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<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8415-3925>TEACHERS' PLURALISTIC AND ASSIMILATIVE ATTITUDES
TOWARDS MULTICULTURALISM*

Introduction: The increase in migration has made education in multicultural contexts one of the key challenges facing contemporary schools. The presence of a significant number of students with migration experience makes work in culturally diverse environments a daily reality for many teachers. Teachers' assimilative and pluralistic attitudes toward multiculturalism determine their instructional and educational decisions and shape a climate that is either conducive or detrimental to integrating with migration experience.

Research Aim: The aim of this study was to determine the level of assimilative and pluralistic attitudes toward multiculturalism among teachers who work with foreign students, to identify which of these attitudes predominates, and to examine whether the level of these attitudes varies depending on teachers' demographic characteristics.

Method: To identify teachers' attitudes toward multiculturalism, a modified version of the Multicultural Ideology Scale developed by Berry, Kalin, and Taylor (1977) was employed. The scale is designed to examine attitudes toward cultural diversity in ethnically and culturally diverse societies.

Results: The results suggest slight predominance of assimilative attitudes over pluralistic attitudes. No significant demographic differences were identified. Item-level analyses showed strong support for statements emphasising integration and those promoting intercultural awareness.

Conclusions: The findings reveal the complexity of teachers' attitudes toward multiculturalism and highlight the importance of the institutional context for school practice. A slight but statistically significant predominance of assimilative attitudes was identified, alongside a persistently high level of acceptance of pluralistic attitudes. Absence of significant differences between demographic groups and parallel presence of both types of attitudes point to the need for systemic measures aimed at strengthening teachers' intercultural competences.

Keywords: multiculturalism, teachers' attitudes, assimilation, pluralism, multicultural education, immigrant students

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INTRODUCTION

Increased migration and dynamic social changes mean that the issue of education in a multicultural environment is becoming a major challenge for contemporary schools. Data from April 2025 show that approximately 237,000 foreign students were enrolled in Polish schools for children and young people, the vast majority of whom were from Ukraine. These pupils are present in 67% of schools (i.e., in approximately 14,100 institutions; see Świdrowska & Stano, 2025). Reports by UNICEF and the Centre for Civic Education confirm these trends, indicating that in the 2024/2025 school year over 150,000–200,000 Ukrainian children and adolescents were enrolled in Polish schools, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive integration measures (Świdrowska & Stano, 2024).

This means that working in a culturally diverse environment is becoming an everyday experience for a significant proportion of teachers and pupils in the Polish education system. In this context, Nussbaum's (1997) concept that education is a process of 'cultivating humanity' that requires development of critical reflection, a global perspective, and narrative imagination takes on particular significance. Critical reflection allows teachers to question stereotypes and their own prejudices, a global perspective promotes understanding of the interdependence of people and cultures, while narrative imagination enables an empathetic view from the perspective of others (Gay, 2018; Nieto, 2010). In light of this concept, pluralism is the foundation of democratic education, understood as the affirmation of diversity.

A similar understanding of the role of education in the context of cultural diversity can also be found in the works of Banks (2004, 2008), who points out that the assimilation model leads only to superficial acceptance of diversity, while pluralism allows the full potential of multiculturalism in schools to be exploited. Banks (2008) further emphasises that traditional assimilationist concepts of citizenship education assume that minority students must give up their own culture, while the pluralistic approach recognises and supports cultural diversity as an educational and social value. As a result, by developing attitudes of openness and respect for cultural differences, teachers play an important role in creating an environment conducive to integration (Gay, 2018). This role is theoretically justified by the concept of culturally relevant pedagogy formulated by Ladson-Billings (1995), which assumes combining a high level of teaching with support for students' cultural identity and development of their critical social awareness. In practice, this means, among other things, selecting content and methods that reflect students' experiences, hence building bridges between school and home culture, and teaching skills for analysing mechanisms of social inequality. The theoretical framework proposed by Ladson-Billings (1995) aligns with the postulate of moving away from passive 'tolerance' towards active acceptance of diversity and serves as a point of reference for contemporary pedagogical approaches that take cultural context into account. This perspective is further developed in the culturally sustaining pedago-

gy presented by Paris (2012) and later expanded upon with Alim (Paris & Alim, 2017). This perspective assumes that schools should not limit themselves to merely accepting students' existing cultural identities, but should actively sustain and develop their languages, cultural practices, and forms of participation in social life. In this understanding, cultural diversity becomes a resource for the entire educational community, rather than a barrier to teaching. Based on this study, the concept of pedagogy that supports students' cultural identity reinforces the interpretation of teachers' pluralistic attitudes, indicating that genuine openness to multiculturalism requires not only a positive attitude, but also the use of teaching practices aimed at sustaining and developing students' cultural identities.

