

# CULTURAL ASSIMILATION OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND THE ROLE ATTITUDES OF MAINSTREAM POPULATION PLAY

MEDEA DESPOTASHVILI

Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi, Georgia

Email: medea.despotashvili@tsu.ge

---

**Abstract:** It has been about ten years that universities in Georgia accept international students From Europe, United States, Asia and Africa. Georgia has been considered as one of the tolerant countries to diversity, being home for people of different culture and religions. In parallel, international students often report that they face major challenges just because of their origin. The value of the research comes from the context of the country. From one hand, we are able to investigate factors of cultural assimilation of long term minorities living in the country for many generations. From the other hand, we have unique possibility to track cultural assimilation process when there is a new, previously unrepresented group of immigrants. Therefore the research has both theoretical and practical value. The goal of the research is to identify what factors may influence – make easier or complicated – newcomers’ social integration. In this unique and specific environment, we try to answer the question: what are the factors that sometimes make assimilation easy or hard, how do attitudes of immigrants and locals influence this process, etc. The study is an attempt to consider cultural assimilation as a dynamic process with more than two dimensions and bring readiness of mainstream population to accept an outgroup as a factor of cultural assimilation.

---

***Index terms:*** Acculturation Orientation, Social Adaptation, Attitudes, Integration, Assimilation.

---

## I. INTRODUCTION

Pettigrew (1998) offers Allport’s intergroup contact theory to understand shaping it by individual differences and social factors. Relative importance of personal and situational factors is one of the challenges in researching prejudice. Our focus is on factors of social perception influencing cultural assimilation of minority groups. As Rudmin (2011) mentions, if single individual integrates s/he becomes bicultural. But when we speak about cultural assimilation of a whole group, it has two vast effects: minority group disappears and majority group changes. Brubaker (2001) speaks of “return of assimilation” which, unlike old understanding of this term, and is more complex and transformed understanding of the

assimilation process. Johnson (1997) uses metaphor of “Ring of Fire”, when speaking of assimilation. It indicates the depth of challenges both group faces in this process.

Studies offer both implicit and explicit measures and questionnaires to describe and explain outgroup prejudice and discrimination (Brigham, 1993; Pettigrew and Meertens, 1995; Reynolds et.al, 2001). Some of the methods developed were quite innovative and flexible using computer based methods and experimental manipulations (e.g., study by Michinov et.al. 2005). Social psychology has focused more on individual factors of racism, prejudice and discrimination, like frustration-aggression hypothesis, authoritarian personality theory, value conflict theory etc. (Sidanius and Pratto, 1999; Sidanius et.al., 2004; Sidanius et.al., 2001). But more and more authors attempted to analyze these processes in wider perspective.

In a modern global society, intercultural mobility and process of acculturation is one of the meaningful issues to study. Acculturation as a research area has been influenced by theoretical constructs like cultural assimilation, acculturation orientation, socio-cultural adaptation, perceived cultural distance etc. the basic challenge is operationalization of these. This field is rich of researches, but data from different cultures are still important to contribute the understanding of the process, its dynamics and factors related with this construct. Besides theoretical importance, these data also have practical implication and can be applied in any space where people from different cultures interact.

Georgia is considered a multi-cultural country due its cultural and ethnic diversity. Though, globalization has brought a new pattern of immigration introducing more diversity. The goal of the study was to investigate culture specific pattern of cultural assimilation in Georgia, focusing on local context and challenges.

## II. ACCULTURATION STRATEGIES OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN GEORGIA

### **Research Goals and Hypothesis**

This research is an attempt to see process of acculturation in local context of Georgia. By comparing assimilation process of different immigrant group we aimed to see what factors weigh more in this process: race, religion, duration of living in the country, plans to stay in the country etc. For this purpose, we used two dimension model of acculturation to see what are the factors influencing cultural assimilation of minority groups in Georgia.

### **Hypothesis**

*Hypothesis 1:* Cultural assimilation of minority group is in positive correlation with the readiness of this group to accept and share the culture of majority group.

*Hypothesis 2:* Cultural assimilation of the minority group is different between different racial and religious groups.

## **Research Instruments**

Attitudes toward Acculturative Behavior Scale (AABS): 24 statements are evaluated using Lickert scale. The scale evaluates three dimensions of acculturation – assimilation, separation and integration

Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (Ward & Kennedy, 1999) contains 41 statements.

Brief Acculturation Orientation Scale BAOS (Demes & Geeraert, 2014) Lickert scale is used to evaluate four statements for each of the three dimensions – acculturation orientation, psychological adaptation, sociocultural adaptation.

