Choice of acculturation strategy by ethnic Armenians and Azeris living in Georgia

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Abstract

The phenomenon of acculturation has acquired significant attention among researchers worldwide. Extensive studies have been conducted to investigate the processes and strategies involved in acculturation. Acculturation encompasses four distinct strategies: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. Integration has been widely recognized as the most successful approach for ethnic minorities. Integration of ethnic minorities is important for democratic nations. Georgia is a multicultural country, over 13% of its population comprises individuals from various ethnic groups. The two prominent ethnic minority groups in Georgia are Armenians and Azeris, predominantly residing in different regions of the country. Despite the long-standing presence of ethnic minority populations in Georgia, integration challenges persist. Guided by previous studies on acculturation strategies, this article seeks to examine the choice of acculturation strategies among ethnic minorities in Georgia in order to illustrate which acculturation strategy is more preferable for Armenians and Azeris and explore potential differences between these ethnic groups based on demographic characteristics. Through a quantitative research approach involving a sample of 472 ethnic minority representatives, this article finds that the integration strategy is the most favored acculturation approach. However, variations exist between ethnic groups, as well as across different demographic characteristics.

Keywords: *Integration, Ethnic Minorities, Acculturation strategies, Armenian, Azeri.*

Introduction

Interactions between cultures have long been observed as a recurring phenomenon, often resulting in a process known as acculturation (Sam & Berry, 2006). When individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds come into contact, they have the potential to adopt aspects of each other's behaviors, languages, beliefs, values, social structures, and technologies (Berry, 2005). The relevance of acculturation has been increased in recent times due to several contributing factors - Technological advancements, for instance, have made it easier to communicate with individuals from different cultures worldwide and maintain connections with one's native culture. Factors such as war, political circumstances, and economic conditions in certain countries have also led to an increase in immigration rates. Moreover, regional and global trade policies promote international trade and the dissemination of liberal political ideologies aimed at fostering acculturation (Rickard, 1994; Rudmin, 2003).

Integration stands out as one of the most successful strategies for acculturation that individuals from minority groups may choose when encountering a foreign culture (Sam & Berry, 2006). The psychological well-being of ethnic minorities is closely linked to their adoption of integration as an acculturation approach (Rogler et. Al., 1991; Suinn et. Al., 1987).

The integration of ethnic minorities is a significant global issue. In 2009, Navanethem Pillay, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, highlighted that "minorities in all regions of the world face threats, discrimination, racism, and are unable to participate fully in their countries' economic, political, social, and cultural life accessible to the majority of society" (Pillay, 2009). The challenges faced by ethnic minorities residing in Georgia impact their daily lives and hinder their complete integration into society (CIPDD, 2011).

Georgia is a multicultural country with citizens representing various ethnic groups, primarily residing in specific regions such as Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli. According to data Georgians statistical center 86.8% of the population, followed by Azeris at 6.3% and ethnically Armenian citizens at 4.5%. The remaining population includes Russians (0.7%), Ossetians (0.4%), Yezidis (0.3%), Ukrainians (0.2%), Kists (0.2%), Greeks (0.1%), Assyrians (0.1%), and others (0.4%). Consequently, with full territorial coverage, approximately one in six Georgian citizens belongs to an ethnic minority, while in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli, this proportion rises to one in every two individuals. The two largest ethnic minority groups in Georgia are ethnic Armenians and ethnic Azeris, with significant concentrations in Kvemo Kartli, Kakheti, and the Samtskhe-Javakheti region (GeoStat, 2014).

Definitions and Theories of Acculturation

Acculturation has been a subject of scholarly interest for centuries, and extensive research, theories, and concepts have been developed to understand this phenomenon (Redfield et al., 1936; Richardson, 1957; Thomas & Znanieck, 1958; van Osch & Breugelmans, 2012; Ward & Kennedy, 1994). However, the debate regarding which model effectively explains and measures the process of acculturation continues (Flannery et.al., 2001; Kang, 2006).