From the point of view of school functioning, teachers' attitudes form the main factor that determines implementation of these assumptions; they influence how cultural diversity is interpreted and how the teaching and educational decisions are made. It is teachers who, through their beliefs and daily practices, decide whether cultural differences are treated as an educational resource or as a difficulty that needs to be minimised. Research conducted in Western European countries shows that teachers' attitudes towards cultural diversity significantly determine the process of student integration and the quality of education (Ciuladiene, 2024; Dubbeld et al., 2019; Horenczyk & Tatar, 2003; Leeman & Ledoux, 2005; Moree et al., 2008).

Previous research on teachers' work in multicultural environments indicates that actual school practice often deviates from the values teachers declare. Research conducted among teachers reveals a difference between declared openness to diversity and institutional barriers that hinder its implementation in everyday teaching (Bartkowiak, 2021; Bocharova, 2025; Młynarczuk-Sokołowska, 2016, 2017). Similar conclusions emerge from analyses of teachers' competences in multicultural classrooms, where a clear discrepancy was noted between the inclusive practices postulated in the literature and educators' actual actions (Bocharova et al., 2024; Dobrowolska, 2015).

RESEARCH PROBLEM AND AIM

The aim of this study was to determine the levels of assimilationist and pluralistic attitudes towards multiculturalism among teachers working with foreign students, to establish which prevail, and to examine whether these levels vary according to teachers' demographic characteristics. The study formulated the main research question: What attitudes towards multiculturalism do teachers who work with foreign students in the Polish education system display? Specific problems were also formulated:

(1) What is the intensity of the results describing assimilationist and pluralistic attitudes towards multiculturalism in the studied group of teachers?

(2) Does the intensity of the results describing teachers' attitudes towards multiculturalism vary depending on gender, age, length of service, and type of school?

The inclusion of demographic variables in the study (gender, age, length of service, type of school) is based on previous research on teachers' attitudes towards multiculturalism, which indicates that approaches to cultural diversity and working with students with migration experience vary depending on professional experience, career stage, and school context. The analysis of these variables allows us to determine whether the intensity of attitudes towards multiculturalism varies according to teachers' socio-professional characteristics.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The survey was conducted at the turn of the 2024/2025 academic year. A link to the online survey was sent by email to the management of approximately 12,000 schools throughout Poland with a request to make it available to teachers. Before completing the questionnaire, respondents were informed about the purpose and course of the study, and gave their informed consent to participate by ticking the appropriate box in the online form, which was a prerequisite for proceeding to the next part of the questionnaire. The study was completely voluntary and anonymous, and respondents completed the questionnaire independently. The invitation to participate in the study emphasised that it was addressed exclusively to teachers with experience in working with students from culturally diverse backgrounds. In accordance with basic ethical standards of scientific research, including the principles of voluntary participation in the study, anonymity and confidentiality of data, and the right to withdraw at any stage of the study, the non-invasive survey did not require ethics committee approval.

A modified version of the Multicultural Ideology Scale developed by Berry et al. (1977) was used to determine the dominant attitudes towards multiculturalism. It is a tool for studying attitudes towards cultural diversity in ethnically and culturally diverse societies. The Multicultural Ideology Scale is based on the assumptions of Berry's (2005, 2008) acculturation model, which holds that relations between majority and minority groups can take various forms depending on attitudes towards preservation of cultural identity and participation in the dominant culture. The scale has been used repeatedly in international research across educational and social contexts.

The tool was adapted to Polish conditions by the author of this study to ensure its cultural and linguistic accuracy. It also had to align with the realities of the Polish education system and the specific nature of teachers' work with students with migration experience. The tool was also consulted with a practising teacher in order to assess its content and cultural relevance, and to maintain a balance between elements relating to assimilationist and pluralistic attitudes.