## ***Sample***

The immigrant groups that were the focus of our study was diverse. Some groups had long history of intergroup relationships with Georgian group. Some had been represented in the country relatively recently. Therefore it was decided to choose a sample that would allow to make comparisons among groups. As all the groups of our interests were represented by student population the country, our sample consisted of representatives of immigrated minority groups of student age (18-30 years old). We used a stratified sample. First of all, we took a database of universities that had international faculties. After getting permission from administrations of the universities, face-to-face interviews were conducted on site.

## ***Participants***

Gender groups were almost equally represented in the sample (55% male, and 45% female). The sample consisted of three subgroups:

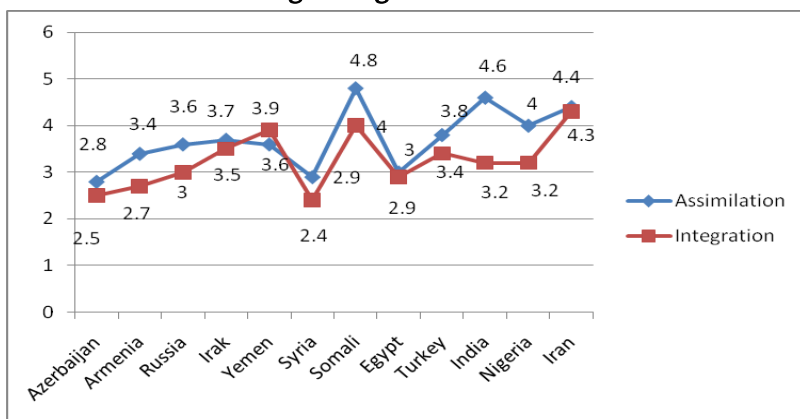
1. 100 short term visitors of Georgia, who arrive to the country to study at the university. The majority was from Irak (26%). The rest of this subgroup was from Syria, Yemen, Iran, Turkey, India, Nigeria, India, Somali, and Egypt.
2. 200 students born and brought up in Georgia, representing Azerbaijani, Armenian and Russian ethnic groups
3. 300 ethnically Georgian students, born and brought up in Georgia

Short term immigrants had been living in Georgia in average for two years (minimum 2 months, maximum three years). Most of them planned to stay from one to ten more years. Only 7,7% (mostly from Irak) planned to stay permanently in the country.

First of all, let's look at the acculturation and social adaptation pattern among immigrants and ethnic minorities. As mentioned, East Asian Acculturation Measure (EAAM) consists of three subscales. Comparing mean scores showed that assimilation and integration subscales correlate with the country of origin ( $F=3.169$ ,  $df=17$ ,  $p<0.001$ ;  $F=2.594$ ,  $df=17$ ,  $p<0.001$  respectively). As seen on the chart below, the

lowest score in assimilation is represented among respondents from African countries, India and Iran. The highest – among respondents from Azerbaijan, Syria, Egypt. Almost the same is the pattern of integration: low among immigrants from Somali and Iran, high among ethnic minorities.

**Chart #1: EAAM among immigrants and ethnic minorities**

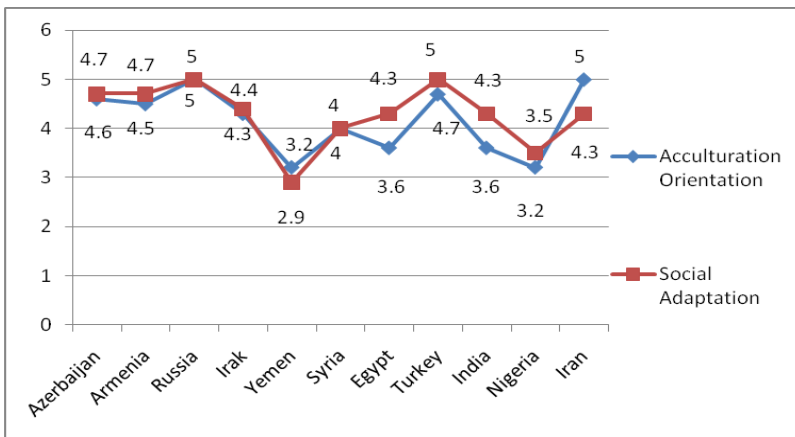


Thus, integration was the lowest among short term immigrants and highest among ethnic minorities ( $F=6,769, p<0.001$ ). If we compare data among the groups, the most assimilated and integrated were those representing neighbouring countries, unlike immigrants from African and Middle East countries. As about separation, least separated were respondents from India, and least – from Asia and Africa.

