



STUDENTS' UNDERSTANDING OF WORKPLACE DIVERSITY: THE CASE OF REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA

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Abstract. *The importance of the research on workplace diversity has significantly increased in the past few decades. Namely, as a result of the increased possibilities for working from distance and the changes in the regulations that protect the rights of the individuals and groups with different background and physical and psychological characteristics, the workplace diversity and inclusion issues become a prominent research topic in the human resource management and management literature. Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate students' understanding of diversity in our country, on a sample of students from the Faculty of Economics – Skopje. The need for conducting such a study in our country emanated from the fact that we live in a society where diversity issues are perceived and acknowledged. For investigating students' understanding of diversity, we used two instruments (Reaction-to-Diversity Inventory and Workplace Diversity Survey) developed by De Meuse and Hostager (2001). The first one was used for investigating students' understanding of the term workplace diversity and the second one for researching the determinants of the students' understanding of diversity. The questionnaire was distributed electronically among students from the Faculty of Economics – Skopje, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje. The analysis of the responses on Reaction-to-Diversity Inventory has shown that most of the students relate diversity with the term unity (47), which refers to the organizational outcomes as one of the dimensions of diversity. Besides referring to the organizational outcomes, it is important to note that unity is a term that has positive connotation. The results from the multiple regression analysis on the sample of 184 respondents, indicate that besides teachers'/professors' engagement in educating on diversity and students' gender, students' academic success should be considered as a predictor of their understanding of diversity (although the statistical association of students' grade and their understanding of diversity is statistically weaker and negative).*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Workplace diversity is a concept whose popularity has dramatically increased at the beginning of the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century. The understanding of diversity is crucial for individuals' successful integration in any organization, as well as for individuals' capacity to contribute for achieving the targeted performance. As a result of the existing trends, the concept called diversity orientated human resource management emerged (Meena and Vanka, 2016). Consequently, the issues related to workplace diversity have found a prominent place in the academic research, as well as in management and business education.

The relevance of this topic has significantly increased in the past few years since the possibility to work from anywhere were broadly accepted in the day-to-day business activities. For modern managers increased diversity among employees is valuable asset, but at the same time has introduced challenges that have to be addressed. In modern organizations, people from different part of the world work together and bring a certain set of differences to the workplace, and at the same time are loudly expressing their need to belong to the group (the organization), which refers to the concept of inclusion (Igboanugo et al., 2022). The concept of inclusion refers to employee involvement, elimination of the barriers for full participation in the working processes and creating conditions for maximal use of the employee's skills and potential (Adamson et al., 2021). Consequently, we must conclude that "workplace diversity can be (auth. note only) managed through specific strategic human resource management systems" (Martin-Alcazar et al., 2012). Furthermore, in the Gallups' 2022 Report on DEI activities it is indicated that most of the activities of diversity management are incorporated in human resource management since the adoption of the values that promote diversity is crucial for the overall HRM effectiveness and enable the improvement of employee engagement, which brings progress (Gallup, 2022). Therefore, we can conclude that the concept of diversity management that was widely researched in the past few decades has evolved into a concept that can be called diversity orientated human resource management. Additionally, these studies provide the strongest argument for conducting a research on students' understanding on diversity, since positive understanding of diversity by individuals is critical for creating inclusive workplace and successfully diversity management.

The need for wide research on diversity management has been elaborate by Prasad and Milles (1997) who argue that it helps individuals understand diversity and establish productive relationships with people at work, helps managers increase their ability to lead people and create an environment that stimulates productivity, improves managers ability to develop people and to implement organizations' long-term strategy, as well as to promote core organizational values.

Considering the importance of workplace diversity for achieving higher organizational performance on all levels in modern organizations (Moore, 1999; Patrik and Kumar, 2012; Guillaume et al., 2017), we aim to research how students understand this concept, or issue

and what determines their understanding of diversity. The logic for investigating students' understanding of diversity is necessary since in a period of 2 to 3 years they are expected to become part from organizations.

Changes in the population structure inevitably lead to the need for more pronounced elaboration of the Powells' "diversity rationale" that diverse student body increases the number of perspectives incorporated in the learning process, enables co-creation and therefore increases higher education quality (Winston, 2010). Furthermore, proper elaboration of the benefits from sound diversity management leads to adaptation of student's attitudes towards differences and increased flexibility when entering new environments. The insights regarding their understanding of workplace diversity can be taken into consideration by managers when designing human resource practices and by educators. Conducting a research on the students' understanding of diversity is necessary for gaining insight that enables designing programs that have impact on their conceptualization of diversity. Consequently, we must note that this research besides academic and theoretical contribution also has practical implications.

