

Interculturalism in Classrooms – Insights into Teachers' Intercultural Sensitivity

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In March 2024, a survey of intercultural sensitivity (IS) was conducted among 300 teachers from the Republic of Croatia. The adapted and translated (Jurković, 2023) Intercultural Sensitivity Scale - ISS (Chen and Starosta, 2000) was used in the research. The aim of the research was to determine the level of IS of teachers and to establish whether there is a correlation between some socio-demographic factors and the level of IS. In addition, an attempt was made to establish whether there is a difference in the level of such sensitivity with respect to the aforementioned socio-demographic factors. The results of the study indicate that the examined teachers mostly show agreement with statements reflecting a positive intercultural orientation ($M=3.83$; $SD=.438$), whereby the enjoyment of interacting with members of different cultures ($M=4.22$; $SD=.707$) was highlighted as the dimension in which respondents expressed the highest degree of agreement, and confidence in interaction with members of different cultures ($M=3.58$; $SD=.596$) as dimension with the lowest level of agreement. In addition, the correlation between teachers' sociodemographic characteristics and IS was examined, and it was shown that attending communication courses is statistically significantly negatively correlated to the level of IS ($p=-.139$; $p<.05$), while the average success of students is statistically significantly positively correlated ($p=.131$; $p<.05$). Finally, it was checked whether there are statistically significant differences in the level of IS with regard to related sociodemographic variables. It has been shown that there is a statistically significant difference in the level of IS of teachers concerning the reported academic success of their students ($F(2,282)=4.942$; $p<.01$) in such a way that better students' academic success also means a higher level of IS of teachers.

INTRODUCTION

Life, work, and every activity in the modern world also require a certain degree of preparedness or competence for it. Namely, today's culturally complex societies rarely provide the opportunity to maintain and nurture monocultural relationships. This is not about the obfuscation of such relations, but simply about the fact that modern societies are not monocultural. Even more, when we talk about the monoculturality of certain societies, we are mostly talking about repressive and totalitarian regimes. Bearing in mind openness to differences as one of the fundamental characteristics of modern, free and democratic societies, it is also necessary that the attitudes, behaviours and actions of those who raise and educate new generations are in line with these values. In this respect, cultural diversity should be emphasised as an important social and educational element, and by no means marginalised under the justification of preserving national unity and connection (Jurković & Buterin Mičić, 2024).

Although modern societies are multicultural, composed of numerous distinct groups and communities differing by race, religious affiliation, language, and other cultural markers (Perotti, 1995), their success depends on evolving into intercultural societies characterised by meaningful interaction and mutual influence among groups rather than mere coexistence. It is important to acknowledge that interculturalism represents a developmental process and is not automatically achieved by the mere presence of diverse cultures within a geographical area. As Cantle (2012) emphasizes, the transition from multiculturalism to interculturalism represents a shift from mere tolerance of cultural diversity to active engagement, where meaningful interactions between communities foster mutual transformation and deeper social cohesion.

The first step, that is, the prerequisite for the development of intercultural competence of individuals, and consequently of societies, is the development of intercultural sensitivity (Bennett, 1986; Chen & Starosta 1996, 1997; Chen, 2010; Deardorff, 2010). Namely, the mere awareness of the existence of culturally different individuals in a society does not ensure a developed intercultural sensitivity (Jurković, 2023). Therefore, although necessary, it is not enough to bear in mind the existence of members of different cultures in a society to develop positive attitudes towards them. Intercultural sensitivity primarily refers to the emotional aspect of such awareness and positive attitudes towards

cultural differences (Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992).