During the preparatory stage of the study, a pilot study was conducted with 25 primary school teachers. Based on the feedback received, minor modifications were made to the tool. They included simplifying the wording of two statements relating to the integration of pupils with migration experience and the role of the school in a multicultural environment, as well as adding an example to one of the statements, illustrating the language support provided to pupils with migration experience.

The final version of the questionnaire included 10 statements: 5 relating to assimilationist attitudes (e.g., *Immigrants should accept the norms of the host country as soon as possible;* *Schools should support the process of immigrants' adaptation to local traditions;* *Cultural differences can hinder integration and should therefore be minimised*) and 5 relating to pluralistic attitudes (e.g., *Schools should foster awareness and understanding of diverse cultures;* *The presence of students from different cultural backgrounds enriches the teaching process;* *Schools should provide students with migration experience with language support tailored to their needs*).

Each statement was rated by respondents on a five-point Likert scale, from 1 ('strongly disagree') to 5 ('strongly agree'). The sum of points obtained within each subscale allowed us to determine the dominance of assimilationist or pluralistic attitudes in the group of surveyed teachers. Higher scores on a given subscale indicated stronger support for the corresponding orientation, allowing the dominance of assimilationist or pluralistic attitudes to be determined. The study involved 1,184 teachers from various regions of Poland with experience in working with culturally diverse classes. Among the respondents, 1,021 women (86.2%) and 163 men (13.8%) were included. The largest group consisted of teachers over 50 years of age (48.4%), while those under 30 years of age accounted for only 2.5% of the sample. The vast majority held a master's degree (97.7%) and a few held a bachelor's degree (2.3%). The vast majority of respondents were employed in public schools (99.1%), while only a few worked in community schools (0.6%) and private schools (0.3%). The sample included teachers from all 16 provinces. The largest number of questionnaires came from the provinces of Silesia (17.4%) and Mazovia (11.4%), and the smallest number from Świętokrzyskie (1.4%). Such broad regional diversity enabled the analysis of teachers' attitudes across different socio-cultural contexts. In this study, factor analysis was not performed because the scale used has a well-established theoretical structure, as confirmed in prior studies (Berry et al., 1977; Dubbeld et al., 2019; Horenczyk & Tatar, 2003), which indicates a two-dimensional structure of assimilationist and pluralistic attitudes.

Reliability of both subscales was acceptable, confirming the tool's internal consistency. Obtained results indirectly indicate the distinctiveness of both dimensions of attitudes. Low correlation between the subscales formed an additional argument in favour of the structural validity of the scale, indicating the relative independence of assimilationist and pluralistic attitudes. This pattern of results is

consistent with the theoretical assumptions of the model developed by Berry et al. (1977). Taking these indicators into account allows for a more comprehensive assessment of the psychometric properties of the scale used and its adequacy for research conducted in the Polish educational context.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data were statistically analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics 25. In the first stage, the tool's reliability was assessed, using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which was $\alpha = 0.78$ for the assimilation orientation subscale and $\alpha = 0.81$ for the pluralistic orientation subscale, confirming the high level of internal consistency of the scale's items. Values of α above 0.70 are considered acceptable, while α exceeding 0.80 is considered good, according to Nunnally's (1978) criteria. Next, basic descriptive statistics (means, medians, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis) were calculated to characterise the general trends in teachers' attitudes and to assess the properties of the result distributions.

To compare the results obtained in the assimilationist and pluralist attitude subscales for the same respondents, a dependent-samples t-test was used. Comparative analyses between groups were performed using non-parametric tests: the Mann-Whitney *U* test for two-group comparisons (e.g., women vs. men) and the Kruskal-Wallis test for multi-group analyses (age, province). The decision to use non-parametric tests was based on deviations from normality in some subgroups and on the unequal sizes of the groups.

A significance level of $p < 0.05$ was adopted in all analyses. For differences considered statistically significant, Cohen's *d* effect size was calculated and interpreted according to classical criteria (Cohen, 1988), where values around 0.20 indicate a small effect, 0.50 a medium effect, and 0.80 a large effect. The application of Laken's (2013) recommendations for reporting effect sizes enabled a more reliable interpretation of the results, taking into account both their statistical significance and practical dimension.