Understanding diversity in Republic of North Macedonia is more that important, since the diversity of the citizenship in our country is evident, acknowledged and accepted by the governing structures and the most relevant political subjects. The data from the census conducted in 2021 indicate that out of the 1.8 million residents in our country, 54.21% are Macedonians, 29.52% are Albanians, 3.98% are representative of the Turkish minority, 2.34% are Gipsy, 1.18% are Serbian ect. (data from the State Statistics agency, published in March 2022)². Regarding the citizens gender structure, in our country 50.4% of the citizens are women, while 49.6% are male. Analyzing this structure, we must highlight that women and men equally contribute to our country's' economy.

Regarding the structure of the study, we must emphasize that it includes literature review, methodology, results, discussion, conclusion and limitations. In the literature review, the depth and broadness of the concept of workplace diversity was analyzed. The literature review includes short overview of the definitions of: workplace diversity, diversity management, diversity-orientated competences, and diversity-orientated human resource management. In the Methodology section the used instruments and constructs are explained. In addition, the information regarding sampling has been provided.

In the section for results presentation, firstly we analyze how students understand diversity in accordance with their responses on the Reaction-to-Diversity Inventory, and afterwards the result regarding the determinants of students' understanding of diversity are interpreted. The aim in this section is to investigate whether there is any relation among students' understanding of diversity and their demographic characteristics, their educational experience and the climate created in their households and educational institution they attended.

Finally, in the discussion the presented results are compared with the findings in previous studies and the recommendation for future research are indicated.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

2.1. Definition of the key concepts

In order to investigate students' understanding of workplace diversity we need to analyze the definition of the term workplace diversity, as well as the components of diversity

² https://www.stat.gov.mk/PrikaziSooptenie_en.aspx?rbtxt=146

management concept. Furthermore, in this section we summarize the approaches used for expanding the essence of diversity and the theoretical approaches used for researching diversity management.

Although significant number of authors investigating diversity management offer definitions on the term diversity and workplace diversity, we would address several of them which are relevant for our research. Phelps (1997), by emphasizing the importance of diversity for the management and leadership processes has defined the term as "...the different or dissimilar attitudes, values and way of life between people based on race, religion, color, national origin, economic status, gender ect" (p.4). This definition highlights that diversity in its' essence refers to difference in values and attitudes, and consequently behaviors, that arise from certain individual characteristics, such as race, religion, color, national origin, economic status, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, parental status, education, place of living, experience ect. Which of this characteristic are going to be considered and investigated largely depends on the social context in which organizations and researches operate (Winston, 2010). Although Van Knippenberg (2007) argues that diversity refers to the characteristics of a group, we concede with Phels (1997) opinion that diversity refers to the different values and attitudes that individuals have because of their belonging to a certain group. Some of these values and attitudes are adopted since some groups (such as women, minorities, people with disabilities ect.) face specific challenges that shape their viewpoint and consequently behavior (Moore, 1999, p.211).

Workplace diversity is a term that was coined in the 90s and according to Christian et al. (2006) refers to the differences analyzed in the context of identity-based and organizational-based group membership such as race-ethnicity, gender, tenure and function, educational background, political background, military experience, weight ect. Patrik and Kumar (2012) elaborate that workplace diversity refers to the "variety of differences between people in an organization" (p. 1) including their perception about themselves and others that affect their interactions. Some other authors argue that workplace diversity does not incorporates only the differences between work and organizational groups but also the relational demography and the environment created by the interactions of the members of separate groups within the organization (Chrobot-Mason and Aramovic, 2013; Guillaume et al., 2017). Prasad and Milles (1997) argue that the term workplace diversity may have different meaning for different groups and individuals and that it may vary from the representation of different demographic and social groups in the workplace to creating new values and adapting work practices. In summary, we can conclude that workplace diversity incorporates the differences between individuals, work and organizational groups, including the differences in perceptions between the individual and the organizational groups.