Since intercultural sensitivity involves empathy for cultural differences, such attitudes must be developed. Given that children and young people are most receptive to the formation and development of certain attitudes (Hrvatić, 2007), the role of the teacher, as the bearer of the formal educational process, is incomparable. However, since values and attitudes that have not been adopted cannot be transmitted, the teachers themselves must be, at least, interculturally sensitive. Only in that case, their work regarding the development of intercultural attitudes and values in children can be successful (Jurković, 2024).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Intercultural communication competence

If we start from the definition of culture as a multidimensional, socially transferred and unconsciously adopted concept of thinking and action that is not fully visible to members of other cultures, but, when meeting other cultures, over a certain period can be consciously or unconsciously changed and/or adapted (Jurković, 2023), it becomes clear that intercultural competence itself is an extremely complex and demanding construct, both for defining and for developing.

Ruben (1989) states that there are several difficulties in determining intercultural competence, and among them, the following stand out: the development of instruments with which the construct of intercultural competence can be measured, the determination of the specific difference between interpersonal and intercultural competence, the determination of the definition in relation to whether it is observed from the perspective of the sender or recipient of the message, determination of convergent and divergent constructs, relationship to the contribution of attitudes, behavioural and cognitive elements to the development of intercultural competence and recognition of all relevant aspects of this competence.

In an attempt to resolve or at least partially overcome the aforementioned difficulties and doubts, the Council of Europe (2014) states that intercultural communication competence is a combination of attitudes, knowledge, understanding and skills applied in practice, which enables an individual to understand and respect people who are of different cultural affiliations. However, the *Conceptual and operationalisation framework for acquiring intercultural*

competencies (UNESCO, 2013) points out that this is not only about relevant knowledge about certain or many cultures and about positive attitudes towards them but also about the linguistic competence of the interlocutor in that relationship. This is one of the reasons why this competence is also called intercultural communication competence. Namely, the possession of all relevant qualities of an interculturally competent person can be threatened by the inability to communicate with members of different cultures.

There are several relevant models with which, on the one hand, an attempt was made to explain intercultural communication competence, and on the other hand, aimed to establish the path to this competence. Among the most significant models, the *Pyramidal model* (Deardorff, 2006) emphasises attitudes, knowledge, skills and internal and external outcomes of communication as key factors of successful intercultural communication and cooperation. In addition, Milton James Bennett (1986) devised the *Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity - DMIS*, which can be understood as a theoretical approach to the development of an individual from the ethnocentric to the ethnorelative stage, where each of the two key stages has three sub-stages. In this sense, ethnocentrism has phases of rejection, defence, and minimization of cultural differences, while ethnorelativism refers to phases of acceptance, adaptation, and integration of cultural differences. Chen and Starostas' (1996) *Triangular model of intercultural communication competence development* is the model on which the empirical research conducted in this paper is based. This *Model* was chosen primarily because of its broad applicability. Claims examining intercultural sensitivity in this model are historically and geographically neutral and applicable to a wide range of populations. It consists of three basic dimensions, each of which consists of characteristic components. Intercultural awareness is the cognitive dimension of intercultural communication competence and refers to an individual's ability to understand other cultures, that is, to understand the influence of culture on thinking and behaviour (Chen & Starosta, 2000). Intercultural effectiveness is a behavioural dimension of intercultural communication competence, and it refers to the effectiveness of intercultural communication, both verbal and non-verbal. Finally, intercultural sensitivity is an affective, emotional dimension. It relates to the ability to project and receive a positive emotional reaction before, during and after interaction with members of other cultures (Chen & Starosta, 1996). In addition, it is the first step and a prerequisite for the development of intercultural communication competence.

Intercultural sensitivity

Modern societies are composed of individuals with diverse worldviews, life experiences, and educational backgrounds shaped by their cultural affiliations. To live a fulfilling life and work productively in such an environment, individuals need to develop intercultural sensitivity. This need is becoming increasingly urgent in today's interconnected world. Without this sensitivity, which Chen and Starosta (2000) state is characterised by the ability to accept cultural differences for better intercultural communication, the individual in his or her actions generally remains closed in his circle of like-minded people, which greatly reduces the possibilities of action, but also this individual's – and consequently social – growth and development.