To begin with, it is important to consider the various definitions of acculturation, which are often used interchangeably with assimilation (Sam & Berry, 2006). The term "acculturation" originated in American anthropology and was first introduced by John Wesley Powell (1883) in a report by the Bureau of American Ethnography. Powell defined acculturation as the psychological changes resulting from cross-cultural imitation (Boas, 1888,1940). According to Powell's definition, acculturation is a process in which groups at a relatively lower level of cultural development subjectively adapt to and imitate the skills, technological advancements, and ideas of a more advanced society. However, Powell did not provide a specific explanation for what constitutes "high" or "low" levels of cultural development. In the industrial age, these distinctions were based on stereotypes and prejudices held by cultural groups, with specific characteristics associated with development primarily centered around economic and military power. This model suggested that only "primitive" groups undergo acculturation, while representatives of developed groups do not experience the process of acculturation themselves (Schwertz & Unger, 2017). Consequently, for anthropologists, the process of acculturation represented a striving for progress on the part of less developed cultures (Powell, 1883).

Stanley Hall is widely regarded as the first psychologist to write about acculturation, although the authors of the first psychological theory on this topic were Thomas and Znaniecki (1987, p. 45). They emphasized that culture encompasses shared conscious processes, such as habits, associations, attitudes, and beliefs, which they referred to as schemas due to their utility in a stable social environment. The first classic definition of acculturation was proposed by Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits in 1936. They defined acculturation as follows: "the process of cultural change that occurs when individuals from different cultural backgrounds come into prolonged, continuous, first-hand contact with each other" (Redfield et. al., 1936) According to this definition, acculturation and

cultural change are distinct phenomena, with cultural change being just one specific aspect of acculturation. Assimilation is seen as one phase of the acculturation process.

Redfield and colleagues later (1954) presented an alternative formulation of the definition of acculturation (p. 974). In this formulation, acculturation is defined as cultural change resulting from the merging of two or more autonomous culture systems, while acculturation change may arise from direct cultural transmission. Change can also be influenced by non-cultural factors such as ecology and demographic shifts and may be tied to the host culture itself. Acculturation change can be delayed, as can internal changes and the adjustment process associated with adopting patterns and practices of the host culture. It can also occur as a reactive adaptation of traditional life patterns. The dynamics of acculturation involve selective adaptation of value systems, processes of integration and differentiation, the emergence of developmental processes, and the influence of role determinants and personal factors (Rudmin, 2009).

Initially, acculturation was perceived as a linear or one-dimensional process (Graves, 1967), where individuals moved from one end of a continuum to the other—either retaining their native cultural heritage or assimilating into the host culture. This model aligned with a bipolar continuum, implying that the decline of one continuum directly affected the growth of the other—for example, adapting to a new culture involved the loss of the native culture.

Berry's acculturation framework (1990a, 1992, 1997a) is widely recognized as one of the most comprehensive. It is based primarily on his two-dimensional acculturation strategy and acculturation stress models (e.g., Berry et al., 1986, 1989). This framework combines cultural-level (situational variables) and psychological-level (personality variables) phenomena, as well as structural and processual characteristics of acculturation.

Acculturation Strategies

In 1976, Berry synthesized research from the fields of acculturation and cognitive psychology to develop a framework that identified four acculturation constructs. These constructs relate to the extent to which individuals value their culture and seek positive relationships. In 2001, Berry refined his earlier theory (Berry, 1974; 1980), which implied eight types of acculturation, and distinguished 4 types of acculturation strategies that a minority representative may apply in the process of interacting with the dominant culture:

Assimilation: This construct is associated with a lower value placed on maintaining one's native culture and a greater desire to establish positive relationships with the host culture. Assimilation involves a process in which one culture loses its identity and is absorbed by another.

Integration: Individuals who adopt an integration strategy maintain connections with their native culture while actively engaging with the host culture. Integration implies a positive attitude towards both cultures and an effort to balance and incorporate aspects from both.

Separation: This construct reflects individuals who place a high value on preserving their native culture and minimize contact with the host culture. Separation applies to individuals who choose not to assimilate with the mainstream culture and strive to maintain a distinct identity.