In order to properly define the term "managing diversity", firstly we need to define the term "understanding diversity". The interpretation of understanding diversity largely depends of the theoretical approach used for researching and defining diversity. For the purposes of this study, we believe that understanding diversity should be defined as individuals' awareness and feeling of closeness with the existing differences and their commitment to respect them, created naturally without the imposed norms or rules (Prasad and Milles, 1997, p.19-20).

On the other side, managing diversity refers to the undertaking systematic and planned activities for "recruiting and retaining employees from diverse demographic backgrounds" and for appreciating the existing differences in the workplace (Prasad and Milles, 1997, p. 4.). Rosado (2006) argues that managing diversity refers to a continuous process for unleashing individual talents and capabilities and creating an environment that is safe for differences.

Managing diversity as a concept, according to Maxwell et al. (2001), is more concerned with organizational culture and managers' styles and therefore includes different activities that enable coping with the existing differences within the organization and enhances organizations' long-term ability to adjust to demographic and cultural changes in the external environment.

Significant number of authors are trying to analyze what does managing diversity includes. According to Ng (2008) diversity management includes a range of diversity practices, such as policy statements, active recruitment, training and development, management accountability and community support. On the other hand, Agócs and Burr (1996) support the standing that diversity management is concerned with the inter-personal and inter-group relations, especially with the relations between managers and employees they supervise, among peer and between employees and customers. In this line is the argument of Nadiv and Kuna (2020) who state that diversity management should contribute to managing paradoxical tensions within the organization. Taking into consideration that most of the activities and processes incorporated in diversity management are tightly related or influenced by human resource management practices, we must agree with the constataion that "diversity management can be seen as a kind-or a facet- of human resource management" (Kollen, 2021). This viewpoint has been supported by numerous authors, such as Mavin and Griling (2000), Ng and Wyrick (2011), Patrick and Kumar (2012), Chrobot-Mason and Aramovic, 2013), Sharma (2016), Mazur and Walczyna (2020).

The human resource management department undertakes most of the activities that are part from the diversity management process and often the head of human resource department is simultaneously the head for diversity management (Ng and Wyrick, 2011). Furthermore, it is interesting to note the research of Mazur and Walczyna (2020) who have created a new model of sustainable human resource management and argue that the emphasizing fair treatment and development and taking into consideration the interests and needs of all groups of shareholders (external and internal) are one of the key functions of sustainable human resource management. The importance of addressing diversity issues for creating sustainable human resource management has also been emphasized by the Vranakova et al. (2021) in their research on generational diversity. Additionally, Vranakova et al. (2021) emphase that most of the diversity management implies interventions in job recruitment, training, learning and career development, health protection and promotion, working arrangements, work design and retirement transition practices which are traditionally part from the human resource management functions. These studies provide additional arguments the Marvin and Griling (2000) standing that diversity management is part from the human resource management or a new perspective in researching human resource management practices and policies as Mavin and Griling (2000) state.

2.2. Theoretical background for researching diversity management

When researching diversity management, most of the studies adopt one of the two general approaches to diversity: the mainstream approach and the critical approach (Kollen, 2020). On the other hand, the investigation of the theories used as foundation for depicting the scope and broadens of the diversity management concept largely differ in accordance with the studies aim. However, Robertson (2019) argue that the theoretical foundation of the diversity management concept incorporates the assumptions of the following theories: the social identity theory, the self-categorization theory and the similarity

attraction paradigm. Ng and Wyrick (2011) on the other side note that the research on diversity management relies primary on the following frameworks and paradigms: the value-in-diversity hypothesis, the access-and-legitimacy, integration-and- learning and discrimination-and-fairness perspective. In this paper we do not intent to thoroughly analyze the theoretical foundations of diversity management as a concept, but we are going to review the essential points in each of this approaches and theories that is going to enable better understanding of the main research question in this paper.

As Kollen (2020) have elaborated, the mainstream approach to diversity has been recently popularized in the management literature and its main focus is on “the positive and negative performance-related outcomes of workplace diversity and its management” (p.2), which have a monetary form and support the ‘business case’ for diversity. On the other hand, the critical approach to diversity explains that diversity managements’ roots are within the political stream for ‘equal opportunity’. Kollen (2020) explains that although the ‘equal opportunity’ can be analyzed as business case, the motives for introduction are primarily related to achieving social justice. These research stream argue that diversity management has been derived through the evolutionary development of ‘equal opportunity’ perspective and does not spontaneously materialize.