Intercultural sensitivity is often defined as an individual's ability to develop positive feelings towards cultural differences, which promotes appropriate and efficient behaviours in intercultural communication (Chen & Starosta, 1997). It is the affective dimension of intercultural sensitivity (Chen & Starosta 1996, 1997) and as such refers to the attitudes and emotions of individuals. In addition, within the framework of intercultural communication competence, as already emphasised, it is necessary to distinguish between intercultural awareness as a cognitive dimension that understands the existence of different cultures and their influence on the individual and his behaviour, and intercultural effectiveness, which should be understood as a behavioural dimension by which communication goals are achieved in intercultural communication (Chen & Starosta, 1996, 1999, 2000).

For Bennett (2004, 2009), intercultural sensitivity is the ability to distinguish between cultural differences that are characteristic of an intercultural individual. Therefore, he has developed ability to notice differences both in the behaviour and in the communication style of his interlocutors and can relate the above to different cultural affiliations. Hammer et al. (2003) highlight empathy as a key element of developed intercultural sensitivity. In addition, they emphasize curiosity towards other cultures as an important trait of an interculturally sensitive individual. They also point to the ability to consciously adapt one's behaviour in different cultural environments.

Since it is a process and taking into account that none of the mentioned features are given to us, but rather acquired and developed, intercultural sensitivity, and consequently intercultural competence, can be understood as part of

lifelong education. In addition, Bennet (1993a, 2004) states that there are experiences that further encourage the development of this sensitivity, and these often refer to experiences that an individual has in intercultural relations, that is, multicultural experiences. However, it should be kept in mind that contacts and meetings with culturally different individuals do not necessarily result in intercultural relations (Bennett, 1993b), that is, positive interactions between individuals. Even more, history teaches us that such meetings were often the source of many conflicts. For this reason, the development of intercultural sensitivity is necessary as a starting point for the development of intercultural competence, whereby the educational system with all its stakeholders must have one of the leading roles in any society that strives for equality of all its members.

Intercultural sensitivity and competence of teachers

An interculturally sensitive or competent teacher does not have a significantly different definition from other interculturally sensitive individuals, but his job is to develop intercultural sensitivity in his students, so the task of defining such teachers is all the more complex. Given that work in a multicultural classroom is more complex than in a monocultural one, there is a need for teachers to be additionally trained for such work (Gundara & Portera, 2008). In the Republic of Croatia, the principles of interculturalism and the learning outcomes of individual subjects are also one of the fundamental pillars of the National Framework Curriculum (2011). As such, teachers are expected to have a certain knowledge of these constructs, but also the development of intercultural sensitivity, in order to pass it on to their students, both at the educational and upbringing level (Hrvatić, 2007). With that on mind, Piršl (2007) suggests the interpretation of intercultural competence as a fundamental pedagogical competence. The fact that in the total number of courses during the teacher education program, the representation of those who thematise interculturalism in some way is about 5% (Jurković, 2023) speaks in favour of the need for a more systematic approach to interculturalism already during the teacher's study. In a similar context, Bartulović and Kušević (2017) state that university programs, both in the Republic of Croatia and in Europe, are not directed towards the development of intercultural competencies of future teachers. However, some previous analyses (Jurković, 2023) indicate that the

majority of courses directly or indirectly addressing interculturalism are offered at the teacher education programs of the University of Zadar (6), while the fewest are offered at the teacher education programs of the University of Zagreb and the University of Slavonski Brod (2).