### Acculturation Orientation

Acculturation Orientation questionnaire also includes three subscales. Therefore respondents evaluated challenges they faced when moving to Georgia, on three dimensions. Comparing means revealed statistically reliable differences only on two subscales. Most challenges in Acculturation Orientation were reported by respondents from Nigeria, Yemen, Egypt and India; least challenges – by ethnic minorities ( $\text{Chi Square}=27.997, \text{df}=17, p<0.05$ ) who also reported challenges on Social Adaptation dimension which was also challenging for respondents from Yemen and Nigeria ( $\text{Chi Square}=41.496, \text{df}=17, p<0.05$ ). Besides, more the immigrant lived in the country, less challenges he/she faced in Social Adaptation.

**Chart #3: Acculturation Orientation measure compared among the subgroups**



**Socio-Cultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS)** was also processed by comparing means. Respondents from Russia and Irak reported less challenges in Socio-Cultural Adaptation, unlike respondents from Yemen, Nigeria and Iran; the best pattern of socio-cultural adaptation was again, seen among ethnic minorities ( $F=2.893$ ,  $df=17$ ,  $p<0.005$ ). Besides, longer the respondent had lived in the country, less were the challenges in socio-cultural adaptation ( $z=-5.604$ ,  $p<0.000$ ).

## CONCLUSION

The basic goal of our research was to determine the pattern of cultural assimilation among immigrating groups in Georgia. We checked three hypothesis. The first one made assumption on pattern of assimilation among different immigrant groups. The results showed that highest pattern of cultural assimilation was among ethnic minorities, and the least – among immigrants from African and Asian countries. Accordingly, we can assume that racial differences play bigger role in cultural assimilation in Georgia, than religious differences.

The third hypothesis were also justified, as long term immigrants and ethnic minorities were more integrated than short term immigrants. Though the pattern was not the same for social adaptation and accultural orientation.

Current research is an important stage in a series of studies, overall objective of which is to identify factors that influence acculturation process.

## REFERENCES

Brigham, J. C. (1993). *College students' racial attitudes*. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 23, 1933-1967.

- Brubaker, R. (2001). *The Return of Assimilation? Changing Perspectives of Immigration and its Sequels in France, Germany and the United States*. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 4, pp. 531-548
- Demes K. A., Geeraert N., (2014) “*Measures Matter: Scales for Adaptation, Cultural Distance, and Acculturation Orientation Revisited*” *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, Vol 45(1) 91–109
- Johnson, K. R. (1997). *Melting Pot or Ring of Fire: Assimilation and the Mexican-American Experience*. 85 *Cal. L. Rev.* 1259 (1997). Available at:  
<http://scholarship.law.berkeley.edu/californialawreview/vol85/iss5/4>
- Michinov, N., Dambrun, M. Guimond, S., Meot, A. (2005) *Social dominance orientation, prejudice, and discrimination: A new computer-based method for studying discriminatory behaviors*. *Behavior Research Methods*, 37 (1), 91-98
- Pettigrew, T. F., & Meertens, R. W. (1995). *Subtle and blatant prejudice in Western Europe*. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 25, 57-75.
- Pettigrew, T. (1998). *Intergroup Contact Theory*. *Annual Reviews Psychology*
- Reynolds, K. J., Turner, J. C., Haslam, S. A., & Ryan, M. K. (2001). *The role of personality and group factors in explaining prejudice*. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 37, 427–434.
- Rudmin, F. W. (2011). *Acculturation, Acculturative Change, and Assimilation: A Research Bibliography With URL Links*. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, 8(1). <http://dx.doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1075>
- Sidanius, J., Pratto, F. (1999) *Social Dominance – an Intergroup Theory of Social Hierarchy and Oppression*. Cambridge University Press
- Sidanius, J., Pratto, F., van Laar, C., & Levin, S. (2004). *Social dominance theory: Its agenda and method*. *Political Psychology*, 25, 845-880.
- Sidanius, J., Pratto, F., Mitchel, M. (2001). *In-Group Identification, Social Dominance Orientation and Differential Intergroup Social Allocation*. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 134(2), 151-167.
- Ward c., Kennedy a., (1999) “*The Measurement of Sociocultural Adaptation*” Elsevier Science Ltd. *Int. J. Intercultural Rel.* Vol. 23, No. 4, pp. 659±677