Similarly, Dwertmann et al. (2016), in the research on diversity climate introduces two perspectives typically used in the diversity-related research: the fairness and discrimination perspective and the synergy perspective. According to this classification the fairness and discrimination perspective is related to the equal opportunities for employment (fairness) and the treatment of the employees after they are hired (discrimination within the organization). The fairness and discrimination perspectives is built on the foundation of the following theories: the social identity and social categorization theory, as well as, the theories of social exchange and psychological contract (Dwertmann et al., 2016). On the other hand, the synergy perspective on diversity climate focuses on the performance outcomes of the benefits of diversity. The main goal of this perspective is increasing “synergistic outcomes from diversity” (Dwertmann et al., 2016, p. 9). This perspective is most commonly used when the performance on complex tasks is analyzed, such as the performance of top management teams, or the performance on tasks that require higher level of creativity and innovation, or specific cultural competencies.

The basic assumption in social identity theory on intergroup behavior is that “groups like each other (or not) because it serves their interests or goals to do so and that intergroup behavior is always preceded by some social categorization activity” (Brown and Cappoza, 2000, p. 8-9). Moreover, the social identity theory explains that peoples’ behavior within groups (and the workforce is a group) is determined by the individual psychological mechanisms and the internalization of the group concepts (Brown and Cappoza, 2000, p. 10). Therefore, individuals’ belonging to a group defines his/her identity and stimulates comparison between the groups in which they belong and the group in which they do not belong.

The self-categorization theory thus identifies three levels of self-categorization that enable the formation of the human, the social and the personal identity (Hornsey, 2008, p. 208). This theory relies on the same basic assumptions as the social identity theory. However, it depicts the complexity of the individuals’ identity and elaborates that in some circumstances one level of self-definition may dominate over the others (Hornsey, 2008; Turner and Reynolds, 2012).

The similarity attraction paradigm emphasizes that the “attitude similarity-dissimilarity could result in unfair bias” (Leonard, 1976, p. 83) and that the similarity of attitudes increases the attraction between two people.

Besides the above-mentioned theories, in diversity related research some authors also elaborate the contribution of the social exchange theory and the psychological contract theories (Dwertmann et al., 2016). The social exchange theory argues that obligations are generated through series of interactions and that these interactions are usually seen as interdependent and contingent of the actions of another person (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). This interaction enable creating high-quality relations (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005) and shape individuals' perceptions about certain issues, such as in our case – diversity. The literature on psychological contract is tightly related to the social exchange theory (at least its roots) and the core assumption of this theories is that “social relationships has always been comprised of unspecified obligations and the distribution of unequal power resources” (Cullianane and Dundon, 2006, p.114). Consequently, the expectations that are created in a relationship, in our case, between the individual and the organization “cover not only how much work is to be performed for how much pay, but also a whole set of obligations, privileges and rights” (Cullianane and Dundon, 2016, p. 114). Therefore, this explains how the psychological contract theories are related to diversity research in organizational context. The psychological contract theories are well established in the human resource management and management literature and must be taken into consideration when researching diversity issues. All of these theoretical approaches attempt to explain how individuals differ and what shapes their identity and behavior in certain circumstances and therefore Roberson (2019) argues that these theories from personal and social psychology and sociology constitute the theoretical foundation for the modern concept of diversity management.

On the other hand, Ng and Waryck (2011) suggest that the main frameworks and approaches used for investigating diversity management are value-in-diversity hypothesis, the access-and-legitimacy, integration-and-learning and discrimination-and-fairness perspective. The value-in-diversity hypothesis argues that people prefer and identify more with diverse than with homogenous groups and that diverse groups build more favorable relationships with their membership (Knippenger et al., 2007). Access-and-legitimacy paradigm argues that there are three types of legitimacy (pragmatic, moral and cognitive), and that gaining, maintaining and repairing legitimacy is related to accessing resources (Suchman, 1995). The access-and-legitimacy paradigm in the context of diversity management suggest that the underrepresented groups in the workplace should be prepared to adjust and work effectively with the dominant groups in the system (organization) (Kwon and Nikolaidis, 2017). The integration-and-learning paradigm suggest that companies should celebrate the difference among employees, accept them, and understand diversity as ongoing process of constant learning and integration (Kwon and Nikolides, 2017, p. 88). Finally, the oldest perspective used in diversity management research is the discrimination-and-fairness perspective, which was imposed by legislation and argues that organization must create equal opportunities for all employees (Kwon and Nikolaidis, 2017). However, in recent research related to diversity scholars actively write about fairness, or organizational fairness, that is defined similarly as organizational justice (Fujimoto et al., 2011; Choi and Rainey, 2014).