An interculturally sensitive and then competent teachers should, among other things, have developed communication skills, know their own and other cultures, be able to understand and accept students from different cultural environments, be open, flexible, creative and critical, but also be able to constantly upgrade knowledge about oneself (Hrvatić & Piršl, 2007). Equally, they should have a developed awareness of the existence of different cultures and accept them as such, understand the power of the influence of the cultural background on the behaviour of individuals, understand the dynamics of different behaviours concerning cultural affiliation, know the culture of their students and by constantly evaluating their knowledge and skills and attitudes to correctly and timely adapt methods and forms of work to all students, regardless of their cultural affiliation (Cross et al., 1989). It is also important to note the position of Gray and Thomas (2006), who state that the characteristics of an interculturally competent teacher should not be attributed to his professionalism, but should be seen as additional characteristics of the teacher's expertise. Namely, underlining intercultural sensitivity, and consequently competence, under professionalism could lead to its simplification or to a situation where every competence is reduced to intercultural competence. In support of such simplification is the analysis of Gorski (2008), who, analysing 45 study programs of teacher education, observed inconsistent inclusion of multiculturalism in learning outcomes, even to the point that courses taught in a foreign language were declared to have multicultural content. Finally, research by Tabatadze and Gorgadze (2014) showed that the majority of the 400 teachers who participated in their research had ethnocentric attitudes towards cultural differences. Such results speak in favour of the need for more systematic work on the development of intercultural sensitivity of (future) teachers. Also, research in China (Luo et al., 2022) showed that the level of intercultural sensitivity of teachers, as well as the number of cultural contents they use in their work, positively affect the level of intercultural sensitivity of students. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the experimental research by Sinagatullin and Valitova (2018), which measured the level of intercultural attitudes, knowledge and skills before and after the introduction of multicultural contents into teaching. The results showed that

those who encountered such contents more often also expressed a significantly higher level of intercultural attitudes, knowledge and skills than those who did not have the opportunity to become acquainted with these contents.

Theoretical rationale for variable selection

The selection of socio-demographic and educational variables in this study was informed by relevant theoretical assumptions, empirical findings from previous international research, and the need to address gaps in the Croatian context. It is particularly important to note that several of these variables, such as years of teaching experience, university of graduation, participation in communication-related courses during university studies, and professional communication training, have not yet been systematically examined in relation to teachers' intercultural sensitivity in Croatia. Their inclusion in this research therefore serves both an exploratory and an agenda-setting function for future studies. Given that some studies suggest gender may influence the development of intercultural sensitivity (Yetiş & Kurt, 2016; Mendoza et al., 2017; Özışık et al., 2019; El Sayed et al., 2020), while others report no such effect (Akça et al., 2018; Altan, 2018; Çiloğlu & Bardakçı, 2019; Arcagök & Yılmaz, 2020), both gender and age were examined. Age, moreover, is often, though not exclusively, linked to teaching experience, which was also included based on the assumption that less experienced, and therefore typically younger, teachers may be more open to cultural differences. Given the potential for variation in university curricula, respondents were asked to report the institution at which they completed their studies. In order to examine Talbert-Johnson's (2004) claim that students of culturally insensitive teachers perform less well academically, teachers were asked to report their students' average academic achievement. Moreover, as previous research suggests that multicultural content in teacher education may foster intercultural sensitivity (cf. Sinagatullin & Valitova, 2018), respondents were asked about relevant coursework during their studies and participation in communication training throughout their careers. Nonetheless, it must be emphasised that some of these variables, particularly self-reported student grades and self-assessed exposure to training, pose inherent methodological limitations, including the potential for bias and social desirability effects. These limitations, along with a non-representative sample, should be taken into account when interpreting the findings.

METHODOLOGY OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

Respondents and research process

The research was conducted in March 2024 through an online survey, and 300 primary school teachers from Croatia participated in it, which, according to data from the *Central Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Croatia*, is approximately 2.3% of all teachers employed in primary education in the country¹. However, it should be noted that the mentioned number of teachers includes both class teachers and subject teachers in primary schools, whereas this study focused exclusively on class teachers. A questionnaire was sent to the official e-mail addresses of the primary schools with a request to forward it to the teachers of those schools. All instructions and notes, as well as contact information for further explanations, are listed at the very beginning of the online form. The sample in this study is a convenience sample. Since participation was not randomised, the findings may not be generalizable to the entire population of teachers in Croatia. This sampling method may introduce self-selection bias, limiting the ability to draw broad conclusions.