Next, statistical analyses were conducted to determine the level of surveyed attitudes. Results exceeding 3.5 points, corresponding to the upper limit of the neutral response category and indicating clear agreement with the content of the scale statements, were considered high. This threshold value was adopted due to the use of a five-point Likert scale, in which a value of 3 indicates a neutral response, while values above 3.5 indicate a predominance of positive responses and thus clear agreement with the content of the scale statements.

RESULTS

As part of the descriptive statistics, means, medians, standard deviations, skewness and kurtosis were calculated. The average level of assimilationist attitudes was $M = 3.82$ ($SD = 0.49$), while that of pluralist attitudes was $M = 3.72$ ($SD = 0.68$). The t-test for dependent samples showed a statistically significant difference between the two orientations, $t(1183) = -3.95$, $p < 0.001$, with a small effect size ($d = 0.11$).

The Mann–Whitney U test and the Kruskal–Wallis test were used in comparative analyses between groups. No significant differences in the level of assimilationist or pluralistic attitudes were found depending on gender, age, length of service, or type of school. A significance level of $p < 0.05$ was adopted in all tests. In addition, the average responses to individual items on the scale were analysed. In the assimilation subscale, the highest scores were given to the statements: *'Immigrants should accept the norms of the host country as soon as possible'* ($M = 4.21$), and *'Schools should support the process of immigrants' adaptation to local traditions'* ($M = 4.03$) received the highest ratings. In the pluralistic subscale, the statement *'Schools should shape awareness and understanding of diverse cultures'* ($M = 4.12$) received the highest average rating.

DISCUSSION

Analysis of obtained data indicates that teachers' attitudes towards multiculturalism are complex and ambiguous. High scores on both subscales indicate that teachers simultaneously emphasise the need to integrate students with migration experience and recognise the importance of cultural diversity in the school environment. A similar coexistence of assimilationist and pluralistic attitudes has been demonstrated in studies conducted in other European countries, including Lithuania, the Czech Republic, and the Netherlands (Ciuladiene, 2024; Dubbeld et al., 2019; Moree et al., 2008). The authors of these studies point out that teachers often declare their openness to cultural diversity, while at the same time their actions at school are largely subordinated to the rules and organisation of school work, which encourage an emphasis on adapting pupils to accepted norms. The observed differences do not indicate clear dominance of one approach, but rather coexistence of different ways of approaching work with pupils in the school environment.

The literature emphasises that schools traditionally serve as integrative institutions whose purpose is to incorporate pupils into the dominant cultural and social order (Lewowicki, 2011). This school function promotes consolidation of the assimilationist attitudes. At the same time, the development of the concept of multicultural education (Banks, 2008; Gay, 2018) and pedagogy that takes cultural context into account (Ladson-Billings, 1995) creates space for forming pluralistic attitudes, which, however, are not always fully reflected in school practice.

The lack of diversity in attitudes based on teachers' demographic characteristics can be interpreted as a manifestation of a strong influence of systemic and institutional conditions, which largely shape how teachers think about the role of schools in contexts of cultural diversity. As Horenczyk and Tatar (2003) point out, the school's organisational culture and the dominant models of educational policy play a significant role in shaping teachers' attitudes towards cultural diversity, often stronger than individual factors. In this context, it is reasonable to consider not only teachers' declared attitudes, but also how they perceive school policy and existing organisational norms. Research by Dubbeld et al. (2019) show that the school climate and the approach to cultural diversity adopted at the school level can shape teachers' attitudes. This means that, even with relatively similar declarations, teachers' practices in working with students from different cultures can vary significantly depending on the school's organisational conditions.

In the context of the Polish education system, the obtained results should be interpreted in light of the dynamic growth in the number of foreign students and the limited availability of consistent solutions to support teachers in their work with culturally diverse classes (Świdrowska & Stano, 2024, 2025). Such conditions may lead to situations in which teachers are forced to take daily action at school in the absence of clear guidelines and with limited institutional support. As a result, attitudes towards cultural diversity may take on an adaptive character, tailored to the school's current organisational capabilities and not always in line with declared beliefs.