2.3. Education and diversity

The educational process is crucial for gaining the appropriate competences for managing diversity, as well as for working effectively with a diverse workforce. Considering, the recent social developments, such as: mass migration, aging population, changing career patterns, same sex marriage legislation, new generational lifestyles and preferences (Post et al., 2021), the need for adopting a diversity orientated competences is highlighted, not only for managers, but for anyone who works or intends to work in an organization. In this section of the literature review, we are going to make a short overview of the competences that in the contemporary research are labeled as diversity orientated, but our focus is going to be on the previous study on understanding diversity by students since this is what we investigate in the empirical part.

Recently, Yuengling (2011), in the diversity competency model suggest that managers must acquire the following diversity-orientated competencies: applying cultural knowledge, organizational awareness and cultural perspective thinking. Visagie et al. (2011) argue that the key competences needed for managing multicultural groups are: cultural empathy, leading of the job, communicational competence, generic managerial skills and personal style characterized with emotional stability. Lillevik (2007) on the other hand does not proposes set of diversity-orientated competencies that employees should adopt, but rather approaches diversity from a cultural aspect and argues that these competences should be acquired in the process of socialization.

However when we approach the diversity issues, taking into consideration the recent trends, we must be aware that students need to acquire skills and competences that are going to enable them to thrive in a culturally and generationally diversified workplace. Therefore, numerous authors investigate how university students understand diversity and what affects their understanding. In the following section, we are going to review some of them.

In general, most of the studies investigating students' understanding on diversity rely on the developmental theories (from psychology) and the theoretical elaboration on the effects of diversity proposed by Gurin et al. (2002). The developmental theories propose that psychological development refers to "a behavior change which requires programing" or "a change in the way an organisms' behavior interacts with the environment (and)... that progressive changes occur with the passage of time" (Reese and Overton, 1970, p.127). According to these theories, the human development occurs in stages and each stage represents a feature of certain model (Reese and Overton, 1970, p.127). Taking into consideration the assumptions of the developmental psychology, Gurin et al. (2002) argues that during college individuals experience cognitive growth and that the first years of college are especially important for this process since, the individual encounters an environment that is different from their home environment. On the other side, Gaish et al. (2018) suggest that when researching diversity in higher education institutions, the same approaches used for researching diversity management in business context can be applied, with certain correction of the rationalities of each paradigm/perspective.

When researching diversity outcomes, in higher education institutions Gurin et al. (2002) suggest that three types of diversity should be taken into consideration: the structural diversity, the informal interactional diversity and the so-called classroom diversity (related to learning about different people or gaining content knowledge). Gaisch et al. (2018) argue that when researching diversity management in tertiary level education, the following segments must be taken into consideration: the demographic diversity, which is related to antidiscrimination

practices, and institutional, functional, disciplinary and cognitive diversity, which are related to competence development and students' learning orientation. Gaisch et al. (2018) have called this model the HEAD wheel, which is an abbreviation of the higher education awareness for diversity. Gurin et al. (2002). Similarly, Misra and McManoh (2006), argue that structural diversity is not sufficient, and that the informal interactional diversity is the most important type of diversity that shapes students' understanding about diversity issues. Misra and McManoh (2006) also highlight that universities' ability to retain students from misrepresented groups and create opportunities for academic and social integration for these students, impacts students understanding of diversity. Jayakumar (2008), building on the theory developed by Gurin et al. (2002), argue that structural diversity (the numerical representation of students of color), cross-racial interaction and classroom diversity together with campus racial climate should be taken into consideration when investigating students understanding of diversity.

Moreover, diversity climate has been separately researched by different authors in the management literature, but the most comprehensive definition has been proposed by Dwertmann et al. (2016). Namely, Dwertmann et al. (2016) state that "diversity is meant to capture the 'perceived' attitude or shared perceptions about which behaviors are appropriate and about the meanings associated with diversity within a particular context" (p.5). Diversity climate, reflect how students experience the institution, and this is based on their perceptions about their interactions and possible outcomes (Mayhew et al., 2005). Furthermore, Jayakumar (2008) argues that post-secondary institutions have lasting impact on students' values (especially of the values of students belonging to the ethnic majority).