Marginalization: Marginalization occurs when individuals avoid both their native culture and the host culture. This construct represents a state where the members of the majority population exclude and disregard the minority group, making them invisible in society. Marginalization is characterized by relegating a class or group of people to a secondary position.

The approach developed by Berry (1980, 1997, 2006) focuses on two key dimensions of individuals' acculturation process. The first dimension pertains to the importance individuals attach to preserving their own cultural heritage when in contact with the host culture. The second dimension relates to the significance individuals place on participating in the activities of the larger society. Based on these dimensions, four acculturation strategies can be derived, which can be grouped into two orientations: those oriented towards the host culture and those focused on preserving the native cultural heritage. Strong orientation towards the host culture leads to assimilation, while a strong orientation towards preserving the native cultural heritage leads to separation. On the other hand, individuals who avoid both cultures exhibit an orientation towards marginalization (Berry, 1997, 2005).

Research studies (e.g., Berry et al., 1989; Berry & Krishnan, 1992; Dona & Berry, 1994; van Oudenhoven et al., 1998) have demonstrated that among the various acculturation strategies, integration is generally regarded as the most favorable strategy. Integration involves maintaining connections with both the native and host cultures while actively participating in the activities of the larger society. Assimilation, which entails prioritizing the adoption of the host culture and minimizing emphasis on the native culture, is typically ranked as the second most preferred strategy. Separation, characterized by a strong focus on preserving the native culture while minimizing interaction with the host culture, is generally seen as the third most preferred strategy. Marginalization, where individuals avoid both their native and host cultures, is typically viewed as the least desirable acculturation strategy.

Methodology

The data presented in this article is derived from a large-scale research project conducted as part of a PhD dissertation, combining quantitative and qualitative research. This article focuses on the results of a quantitative study carried out with ethnic minorities residing in Georgia, specifically ethnic Armenians and Azeris living in the regions of Tbilisi, Kakheti, Kvemo Kartli, and Samtskhe-Javakheti.

The research followed general approach of Berry's theory (1980, 1997, 2006) and used The East Asian Immigrant Acculturation Assessment Scale (EAAM) developed by Barry (2001) to examine the choice of acculturation strategies of 452 ethnic minority representatives in Georgia. The scale was translated and adapted into Armenian and Azeri languages to ensure that respondents faced no language barriers when completing it.

The fieldwork for the quantitative study was conducted in September and October 2020.

Sampling and Participants

Given the challenges associated with accessing and engaging ethnic minority populations, non-probability sampling methods such as convenience sampling and snowball sampling were employed. The survey was administered through a self-administered questionnaire. The research was conducted in four regions of Georgia: Samtskhe-Javakheti, Tbilisi, Kakheti, and Kvemo Kartli. The distribution of participants across these regions was as follows: 40% of participants resided in Samtskhe-Javakheti, 12% in Tbilisi, 40% in Kvemo Kartli, and 8% in Kakheti. Interviewer went to different regions and conducted interviews using door-to-door (D2D) approach. In cases where respondents had specific questions, the interviewer provided assistance with filling out the questionnaire.

The research included participants from various age groups, varying from 13 to 82 years old. The majority of participants (40.8%) fell within the 19-30 age range, followed by the 31-44 age range. The smallest proportion of respondents was from the 75 and above age group.

In terms of ethnic composition, 46.5% of the research participants were Armenian, while 53.5% were Azeris. Consequently, 46.5% of participants reported speaking Armenian at home, while 53.5% spoke Azeri.

Results and Discussion

Using EAAM scale (Barry, 2006) we determined which of the 4 acculturation strategies (integration, assimilation, separation, marginalization) are applied more by ethnic Armenians and Azeris living in Georgia.