The topic and purpose of the research were explained to the research participants and information was provided that the research is completely anonymous and voluntary, that they can withdraw from it at any time and that the research results will be used exclusively for scientific purposes.

It took approximately 10 minutes to complete the survey form.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics 25.

An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to examine the underlying structure of the *Intercultural Sensitivity Scale* (Chen and Starosta, 2000) and to confirm its construct validity within the sample.

Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, minimum, maximum, median, skewness, and kurtosis) were used to describe the distribution and central tendencies of key variables. For categorical variables, frequency distributions (D with %) were used to present the proportions of results across response categories.

¹ See more: <https://podaci.dzs.hr/2024/hr/76961>

Spearman's rank-order correlation was used to assess the strength and direction of associations between intercultural sensitivity and continuous or ordinal variables, due to the non-parametric nature and lack of normality in some distributions.

Independent samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA is used to examine whether there were statistically significant differences in the level of intercultural sensitivity across different socio-demographic groups.

Assumptions of normality were tested using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk tests, and homogeneity of variances was checked using Levene's test. All statistical procedures were performed with a significance level set at $p < .05$.

Instruments

Data collection was carried out using an online questionnaire that consisted of:

1. Sociodemographic data questionnaire

The socio-demographic questionnaire consisted of 7 questions that collected data on the socio-demographic and educational structure of the respondents. Respondents' data were collected on: gender (male/female), age, university where they completed their teaching studies (universities of: Zagreb, Split, Rijeka, *Josip Juraj Strossmayer University* in Osijek, Zadar, *Jurja Dobrila University* in Pula, Slavonski Brod or foreign country), length of service, average student academic success, attendance of classes that focused on or practiced communication skills (I did/I did not) and attendance at communication courses (I did/I did not).

The questions about gender, university, attendance at courses/classes were closed-ended, that is, the teachers chose from the offered answers, while the remaining questions were answered by entering the requested information.

2. Intercultural Sensitivity Scale - ISS

For this research, the translated and adapted *Intercultural Sensitivity Scale* (Jurković, 2023) by Chen and Starosta (2000) was used, which through 24 statements, on a five-point Likert scale, from 1 = *I do not agree at all* to 5 = *I completely agree*, measures the level of intercultural sensitivity. The original translation of the *Scale* (Drandić, 2016) was adapted into five items in a way that, in the author's opinion, offered a more adequate translation of certain statements.

The adaptation of the *Intercultural Sensitivity Scale* consists of 22 statements that are classified into the following five subscales, i.e. dimensions: *Interaction confidence*, *Interaction enjoyment*, *Respect for cultural differences*, *Interaction engagement* and *Interaction attentiveness*.

The adaptation of the *Scale* (Jurković, 2023) applied to students of teacher studies, but the factor analysis in this study did not show a significantly different distribution of particles and dimensions in relation to that adaptation. The coefficient of internal consistency proved to be high in the initial adaptation ($\alpha = .89$) as well as in this analysis ($\alpha = .80$), which indicates the high reliability of the *Scale*.

Aim and hypotheses of the research

This research aimed to determine the level of intercultural sensitivity of teachers. Additionally, the goal was to establish whether there is a correlation between some of the socio-demographic factors (such as gender, age, length of service, universities they attended, their students' average grades, attendance at courses and courses where they practiced communication skills) and the level of intercultural sensitivity and whether there is a difference in the level of intercultural sensitivity concerning named socio-demographic factors.

With regard to the goal of the research, the following hypotheses were set:

H1. Class teachers predominantly exhibit positive intercultural attitudes, as measured by the *Intercultural Sensitivity Scale*.

H2. There are statistically significant correlations between teachers' intercultural sensitivity and socio-demographic factors. It is expected that higher intercultural sensitivity is associated with younger age, less work experience, better average student academic success (as reported by teachers), and more frequent attendance of communication-related courses and classes.