When investigating diversity management in higher education institutions, Gurin et al. (2002) stress that there are two types of outcomes that should be taken into consideration: learning outcomes (which are related to active thinking or encouraging effortful, mindful and conscious modes of thought) and democratic outcomes (which refer to preparing young people to respond to citizens demands in modern societies). Jayakumar (2008) argues that the outcomes of proper diversity management in higher educational institutions should be the development of the cross-cultural workforce competencies, which include pluralistic orientation (extent to which students' thinking demonstrates a dualistic versus a multiple perspective) and leadership skills (capacity to negotiate controversial issues, reflecting the competencies required of leaders in diverse or global society).

Finally, the research on the determinants of students' understanding of diversity reveals that it can include students' demographic characteristics (such as: gender, race, socio-economic status, year in school, pre college interactions with diverse peers) and perceptions about the institutions awareness and commitment to diversity (Mayhew et al., 2005). Buterin-Micic (2018), argues that students' attitudes towards school integration of children from different ethnic backgrounds are determined by gender, ethnic status, interethnic contact and their attitudes towards multiculturalism. Gurin et al. (2002) argues that gender, students' educational success, parents' educational level, racial composition of the high school, racial composition of the neighborhood and institutional characteristics (out of which significant number refer to diversity climate) impact diversity-related outcomes (learning and democracy outcomes). Jayakumar (2008) suggests that development of students' cross-cultural competences is determined by diversity of the high school they attended, structural diversity of the college, campus diversity (racial) climate, college cross-racial interactions, and post college lifestyle.

2.4. Hypothesis development

Taking into consideration the above-mentioned research, the following hypothesis were developed:

H₁: Students' understanding on workplace diversity is related to positive reactions.

H₂: Students' understanding of workplace diversity is determined by students' gender.

H₃: Students' understanding of workplace diversity is determined by students' socio-economic status.

H₄: Students' understanding of workplace diversity is determined by their parents' educational level.

H₅: Students' understanding of workplace diversity is determined by the environment in which they grew.

H₆: Students' understanding of workplace diversity is determined by the diversity climate in the educational institutions which refers to teachers' commitment to diversity.

H₇: Students' understanding of workplace diversity is determined by students' educational success.

3. METHODOLOGY

In order to test the above-proposed hypothesis, we used the instrument for measuring attitudes towards and perceptions of workplace diversity developed by De Meuse and Hostager (2001). The Reaction-to-Diversity Inventory was used for testing the first hypothesis (related to the students' reactions to diversity), while the items of the workplace diversity survey were used for investigating the determinants of students' understanding of diversity. The questionnaire was distributed electronically to the students from the second and first year of undergraduate studies at the Faculty of Economics – Skopje. In the first wave, a total of 136 responses to the questionnaire have been gathered. Afterwards, we managed to enlarge the sample and reached the number of 184 respondents. The respondents were students in first and second year of undergraduate studies.

In order to test the hypothesis 2, 3,4,5,6 and 7 we used a multiple regression analysis. One of the independent variables represents a construct, whose reliability was properly tested. Also, the dependent variable represents a construct, which incorporates 18 items.

4. RESULTS

In the following section we are going to present the results from the analyses performed on the sample of the 184 respondents. We are going to start with the presentation of the results from the Reaction-to-Diversity Inventory and afterwards we are going to present the results from the multiple regression analysis.

The results from the Reaction-to-Diversity Inventory on a sample of 184 respondents has shown that most of the students relate the term diversity with *unity* (47), which represents an organizational outcome. As De Meuse and Hostager (2001) have argued diversity, or the reaction to diversity may be related to the following dimensions: emotional reactions, judgments, behavioral reactions, personal consequences, and organizational outcomes. Furthermore, De Meuse and Hostager (2001) for each dimension have identified positive and negative words. According to De Meuse and Hostager (2001) unity is a word that has positive connotation, and it is opposite to unprofitable. In this line, we can conclude that the students of

the sample have positive understanding of workplace diversity and link this concept with beneficial organizational practices. In accordance to these finding we can conclude that most of the students relate diversity with positive aspects of its dimensions, and most of them understand diversity in light of organizational outcomes.

In Table 1 we present the results from the multiple regression analysis on the data from the sample that consists of 184 students. The Cronbach's Alpha of the dependent variable in this sample is 0.874, while the Cronbach's Alpha of the variable named teachers' commitment to promoting diversity is 0,824, which indicate that both constructs are reliable. The models presented in Table 1 include 3 independent variables.

