Encountering the Differences in Religious Education: A Scale Development Study (1st Stage)

**Abstract**

First and foremost the religious aspects, what are the cognitive, affective and behavioral elements shaping individuals’ experiences when they face with the differences; in what ranges are these experiences lived and what is the complex mixture of mindsets, dispositions, values, sources, thoughts and attitudes forming these experiences? The answers for these questions give an opportunity to live together, to rethink encountering ethics. In this framework, the study aims to develop the “Scale of Experiences in Encountering the Differences (SEED)” in order to determine the teachers’ experiences in encountering particularly towards the differences in religious education. It is expected that the data obtained by the application of SEED will make it possible to see the borders of encountering experiences either they point richness, proliferation of understanding or dispute, chaos, violence even conflict and of giving an opportunity to understand and interpret them.

**Introduction**

Differences lead to a theoretical perspective within the framework of we as human beings need others in order to be ourselves (Fay, 2001). It is also claimed that the relationship between me and others involves sides that does not consider, the universe and human beings as a meta (as a thing or object) which cannot be taken in possession, does not minimize to the relationship between subject and object, and on the contrary, interprets the
relationship between me and others as a dialogical opportunity to understand the reality by grasping it ontological and existential-wise, and that ensures production of constructive – ameliorating meanings that prevent the individuals from alienating themselves from their environment and themselves. (Kalın, 2016).

How the differences that are intertwined in different cultures will be resolved against all the optimistic approaches, its risks or opportunities cause another problem (Göle, 2009). So to speak, there is a dilemma of peace and conflict. The possibility of providing clear answers to how this dilemma will evolve and conclude has become questionable.

When we talk about tolerance, dialogue, peace and the cohabitation culture, one of the fields that we come across both in our day and in the past and where differences intensively appeared is religion. Religion provides versatile encounters and forms in the fields of education, culture and art by its individual, social, historical and universal nature.

Question of fact about differences and religion is whether religions/faiths are an obstacle or a chance to live together and form a culture of tolerance and collaboration. In this sense, “definition” of religion and its “perception/understanding”, perception of believers towards each other, religious attitudes assumed by their believers and theological approaches are discovered as the fields to study in the literature.

The answer to the questions what are cognitive, affective, and behavioral factors forming the experiences of the individuals against the differences especially the religion, the situations where these experiences occur and mentalities, dispositions, values, sources, thoughts and attitudes forming and shaping these experiences would provide an opportunity to reconsider living together and ethic of encounter. Diversity and versatility formed against religious differences provide an insight towards where and how to handle the differences.

**Methodology**

**Research Design**

General framework of this paper to be made can be expressed as follows: to share the findings based on the course, depth and content of the grounds of experiences of encountering religious differences with the participants and to include the valuable contributions of the participants in the discovery of experiences regarding religious differences as the first part of the study.

This is the first step of a descriptive study which focuses on designing a scale to examine experiences in encountering the differences, and determining its psychometric features (validity & reliability).

Scale development is a process of obtaining a reliable, valid and practical measure of a construct in order to assess an attribute of interest. It is important to follow certain steps during a scale development process (Cohen & Swerdlik, 2013; Crocker & Algina, 1986; DeVellis, 2014). We can list these steps as follows:

1) Defining the concept to be measured, purpose of the scale, and the target group
2) Deciding/Determining the scope and content of the scale
3) Generating items based on this scope and content
4) Checking the items (expert judges) and creating the scale form
5) Identifying the methods to score the items and procedures for data analysis
6) Piloting the scale among the scale development group
7) Scoring the items and analyzing the data (validity and reliability studies)
8) Creating the final draft of the scale based on these results

Defining the concept to be measured, the purpose of the scale &
Deciding/Determining the scope and content of the scale

There are two different approaches for scale development. One of them is “deductive approach” which focuses on an already existing, conceptualised construct. This approach is practical when the definition of the construct is known and robust enough to generate the draft item pool. The second approach on the other hand is “inductive approach” which is used when there is an uncertainty about the definition and/or the dimensions of the construct. With an inductive approach, first of all it is tried to be explored that in which fields and at what levels the encountering the differences have been experienced in RE. The basic discussions about the psychological feature -Experience in Encountering the Differences”- we have interested in is given above.