H3. There are statistically significant differences in teachers' intercultural sensitivity based on certain socio-demographic factors. It is expected that teachers with higher intercultural sensitivity will have students with better academic success (as reported by the teachers) and will be more likely to have attended communication courses.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Before analysing the results, a principal component factor analysis of the *Intercultural Sensitivity Scale* (Chen & Starosta, 2000) was conducted. Bartlett’s test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 = 2354.247$; $p < .01$), and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was .899, confirming the suitability of the correlation matrix for factor analysis.

Out of 24 items, 22 variables were retained in the final factor solution. Item 2 (“I think people from other cultures are narrow-minded.”) was excluded due to a very low communality value, and item 6 (“I can be as sociable as I want to be when interacting with people from different cultures.”) was removed due to inconsistency with the identified factor structure.

Using the Guttman-Kaiser criterion, five factors were extracted (eigenvalues: 7.274; 1.853; 1.503; 1.171; 1.021). Only factor loadings above the threshold of 0,4 were considered. The resulting factor structure accounted for 53.42% of the total variance.

Results of the *oblique (direct oblimin)* rotation are presented in *Table 1*.

TABLE 1. Results of the Principal Component Exploratory Factor Analysis of the *Intercultural Sensitivity Scale*

		Factor loadings					Communalities
		1	2	3	4	5	
1	I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures.					.708	.689
3	I am pretty sure of myself in interacting with people from different cultures.		.556				.658
4	I find it very hard to talk in front of people from different cultures.		-.625				.496
5	I always know what to say when interacting with people from different cultures.		.506				.390
7	I don’t like to be with people from different cultures.					-.616	.611
8	I respect the values of people from different cultures.	.633					.487

		Factor loadings					Communalities
		1	2	3	4	5	
9	I get upset easily when interacting with people from different cultures.				-.534		.566
10	I feel confident when interacting with people from different cultures.		.490				.490
11	I tend to wait before forming an impression of culturally-distinct counterparts.				.722		.552
12	I often get discouraged when I am with people from different cultures.				-.764		.607
13	I am open-minded to people from different cultures.	.519					.398
14	I am very observant when interacting with people from different cultures.	.685					.536
15	I often feel useless when interacting with people from different cultures.				-.664		.556
16	I respect the ways people from different cultures behave.	.760					.622
17	I try to obtain as much information as I can when interacting with people from different cultures.			.581			.543
18	I would not accept the opinions of people from different cultures.	-.438					.482
19	I am sensitive to my culturally-distinct counterpart's subtle meanings during our interaction.					.719	.575
20	I think my culture is better than other cultures.	-.696					.575
21	I often give positive responses to my culturally different counterpart during our interaction.			.521			.518

		Factor loadings					Communalities
		1	2	3	4	5	
22	I avoid those situations where I will have to deal with culturally distinct persons.					-.477	.578
23	I often show my culturally-distinct counterpart my understanding through verbal or nonverbal cues.			.609			.555
24	I have a feeling of enjoyment towards differences between my culturally-distinct counterpart and me.			.620			.619
Eigenvalues		7.274	1.853	1.503	1.171	1.021	

The internal consistency coefficient was high ($\alpha=.802$), indicating strong reliability of the scale.

Additionally, statistically significant positive correlations were found among all extracted factors, suggesting they are related but not identical constructs. This supports the absence of redundancy among the factor dimensions. The correlation coefficients ranged from $r=.296$ ($p<.01$) to $r=.561$ ($p<.01$).

For a more detailed insight into the socio-demographic data of the research participants, a descriptive analysis of these factors was carried out. The results of the analysis are shown in *Table 2*.