Table 1 Results from the multiple regression analysis which indicate the determinants of students' understanding of diversity in the workplace (with n=184)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
	Students' understanding of diversity in the workplace	Students' understanding of diversity in the workplace	Students' understanding of diversity in the workplace	Students' understanding of diversity in the workplace	Students' understanding of diversity in the workplace
Gender	0,178**	0,149*			0,119
Mothers' educational level	-0,084			-0,130**	-0,044
Place of birth	-0,114		-0,083		-0,082
Average grade during on Faculty (University)		-0,179**	-0,178**	-0,178**	-0,171**
Teachers' commitment to promoting diversity		0,393 ^a	0,393 ^a	0,393 ^a	0,373 ^a
R ²	0,068	0,224	0,209	0,218	0,233
Adjusted R ²	0,052	0,207	0,191	0,201	0,204
F	4,362***	12,990 ^a	11,856 ^a	12,540 ^a	8,091 ^a
Durbin-Watson	1,942	1,743	1,727	1,756	1,763

*p<0.10; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01; ^ap<0.001; and values in the table are standardized beta coefficients

Source: authors' analysis

The first model indicates that students' gender has statistically significant association with students' understanding of workplace diversity. This model includes 3 independent variables and has relatively weak explanatory power (adjusted R² is 5,2%).

The second model shows that gender, students' academic success and teachers' commitment to promoting diversity are statistically significant predictors of students' understanding of workplace diversity. Namely, the association between gender and students' understanding of workplace diversity is statistically significant (p<0.10) and positive, which means that female students are more likely to have positive understanding of workplace diversity. The association between teachers' commitment to promoting diversity and students' understanding of workplace diversity is also positive, but the standardized beta coefficient that represent the relation between students' academic success and their understanding of diversity is negative. This implies that students from first year of studies have deeper understanding of workplace diversity and see it as valuable concept. The explanatory power of this model is 20.7%.

The results from the Model number 3 indicate that students' academic success and teachers' commitment to promoting diversity have statistically significant relation with students' understanding of workplace diversity (p<0.05 and p<0.001, respectively). The explanatory power of this model is 19.1%.

The Model number 4 indicates that mothers' educational level, as well as students' academic success are statistically significantly and negatively related to students' understanding of workplace diversity ($p < 0.05$). Furthermore, the results from this model also suggest that teachers' commitment to promoting diversity is statistically significantly and positively related to students' understanding of workplace diversity ($p < 0.001$). The explanatory power of the 4th model is 20.1%.

The last multiple regression model includes the following variables: gender, mothers' educational level, students' place of birth, students' academic success and teachers' commitment to promoting diversity. According to the presented results students' academic success and teachers' commitment to promoting diversity have statistically significant relationship with students' understanding of workplace diversity ($p < 0.05$ and $p < 0.001$, respectively). The explanatory power of the model is 20.4% (Adjusted R^2 is 0.204).

The results presented in Table 1 indicate that Teachers' commitment to promoting diversity is the strongest strong predictors of students' understanding of diversity. The results also indicate that most of the students relate diversity with word that represent organizational outcomes and have positive connotation (the word unity).

5. DISCUSSION

The results presented in this study partially coincide with the findings presented in other previous studies. Namely, Gurin et al (2002) findings suggest that informal interactional diversity has larger impact on the learning and democracy outcomes investigated in their study. Furthermore, their findings indicate that students' diversity experiences are equally important in the national level study, as well as in the Michigan study. Gurin et al. (2002) argue that most students' experiences, inside and outside classroom, are important for different learning and democracy outcomes. On the other hand, Jayakumar (2008) findings indicate that there is significant differences across subsamples based on whether the individuals included came from segregated or a diversified pre-college neighborhood. Additionally, Jayakumar (2008) findings indicate that there is statistically significant relation between diversity of high school and individuals' ability to develop cross-cultural workplace competencies. In addition, the findings presented by Jayakumar (2008), on a sample where the individuals came from a diverse pre-college neighborhood, suggest that gender is statistically significantly related to cross-cultural competences. Furthermore, Jayakumar (2008) findings indicate that campus racial climate is statistically significantly related to individual's cross-culture competences. In this line, we must note that our findings, which indicate that teachers' commitment to promoting diversity and students' gender, are the most significant predictors of students' understanding of diversity practically coincide with the findings presented by Gurin et al. (2002) and Jayakumar (2008). Similarly, Hostager and DeMeuse (2008) also note that female students from the diversity class that participated in their study have more positive understanding of diversity. These results are also, partially, in line with our findings. Furthermore, Buterin-Micic (2018) also found students' gender is a significant predictor of students' attitudes towards school assimilation.