CONCLUSIONS

This study makes a significant contribution to understanding how teachers in the Polish education system approach the issue of cultural diversity. The collected data suggest that the issue of multiculturalism should not be analysed solely in relation to individual teachers' beliefs, but should also consider the broader organisational and systemic conditions in which everyday school practice is carried out. The obtained results allow us to conclude that working with students with migration experience requires institutional support, including both a curriculum framework and organisational conditions conducive to activities that take cultural diversity into account.

This points to the need to implement coherent, systemic solutions that support teachers in their daily schoolwork. The results also highlight the importance of ensuring conditions that enable teachers to take consistent action in a culturally diverse school environment. Of particular importance in this regard are the institutions responsible for education and professional development of teachers, which prepare teachers to work in changing social and educational realities.

From the perspective of further research, it seems reasonable to conduct qualitative studies on teachers' work. The studies should take into account the relationship between declared attitudes and actions taken in school practice. Combining quantitative and qualitative approaches may also contribute to a better understanding of the factors determining teachers' everyday practice in culturally diverse environments.

LIMITATIONS

The study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. Firstly, the use of online surveys carries the risk of social desirability bias, which may lead to discrepancies between teachers' declared and actual practices. Secondly, the research sample was not representative; the predominance of women and older teachers limits the scope for generalising the results and analysing intergenerational differences. Thirdly, the specific socio-political context of Poland in 2022–2025, related, among other things, to intensified migration processes and the prominence of multiculturalism issues in public debate, may have influenced the way respondents formulated their declarations. Despite these limitations, the study is an important starting point for in-depth analyses of teachers' attitudes towards multiculturalism, covering both the dimension of teaching practice and institutional conditions.

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POSTAWY PLURALISTYCZNE I ASYMILACYJNE NAUCZYCIELI WOBEC WIELOKULTUROWOŚCI

Wprowadzenie: Wzrost migracji sprawia, że edukacja w warunkach wielokulturowości staje się jednym z kluczowych wyzwań współczesnej szkoły. Obecność znacznej liczby uczniów z doświadczeniem migracyjnym powoduje, że praca w środowisku zróżnicowanym kulturowo staje się codziennym doświadczeniem wielu nauczycieli. Postawy asymilacyjne oraz pluralistyczne nauczycieli wobec wielokulturowości determinują podejmowane decyzje dydaktyczne i wychowawcze oraz kształtują klimat sprzyjający bądź niesprzyjający integracji uczniów z doświadczeniem migracyjnym.

Cel badań: Celem niniejszego badania było określenie poziomu postaw asymilacyjnych i pluralistycznych wobec wielokulturowości wśród nauczycieli pracujących z uczniami cudzoziemskimi, ustalenie, które z nich wykazują przewagę oraz sprawdzenie, czy poziom badanych postaw różnicuje się w zależności od cech demograficznych nauczycieli.

Metoda badań: Do określenia postaw nauczycieli wobec wielokulturowości zastosowano zmodyfikowaną wersję Skali Ideologii Wielokulturowej (Multicultural Ideology Scale) autorstwa Berry'ego, Kalina i Taylora (1977), służącej do badania postaw wobec różnorodności kulturowej w społeczeństwach zróżnicowanych etnicznie i kulturowo.

Wyniki: Stwierdzono niewielką przewagę postaw asymilacyjnych nad pluralistycznymi. Natomiast nie stwierdzono istotnych różnic w zakresie postaw związanych z cechami demograficznymi badanych. Analiza szczegółowa wskazała wysokie poparcie zarówno dla twierdzeń

asymilacyjnych dotyczących integracji, jak i pluralistycznych akcentujących edukację międzykulturową.

Wnioski: Wyniki badania pokazują złożoność postaw nauczycieli wobec wielokulturowości oraz znaczenie kontekstu instytucjonalnego dla pracy szkolnej. Zidentyfikowano niewielką, lecz statystycznie istotną przewagę postaw asymilacyjnych, przy jednoczesnym utrzymywaniu się wysokiego poziomu akceptacji dla postaw pluralistycznych. Brak istotnych różnic między grupami demograficznymi oraz równoległe funkcjonowanie obu typów postaw wskazują na konieczność podejmowania systemowych działań ukierunkowanych na wzmocnienie kompetencji międzykulturowych nauczycieli.

Słowa kluczowe: wielokulturowość, postawy nauczycieli, asymilacja, pluralizm, edukacja wielokulturowa, uczniowie cudzoziemscy