For ethnic Armenians, the preservation of cultural values holds significant importance in sustaining their sense of identity and belonging. Scholarly investigations (Aghaie, 2019; Ghazarian, 2017) indicate that Armenian diaspora communities worldwide place considerable emphasis on cultural preservation, engaging in endeavors such as language classes, folk dance groups, and cultural festivals to safeguard their traditions. In addition to reinforcing connections with their ancestral homeland, the maintenance of cultural values has been found to enhance the mental health and well-being of Armenians living abroad (Dadrian & Panossian, 2004).

Similarly, for Azeri, the preservation of cultural values is regarded as a means of safeguarding their distinct identity and heritage. Research conducted by Mamedova (2015) demonstrates that Azeri diaspora communities prioritize the preservation of cultural traditions and values, participating in activities like traditional music and dance performances, language classes, and cultural festivals. Moreover, the preservation of cultural values has been shown to contribute to the well-being and sense of belonging among Azeris residing abroad (Hasanova, 2014).

The research findings indicate that the most preferred acculturation strategy among ethnic minorities is integration (M=3.8; SD=1.1), followed by separation (M=3.6; SD=1.2), while marginalization (M=2.5; SD=0.9) and assimilation (M=2.3; SD=1.1) are the least preferred strategies.

Significant difference were observed in the choice of acculturation strategies between different ethnic groups. Regarding the separation strategy (t=76.151; p=0.000) (t(328,8)=1.235; p=0.218), no statistically significant difference was found. However, for the other strategies, namely integration (t=100.4; p=0.000) (t(336.1)=4.665; p=0.000), marginalization (t=1.231; p=0.268) (t(450)=-8998; p=0.000), and assimilation (t=0.048; p=0.827) (t(450)=-2.269; p=0.024)), Armenians and Azeris exhibited divergent preferences.

Integration and separation emerged as the most preferred strategies for both ethnic groups, while marginalization and assimilation were the least preferred. This aligns with findings from other countries (Sahakyan & Yeghiazaryan, 2018) as well as the case of ethnic Armenians residing in Georgia, where the dominant acculturation strategy is integration. However, ethnic Azeris tend to adopt a strategy of separation. It is challenging to draw direct comparisons from the existing literature regarding which group, Armenians or Azeris, places greater importance on the preservation of cultural values. Both groups exhibit strong connections to their cultural heritage, and the preservation of their values is critical for maintaining their sense of identity, belonging, and overall well-being (Sahakyan & Yeghiazaryan, 2018; Shafiyev, 2015; Grigoryan, 2018).

Table 1

Ethnicity		Assimilation	Separation	Integration	Marginalization
Armenian	Mean	**2,18**	**3,66**	**4,15**	**2,13**
	Stan. Deviation	1,16	1,61	2,02	0,88
Azeri	Mean	**2,43**	**3,50**	**3,40**	**2,85**
	Stan. Deviation	1,14	0,95	1,24	0,83
sum	Mean	**2,31**	**3,58**	**3,75**	**2,51**
	Stan. Deviation	1,15	1,30	1,69	0,92

Gender can also play a role in influencing the choice of acculturation strategy, particularly when there are disparities between the traditions of the host culture and the native culture. In such cases, women may attempt to adopt new roles in the host society, potentially leading to conflicts with their native culture and traditional gender roles (Moghadam, Ditto, & Taylor, 1990). In our study, a statistically significant difference based on gender was observed only in relation to the marginalization strategy (t=6.996; p=0.009) (t(450)=-2.521; p=0.012). It was found that women (M=2.6; SD=0.9) tend to employ the marginalization strategy more frequently than men (M=2.4; SD=0.09). This trend was specifically observed among ethnic Armenian participants. Ethnic Armenian females (M=2.3; SD=1.05) were more likely to utilize the marginalization strategy (t=33.4; p=0.000) (t(208)=-3.344; p=0.001) compared to males (M=1.9; SD=0.6). Conversely, no statistically significant difference was found in relation to any of the acculturation strategies among ethnic Azeri. No other statistically significant gender differences were recorded for either ethnic Armenians or Azeri in terms of other acculturation indicators.