What would be the starting point when it’s required to formulate an encounter principle in the field of religious differences and reach the agreed general principles of an ethic of encounter? It seems possible to talk about an ethic of encounter when the course, depth and content of the encountering experiences can be understood and explained well. Then how religious differences evolve becomes more explicit in line with the characteristics of encountering experiences. This is because it supports the argument that the experiences have different courses when the people who have the same religious background reading the same texts adopt distinct approaches such as exclusive, inclusive and pluralism regarding religious differences. Therefore, in the first stage of the study conducted, grounds, course, depth and content of experiences of encountering religious differences were tried to be understood, explained and discovered. In the second stage, scaling studies which are going to allow seeing the main principles will be included. And in the third one, the research attempts to reach the principles constituting the basis for encountering principle. Briefly, the three stages indicated below;

→ Discovery of experiences of encounter religious differences,
→ The development of a scale assessing experiences of encounter the differences,
→ Principles regarding experiences of encountering that can be talked about,

constitute the main frame of the study to be conducted.

In the discovery phase of the fields where experiences of encountering religious differences occur and their levels, research was carried out through literature reviews and analyses of qualitative researches on this subject. In terms of theoretical sides of experiences of encountering and examples selected from the field, the following works of Dr. Ahmet Yemenici, one of the authors of this paper were utilized: Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Öğretmenlerinin Diğer Dinlere ve din mensuplarına ilişkin yaklaşımları (nitel bir çalışma) [Approaches of Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge Teachers towards Other Religions and Their Adherents (a qualitative study)]; Din Kültürü ve Ahlak bilgisi Öğretmenlerinin Diğer Dinlere ve Din Mensuplarına İlişkin Yaklaşmaları. Yayılmamamış Doktora Tezi [Approaches of Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge Teachers towards Other Religions and Their Adherents. Unpublished PhD Dissertation].

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Experiences Regarding Religious Differences and Areas/Environments of Experiences

After the literature reviews and qualitative studies, it was found that the experiences/approaches regarding religious differences occur in the theological, socio-cultural and pedagogical fields, either only in cognitive level or both cognitive and self-experience level (Yemenici, 2012, 2014).

In the following sections, the study will touch upon some examples based on the studies conducted regarding the fields where religious differences are seen and the experience of encountering. These examples will also be utilized to present several examples regarding the factors of the scale for experiencing differences.

- **Different Approaches Occurring in Theological Level and Examples of Experiences of Encounter**

  The approaches based on accuracy claims and discussing diversity of religions in this sense in philosophical and theological level ask the following questions in terms of the diversity of religions: a) can only one of the religions make you find God and salvation? b) Can other religions also be considered as Holy and savior? c) or are all the religions equal in terms of reality? The approach adopting (a) is called exclusivism, while the one adopting (b) is called inclusivism and (c) is called pluralism (Kılıç, 2003).

  Michael Peterson et al. suggest that the philosophical approaches with regard to religious diversity are grouped under three main titles which are exclusivism, pluralism and inclusivism (Peterson et al., 2006).

  There are discussions and researches whether these three paradigms could define the approaches of members of different religions sufficiently. For instance, there are also approaches such as the one stating that only God can decide who would find the salvation and that we can only criticize and discuss about the understanding and interpretation of religions.

  Different approaches are seen regarding this concern in terms of the experiences of teachers about religious differences. For instance, AG1 who is a long-time teacher in England and who encountered people with different religious backgrounds both cognitively and personally states that:

  “AG1: Actually the number of categories should be increased. I mean, it’s not right to consider this subject only in terms of these three categories. For example, I consider myself a member of the second approach. I have an including character by behaviours and perspectives. So in my opinion, if a person believes in God and does not commit sins, God would accept that person to heaven. This person can either be a Jew, a Christian or a Buddhist. God may accept that person to the heaven or not. There is always this possibility in my opinion. I don’t find this categorization accurate. First of all, the only religion that God accepts according to Muslims is Islam. The Holy Book is Quran, and Prophet Muhammed is the last prophet. But neither Jews, Christians, nor Buddhists don’t accept this. But it was sent as the last religion and Muhammed was sent to us as the last prophet. Therefore, I don’t consider or say this as an exclusivist. It may be defined in that categorization as exclusivist, but this is not true. This my truth, and I still believe that the essence is to be a good person and serve the humanity. Three things are important in our religion: to believe in God, to believe in the prophet and to believe in afterlife, or in other words, to believe that we will resurrect after death. If a person believes in
these three things, this person is a Muslim, or a believer. This person is a good person in the presence of God. So s/he believes in God. S/he believes in the prophets and that s/he will resurrect after death. This is how it’s explained in our religion... And this is what I believe. So, if a person believes in these, God will place that person in heaven. So it’s not possible to go to hell and this is inclusive, and the other thing shouldn’t be said in an exclusivist way.” (Yemenici, 2012)

TG4 who didn’t have many experiences encountering people with different religious backgrounds expresses his/her experiences in a more different way:

“Does anybody have the right to say “This is right in the presence of God” for another religion or to say “s/he found the salvation or failed in the presence of God” for a believer of another religion? For this question, TG4 stated that “a person can say this for other religions.” “I don’t consider their ways of living. I care about their belief systems.” said TG4 about the question how do you evaluate whether a person found the right path while approaching people with different religious backgrounds? Do you consider their Holy books, theology or their ways of living? (Yemenici, 2012)

Scaling examples regarding experiences based on only three paradigms when it comes to approaches about differences:

“I believe that the Holy texts are exclusive in terms of different groups.”