Regarding the results from the Reaction-to-Diversity Inventory, DeMeuse and Hostager (2001) have indicated that students in the university sample on which they tested the RTDI were least optimistic regarding diversity. Only 35% of the students fall in the category classified as diversity optimists (with scores between +35 and +11). In

their later research, Hostager and DeMeuse (2008) have noted that senior-level students link diversity with “significantly fewer positive words than their junior counterparts” (p.135). Taking into consideration that in our study we have included primarily students from 1st and 2nd year of undergraduate studies, we may say that our findings coincide with Hostager and DeMeuse later research.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we must note that researching diversity in our country is more than necessary since our long-term strategic goals is building a society that is multicultural and inclusive. Furthermore, the key trends regarding workplace and HR management practices indicate that diversity is a concept that is expanding and that includes different dimensions. The finding presented in this study indicate how students understand diversity and may help managers to design proper HR practices and universities to successfully introduce new classes that address diversity issues.

The presented results strongly support hypothesis 1 and 6. Additionally, we present results that partially support hypothesis 2, 4 and 7. The findings indicate that most of the students positively understand diversity and that the strongest predictor of students' understanding of diversity is teachers' commitment to promoting diversity. The results that partially support hypotheses 2, 4 and 7 are not conclusive and their association of these variables with students' understanding of workplace diversity should be examined further.

7. LIMITATIONS

The study has several limitations. The first one is related to the sample size. Taking into consideration that the Faculty of Economics – Skopje has over 2.000 students, the sample in future research may increase. Furthermore, future research should provide more information regarding understanding of diversity by students from different level of studies (undergraduate and postgraduate).

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STUDENTSKO RAZUMEVANJE RAZLIČITOSTI RADNOG MESTA: SLUČAJ REPUBLIKE SEVERNE MAKEDONIJE

Značaj istraživanja o raznolikosti radnog mesta je porastao u poslednjih nekoliko decenija. Naime, kao rezultat povećanih mogućnosti za rad na daljinu i izmena propisa koji štite prava pojedinaca i grupa različitog porekla i fizičkih i psihičkih karakteristika, pitanja raznolikosti na radnom mestu i inkluzije postaju istaknuta tema istraživanja u literaturi o upravljanju ljudskim resursima i menadžmentu. Stoga cilj ove studije je da se na uzorku studenata Ekonomskog fakulteta u Skoplju ispita njihovo razumevanje različitosti. Potreba za sprovođenjem ovakve studije u našoj zemlji proizilazila je iz činjenice da živimo u društvu u kojem se percipiraju i priznaju pitanja različitosti. Da bismo istražili razumevanje različitosti od strane studenata, koristili smo dva instrumenta (Reaction-to-Diversity Inventory i Workplace Diversity Survey) koju su razvili De Meuse i Hostager (2001). Prvi je korišćen za istraživanje studentskog razumevanja pojma različitosti na radnom mestu, a drugi za istraživanje determinanti razumevanja različitosti studenata. Uпитnik je elektronski distribuiran studentima Ekonomskog fakulteta – Skoplje, Univerzitet Sv. Kirila i Metodija u Skoplju. Analiza odgovora na Reaction-to-Diversity Inventory pokazala je da većina studenata različitost povezuje sa pojmom jedinstvo (47), koji se odnosi na organizacione ishode kao jednu od dimenzija različitosti. Osim što se odnosi na organizacione ishode, važno je napomenuti da je jedinstvo pojam koji ima pozitivnu konotaciju. Rezultati višestruke regresione analize na uzorku od 184 ispitanika ukazuju da pored angažovanja nastavnika/profesora u obrazovanju o različitosti i polu studenata, akademski uspeh učenika treba smatrati prediktorom njihovog razumevanja različitosti (iako statistička povezanost ocene studenata i njihovo razumevanje različitosti je statistički slabija i negativna).

Ključne reči: različitost, inkluzija, upravljanje ljudskim resursima orijentisano prema različitost, studenti, edukacija o različitosti