Furthermore, age is considered an important factor influencing the success of acculturation, as suggested by Berry (2001). It is believed that younger individuals who are more intelligent and better educated tend to adapt more rapidly to the host culture. This viewpoint is supported by Tran's (1989) study of 75 Vietnamese American female college students and Faragallah, Schumm, & Webb's (1997) study of Arab Americans.

In the present research, a significant correlation was observed between age and three acculturation strategies, except for the marginalization strategy. There was a negative correlation between age and the assimilation strategy (r=-0.375; p=0.000) as well as the integration strategy (r=0.274; p=0.000), and a positive correlation between age and the separation strategy (r=0.439; p=0.000). Analyzing acculturation rates by age for both Armenians and Azeris revealed no notable differences in trends. However, it is worth noting that among ethnic Armenians, there was a statistically significant relationship between age and the marginalization strategy (r=0.527; p=0.000). For ethnic Azeris, a statistically significant relationship was observed only in relation to the separation strategy (r=0.174; p=0.007).

When comparing the choice of acculturation strategies among ethnic minorities residing in Georgia, it is evident that the integration (F (4)=20.251; p=0.000; η2=0.153) and assimilation (F(4)=24.312; p=0.000; η2=0.179) strategies are predominantly favored by individuals between the ages of 19 and 30 within these minority groups. The 31-44 age group also demonstrates a considerable inclination towards the integration strategy, whereas individuals aged 45 and above exhibit the least tendency to adopt it. The higher prevalence of the integration strategy among respondents aged 19-30 can be

attributed to the fact that this is the phase in life when young individuals commence their university education. During this period, frequent interactions with ethnic Georgians lead to an increased propensity for integration.

Several factors may contribute to the inclination of older individuals towards the separation strategy, while younger individuals tend to prefer the integration strategy within the context of acculturation:

Cognitive flexibility: Older individuals may exhibit a more rigid cognitive style, making it challenging for them to adapt to new cultural norms and values. In contrast, younger individuals often display greater openness to change and possess more flexible thinking patterns (Lachman et al., 2015).

Generational differences: Older individuals may have grown up in a distinct cultural context characterized by different social norms and values compared to younger individuals. This disparity can make it more difficult for them to integrate into the dominant culture (Schwartz et al., 2010).

Life experiences: Older individuals may have encountered more instances of discrimination or marginalization within the dominant culture. These experiences can lead them to prioritize the preservation of their cultural identity rather than pursuing assimilation (Birman & Trickett, 2001).

Access to resources: Younger individuals typically have greater access to education, employment opportunities, and social networks that facilitate their integration into the dominant culture. Conversely, older individuals may encounter limitations in terms of available resources, which can impact their acculturation choices (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009).

Table 2

Age Groups		Assimilation	Separation	Integration	Marginalization
13-18	Mean	2,51	3,48	2,95	3,12
	Stan. Deviation	1,21	0,94	1,16	0,79
19-30	Mean	2,77	3,07	4,37	2,47
	Stan. Deviation	1,13	0,90	1,41	0,83
31-44	Mean	2,33	3,43	4,01	2,15
	Stan. Deviation	0,90	1,30	1,86	0,96
45-59	Mean	1,59	4,26	2,99	2,52
	Stan. Deviation	1,03	1,45	1,66	0,93
60+	Mean	1,58	4,80	2,73	2,95
	Stan. Deviation	0,90	1,38	1,57	0,91

Another factor that Berry (2001) suggests influences an individual's successful acculturation is their level of education, which is supported by studies conducted with Albanian immigrants (Dow & Woolley, 2010) and Bosnian refugees (Colic-Peisker & Walker, 2003). These studies indicate that individuals with higher levels of education are more inclined to employ integration strategies to adapt to life in a new country, while those with lower levels of education tend to lean towards separation.

The preference for the integration strategy among students is also evident when comparing the data across different levels of education. A statistically significant difference is observed in relation to all four acculturation indicators (integration (F (6)=21.551; p=0.000; η2=0.225), separation (F(6)=22.895; p=0.000; η2=0.236), assimilation (F(6))=10.164; p=0.000; η2=0.121), marginalization (F(6)=5.198; p=0.000; η2=0.081)).