“I believe that the Holy books are including other religions and their believers.”

“People cannot decide whether a person will go to heaven.”

“There are universal values in all religions and beliefs emphasizing common characteristics of humanity.”

- Different Approaches and Examples for Experiences of Encounter in Socio-cultural Level

By saying approaches in socio-cultural level, it’s intended to explain social, cultural and political encounters and experiences regarding other religions and their adherents apart from a perception-association-communication level considering only epistemological and theological values regarding different religions and the people who believe in those different religions.

When the approaches describing the situations experienced by people in the mutual socio-cultural settings about differences are considered, the following statements are striking:

“We are now on the verge of dialogue age. We can travel the whole world and we can reach anything. There is almost nowhere left on earth where different languages and accents are spoken. Our streets, workplaces and homes are full of foreign products. We are able to see many different nations, cultures and religions in our living room thanks to our TVs (Smidler, 2007).”

It’s seen that the experiences of encountering differences in socio-cultural level are formed around two concepts: “ignorance” which tends to ignore differences, or “recognition” which doesn’t consider differences as a threat, considers them natural and enriching, and tends to form values through mutual understanding and collaboration (Selçuk, 2005). In this context; respect, tolerance, dialogical dialogue, sincerity, collaboration can be considered under the title of recognition, while conflict, exclusion, marginalisation, insincerity, ignorance, assimilation can be considered under the umbrella of ignorance.

In the experiences of teachers regarding differences in socio-cultural level, it was discovered that they weren’t in a state of ignoring due to difference of beliefs (ignorance) when
it was about their Daily-life and cognitive encounters with people who believe in different religions in the situations such as being neighbours, friends, working together, knowing about other religions. Their readiness for becoming in close relations such as friendship thanks to historical background, confidence and their daily experiences are really interesting. And their ideas stating that the past negative experiences were not due to religion or belief, but were due to political reasons shows that the real situation wasn’t the negative encounters or experiences but it was the situation due to lack of experiencing.

In socio-cultural level, especially the experiences of the teacher ÖG1 are interesting. ÖG1 who works as a religion culture teacher at French private school in Turkey states that:

“I realized I didn’t really know them until I came here. My perspective about them, perspective on life and people changed a lot after I came here. Maybe because of the way we were raised... The rightest, most perfect, flawless belief was ours. But when I came here, I realized that their beliefs are also right, perfect and flawless for them. Therefore, experiences differences and being aware of them is really important. We didn’t have any difficulties here. We had really good dialogues. One of my best friends is a pastor who is also an English teacher. We used to study English together every day. We used to take the ferry together. We showed each other respect. I can say he was a good friend of mine. Maybe we didn’t have any problems because of the place we worked and that it was a group of people who were mature enough to respect each other. I was quite respected since it was a foreign school and I was teaching religion. For example, I didn’t have any classes on Fridays so that I could freely go and pray, or when I had classes, I could have a 2-hour class and then break during the prayer times. They could sometimes let me for a day-off when I made speeches in the mosque. They let me when one of our students died. And I could lead the funeral prayer. We got a lot of respect as religion teachers. And they were really sensitive and careful about our beliefs. This wasn’t the case in most of the state school.” (Yemenici, 2012)

Examples for the ways of experiencing approaches regarding differences in socio-cultural level:

“Knowing about different beliefs allows people to know about their own beliefs better.”

“Exchanging information with the people with different religious backgrounds increases mutual respect.”

“Parties should trust each other first for a collaboration with people with different religious backgrounds.”

“Artistic activities make people with different beliefs and religious backgrounds closer.”

*Different Approaches and Examples for Experiences of Encounter in Pedagogical Level*

One of salient aspects in terms of the experiences with regard to including different religions and their believers-adherents- in the education was that it wouldn’t change a p-give any harm to- a person’s belief to know about other religions and people with different religious backgrounds and that it was necessary to include other religions in the education. The fact that including current issues and comparing other religions in the education kept the attention and interest higher was mentioned by participating teachers. It was mentioned that the lectures in the normal course without any other associations didn’t interest the students.
Examples for the ways of experiencing approaches regarding differences in pedagogical level:

“I believe that communicating with people with different beliefs in the same learning environment will improve me.”

