexistence or transformation in the cultural background. The aggressive strategy is based on fighting against cultural differences through various methods such as exclusion, rumor spreading and labeling. Defensive strategy means standing against the pressure of the dominant culture and the majority (native culture) through isolation, dropping out of school and frequent absences. The data from the analysis of the interviews highlighted that all three strategies are used by native and non-native teachers and students.

### **Consequences**

It refers to the reactions of teachers and students against the above three strategies. In fact, by choosing each of these three strategies by native (or non-native) teachers and students, non-native (or non-native) teachers and students show reactions that can be seen as the consequences of each strategy. Data analysis shows 12 consequences: Concealment of needs (the student or teacher ignores their needs due to the pressure of cultural interaction, for example, the shyness of the non-native student to speak in class and answer the teacher's questions), repeated absences from school, negative attitude towards others, self-superiority, positive or negative attitude towards any kind of change and diversity in life, conflict, dissatisfaction, discrimination, sacrifice and selflessness, equality, respect for citizen rights and recognition of social differences. These consequences may be positive or negative depending on the special situation of each school (characteristics of teachers, gender of students, economic status, degree of tolerance, etc.). Also, the consequences are not only objective and can include the three mental states of hope, confusion and mental despair for both teachers and students in the process of cultural interactions. The result of three causal, intervention and contextual conditions, as well as strategies and consequences, is the formation of a core, namely "relative strength and weakness in intercultural interactions". This core concept shows that intercultural

interactions between native teachers with non-native teachers, teachers with native/non-native students and native students with non-native students have highs and lows, differences and friendships, rivalries and empathizes that occur in an involuntary and uncontrollable cycle affected by the requirements of economic life (Figure 1).

### **Similarities and differences**

The results of the research reveal the similarities and differences between the two studied groups, teachers and students. The similarities are:

- Involuntary presence in a social environment that has changed over the last two decades from a state of cultural integration and unity to a multicultural society affected by the phenomenon of immigration.
- Forced effectiveness of family system and educational system limitations that do not make much effort to resolve conflicts resulting from interactions in a multicultural society.
- Relative acceptance of the realities governing the multicultural society and adaptation to the existing situation through personal choice of one of the three transformational, offensive and defensive strategies.

The results also indicate differences between teachers and students in terms of lived experiences in cultural interactions:

- Effect of cultural interactions on the professional life of teachers,
- Effect of cultural interactions