Further analysis using the Tukey-Kramer criterion reveals that respondents with higher education are more likely to adopt the assimilation strategy compared to those with incomplete secondary education (p=0.002). Additionally, individuals with technical education (p=0.035) and students (p=0.000) exhibit a higher propensity for assimilation than those with secondary education.

The assimilation strategy is more commonly used by ethnic minorities with higher education compared to those with less than secondary education (p=0.00), secondary education (p=0.000), and technical education (p=0.000).

Regarding the choice of the integration strategy, students and individuals with higher education are more inclined to select this strategy compared to those with incomplete secondary education (p=0.000; p=0.000), secondary education (p=0.000; p=0.000), or technical education (p=0.023; p=0.000). Conversely, individuals with higher education and students show a lower preference for the separation strategy. In terms of marginalization, students are the least likely to employ this strategy compared to ethnic minorities with incomplete secondary education (p=0.017), secondary education (p=0.000), and technical education (p=0.041).

The data suggests that individuals with higher levels of education in ethnic minority groups are more inclined to prioritize integration and assimilation strategies, while showing less preference for separation and marginalization strategies. This trend is observed among both ethnic Azeris and ethnic Armenians.

There are several explanations on why educated individuals tend to favor integration as an acculturation strategy:

Increased exposure and understanding of different cultures: Education offers more opportunities for individuals to engage with diverse cultures, fostering a broader understanding and openness to new experiences and perspectives (Byram, 2008).

Language proficiency enhancement: Education often involves language learning, enabling individuals to communicate more effectively with members of the dominant culture and facilitating integration (Dewaele & Van Oudenhoven, 2009).

Socialization into a cosmopolitan worldview: Higher education can contribute to the development of a cosmopolitan worldview that values diversity and multiculturalism, leading individuals to prioritize integration as a means of acculturation (Sturgeon, 2011).

Increased access to resources: Education provides individuals with greater access to economic, social, and cultural resources that can facilitate their integration into the dominant culture (Kao, 2004).

These factors collectively contribute to the observation that higher-educated individuals are more likely to adopt integration and assimilation strategies, benefiting from their educational background, linguistic abilities, and exposure to diverse perspectives and resources.

Table 3

Education		Assimilation	Separation	Integration	Marginalization
Primary	Mean	**2,57**	**3,02**	**2,87**	**2,74**
	Stan. Deviation	0,96	0,73	0,67	0,37
Incomplete secondary	Mean	**1,88**	**4,41**	**2,54**	**2,81**
	Stan. Deviation	1,21	1,34	1,42	0,57
Secondary	Mean	**1,98**	**4,16**	**3,02**	**2,73**
	Stan. Deviation	1,17	1,39	1,67	0,96
Vocational	Mean	**2,04**	**3,71**	**3,57**	**2,52**
	Stan. Deviation	0,90	0,98	1,33	1,03
Student	Mean	**2,45**	**2,62**	**4,43**	**2,04**
	Stan. Deviation	1,13	0,87	1,52	0,71
Higher degree	Mean	**2,93**	**3,03**	**4,83**	**2,36**
	Stan. Deviation	0,94	0,91	1,35	0,88
Master and PhD	Mean	**2,61**	**4,01**	**3,90**	**2,96**
	Stan. Deviation	1,44	0,98	1,01	0,73

Conclusion

The preferred acculturation strategy among ethnic minorities in Georgia is integration, although variations exist between the two different ethnic groups, namely ethnic Armenians and Azeris. Ethnic Armenians tend to adopt the integration strategy more frequently compared to ethnic Azeris, which may be attributed to their cultural characteristics and background. The findings indicate that two significant demographic factors significantly influence the choice of acculturation strategy among ethnic minorities. These factors include age and education. Specifically, younger individuals and those with higher levels of education are more inclined to select the integration strategy from the range of acculturation strategies, which is widely regarded as the most successful approach.

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