“When teaching a different religion, you should approach it from that religion’s own perspective.”

“A comparative approach should be adopted when teaching about different religions and beliefs.”

Before moving on, it would be beneficial to provide some brief information about the other stages of the study. In the second stage of the study where scale development is carried out; first teacher candidates will form the study group. Once the study will be completed with them lecturers, teachers ranging from higher religion education to formal and non-formal religious education, and religious officials will form the next study groups for new validity and reliability studies. Because religious education is the main focus of discussions in terms of its learning environments such as school, teacher, prayer halls; program understandings, contents, resources and tools for experiences differences. On the other hand, religious education is supposed to respond to the demands and duties that is has to fulfil.

Defining the Target Group

RE has been an issue of debate in experiencing the differences, with its opportunities and materials like school, teacher, multiple learning environments, programme approaches and content. On the other hand RE is obliged to answer the demands in order to perform the duties, expected from itself. In this respect, as being one of the most important components of education, the focus of this study has been teachers and trying to find out the appearance of their experiences in encountering the differences. However, the refusal the researchers faced during the application permission process from the Ministry of Education, a mandatory change emerged in the target group. Teacher candidates have been chosen as the new target group of this study. Our study will be carried out with two different scale development groups:

1. Exploratory Factor Analysis and Realibility (Internal consistency) Studies Group: This group will be the group from which the data will collected in order to explore the factor structure and the internal consistency of the scale.
2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Reliability (Test-retest) Group: The aim of applying the scale to a different group is to determine whether the explored construct will be confirmed or not.

Both groups will consist of 220, because the literature tells us there should be at least 5 cases for each item (there are 44 items in the draft scale) (Tavşancıl, 2002). And also while we will sample these groups, the gender will be another issue and the number of males and females will be close to each other. The researchers will reach the applicants by purposive sampling method also known as selective or subjective sampling).

Generating items based on this scope and content & Checking the items (expert judges) and Creating the Scale Form

The draft item pool was generated according to the discussions held in this respect. Also the literature and the the opinions of the target group (by asking them to write an essay about what do they understand from the experience in encountering the differences) were taken into
account while writing the draft items. A total number of 86 items were generated within the first draft form. The draft item pool has been sent to 21 different experts from the fields of RE, social psychology, educational statistics, educational measurement and evaluation, and the other basic Islamic sciences of theology field. The experts were asked to review the items and comment on whether they cover a representative sample of the domain and . According to the expert judges, the face and content validity were determined. The items with low content validity rate (<.90) were excluded from the scale and some of the items were revised according to the expert comments. Also this revised form was checked by Turkish Language experts as well.

The scale will be a five point Likert scale between “Strongly Disagree – (1 point)” in one end and “Strongly Agree – (5 points)” in the other. The instructions has been written and the draft scale is ready to apply to the target groups. As soon as the 2017-2018 academic year will start, data collection process will also start.

In the following stages of the study, after collecting the data in iterative applications, the validity and reliability studies will be completed. Obtained data will be transferred into IBM–SPSS 22, AMOS 22, and LISREL 8.8 programs. In order to determine the validity and reliability of SEED, techniques such as Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) test, Bartlett Sphericity test, Varimax rotation, Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient, and confirmatory factor analysis will be used (Büyüköztürk, 2013; Özdamar, 2013). For the construct validity of the scale factor analysis (both exploratory and confirmatory) will be conducted to the data. For reliability evidences, Cronbach Alpha (α) Coefficient will be calculated to determine the internal consistency of the scale, and also to test the stability of the scale over time, test-retest reliability method will be used. In order to analyse the data IBM–SPSS 22 ve AMOS 22 will be used.

Conclusion

The aim of this study is to develop a scale - Scale of Experiences in Encountering the Differences (SEED)- in order to determine the individuals’s encountering experiences particularly towards the differences in religious education. Because Turkey is in a struggle for understanding and to develop its experience in the context of differences in terms of the country’s current status (Coşkun, 1997).

In the first stage of our study it was mostly aimed to understand content, course and depth of experiences and to share them with you. With these qualitative data, we avoid making any generalizations about the approaches that may occur following the experiences of encountering in religious, socio-cultural and pedagogical levels. However, with the data obtained a significant progress was made to write scale items and for the implementation of SEED. After the implementation of the scale, we aim to access more general information about the experiences. And also, it is expected that the data obtained by the application of SEED will not only make it possible to see the borders of encountering experiences either they point richness, proliferation of understanding or dispute, chaos, violence even conflict and of giving an opportunity to understand and interpret them, but also will enable the usage of an instrument for new studies in the field, such as psychology and sociology of religion.