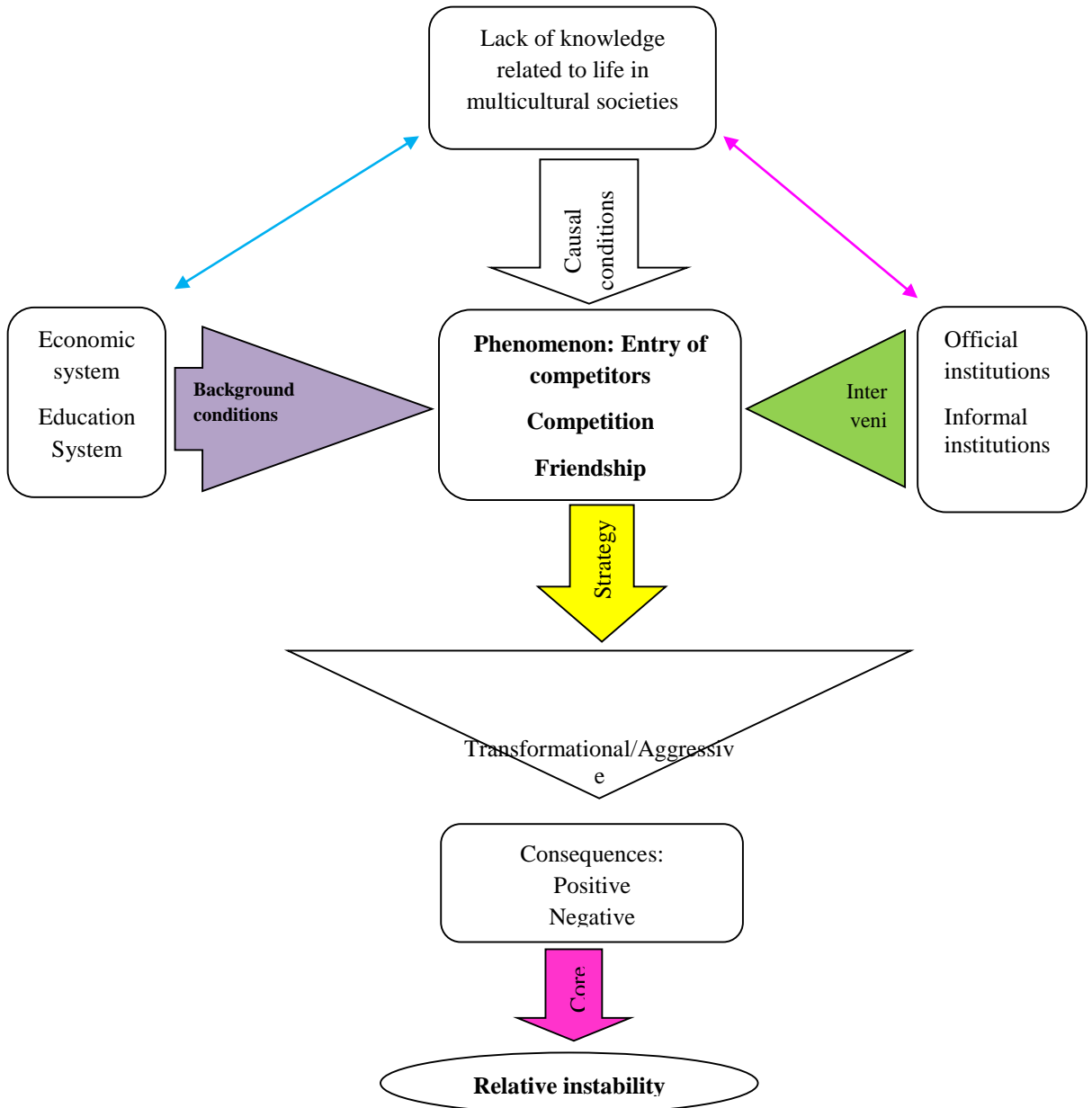


on the personal life and academic progress of students,

- More preparation of students to accept and choose a transformational strategy and live in a multicultural

society due to age characteristics, and

- Teachers' efforts to ignore and downplay cultural differences by emphasizing the curriculum and devoting more time to it.



**Figure 1. Paradigm model of understanding the meaning of intercultural interactions according to the lived experiences of teachers and students**

## Conclusion

From the point of view of cultural similarities between the people of the society, it was easier to live in traditional integrated societies in the past. During the last one hundred years, the people of Iran - like many other societies - have experienced cultural division and cultural fusion affected by phenomena such as the growth & development of information & communication technologies, industrial developments, urbanization and changes in the economic structure & employment. The migration phenomenon has caused Iran society to witness the change of traditional culture in many small and large cities and their transformation into "multicultural societies". Iran's educational system has also been greatly affected by the change in the diverse cultural context of students and teachers due to labor mobility. The first finding of the research showed that the causal conditions caused the formation of a main component under the title "Lack of knowledge related to life in multicultural societies". This component indicated the lack of a suitable model for multicultural management of the host society. This finding is consistent with the research results of Reiss (2018), Shahbazin, Shawazi & Askari Nodushan (2017), Pour Mousavi, Abdulahi, Naveh Ebrahim & Abbasian (2019); Gazian, (2019); Hamidizadeh et al. (2016); and Khosravi (2007) which have emphasized the lack of systematic

management and planning of social systems - such as the government, the Ministry of Education and families - in Iran to change monoculture societies to multicultural societies. The second finding of the research indicated that cultural interactions are mainly formed based on the natural behaviors of teachers and students - in the absence of necessary training. This formation is sometimes hostile and negating the "other" and sometimes it is associated with "altruism". This finding has also been proven in the research of Bagher Najad et al. (2021), Qurbani (2020); Abdulli Sultan Ahmadi, Naderi, Shariatmadari & Saif Naraghi (2015), Juvonen et al. (2019), and Thijs & Verkuyten (2014). The third finding of the research reveals the adoption of three transformational, offensive and defensive strategies for life in classrooms and schools of a multicultural society. The arrival of non-indigenous students is a new phenomenon in indigenous communities, whose inhabitants have followed single behavioral and cultural patterns for centuries. The natural behavior in the initial steps can be nothing but the negation of other cultures and emphasis on "self" culture. However, the speed of changes in the new millennium is so fast that the traditional structures of culture are changing rapidly. The new generations, like the previous ones, do not insist on preserving all aspects of cultural heritage. The results of this research show that the host society is slowly

being affected by non-native cultures. This finding is consistent with the research results

Mamat, & Razali, (2022); Aboud, Mendelson, & Purdy, (2003); Banks, (2008); Choi & Mao, (2021); and Metzner et al. (2022). The results of the research indicate that intercultural interactions in immigrant-accepting areas should be considered by policymakers and educational planners in order to reduce tensions and lead to intercultural synergy.

According to the findings, it can be concluded that the schools of the research society - Ardakan city - affected by the arrival of immigrants, have undergone changes in the ethnic and linguistic background of the pupils. In this situation, as UNESCO (2014) also emphasize, recognizing cultural diversity is undoubtedly one of the most basic functions of modern educational systems. Therefore, the following items can be suggested to the administrators and teachers of Ardakan city:

- Encouragement of teachers to participate in multicultural and multilingual classes through in-service courses
- Acquainting native students and their parents with the diverse ethnic and linguistic structure of Iran in order to reduce the negative view of other cultures and languages (increasing the positive portrayal of others)
- Providing short-term meetings to familiarize immigrant parents with cultural & social values and traditions of Ardakan City

- Acquainting students with concepts such as freedom, cultural interaction, linguistic diversity, citizenship rights, equality, historical traditions, social justice and tolerance through school extracurricular activities
- Using films, historical works, exhibitions and museums to introduce native culture and immigrant culture to students and parents in order to increase cultural coexistence.

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