TABLE 2. Descriptive data of socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

	Min.	Max.	M	SD	C	D	Skew.	Kurt.
Gender						2 (95%)		
Age	24	65	46.37	10.288	47.5		-.308	-.879
University						1 (44%)		
Length of service	1	42	21.38	11.201	21.5		-.141	-1.003
Average student academic success	2.6	5.0	4.42	.422	4.5		-1.124	2.196
Classes						2 (55%)		
Courses						1 (58.3%)		

N=300

Table 1. shows that the research participants were mostly female (D=2; 95%) between the ages of 24 and 65 (C=47.5). Concerning the total length of service, the mentioned factor ranges from one to 42 years of the total length of service, with the average value being approximately 21 years (M=21.39; SD=11.201).

Also, it can be determined it is most often the University of Zagreb (D=1; n=132; 44%), while the smallest number of participants completed their teacher studies at the University of Slavonski Brod (n=5; 1.7%). The data obtained are expected because, on the one hand, it is the largest, and on the other hand, the smallest university that educates future teachers.

With regard to the question about students' success, it can be stated that teachers report that most students achieve a very good (4) level of academic success (M=4.42; SD=.422; C=4.5).

Approximately the same number of teachers stated that they had and did not have experience of attending classes which thematised and/or practised communication skills, with a preponderance on the side of those who have no experience with such courses (D=2; 55%; n=165). Furthermore, with regard to participation in communication courses in previous work or education, the majority states that they had such an experience (D=1; n=175; 58.3%).

To verify the first hypothesis of the research ("Class teachers predominantly exhibit positive intercultural attitudes, as measured by the *Intercultural Sensitivity Scale*"), a descriptive analysis of the responses to the *Intercultural Sensitivity Scale* and its subscales was carried out. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive data of the *Intercultural Sensitivity Scale* and associated subscales

	Min.	Max.	M	SD	C	Skew.	Kurt.
Interaction confidence	1.80	5.00	3.58	.596	3.6	.332	-.283
Interaction enjoyment	2.00	5.00	4.22	.707	4.3	-.493	-.769
Respect for cultural differences	2.33	4.67	3.92	.449	4.0	-.787	.392
Interaction engagement	2.57	5.00	3.87	.585	3.9	.091	-.753
Interaction attentiveness	2.00	5.00	3.61	.603	3.7	.153	-.067
<i>Intercultural Sensitivity Scale</i>	2.63	4.79	3.83	.438	3.8	.020	-.557

N=300

Table 3. shows the descriptive data of the *Intercultural Sensitivity Scale* and its subscales. From the above table, it can be concluded that the examined teachers predominantly exhibit positive intercultural attitudes, as measured by the *Intercultural Sensitivity Scale*, which partially confirms the first hypothesis of the research.

Regarding the subscales, *Interaction enjoyment* was shown to be the most positively expressed ($M=4.22$; $SD=.707$), while the participants rated their *Interaction confidence* as the lowest among the other subscales ($M=3.58$; $SD=.596$). Average estimates on the remaining subscales, ranked from lowest to highest, are *Interaction attentiveness* ($M=3.61$; $SD=.603$), *Interaction engagement* ($M=3.87$; $SD=.585$) and *Respect for cultural differences* ($M=3.92$; $SD=.449$).

Furthermore, to verify the second hypothesis of the research (“There are statistically significant correlations between teachers’ intercultural sensitivity and socio-demographic factors. It is expected that higher intercultural sensitivity is associated with younger age, less work experience, better average student academic success (as reported by teachers), and more frequent attendance of communication-related courses and classes.”), we were also interested in whether there are correlations between the development of intercultural sensitivity and the associated subscales with the examined socio-demographic factors of teachers.

Prior to conducting the Spearman correlation analysis, the assumption of a monotonic relationship was visually examined using scatterplots. All examined variable pairs demonstrated a monotonic trend, indicating that the assumption was met. The results of the correlation analysis are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Correlations (Spearman’s correlation coefficient ρ) of the *Intercultural Sensitivity Scale* and socio-demographic factors of the examined teachers

	Average success	Classes	Courses
Interaction confidence	.108	-.046	-.182**
Interaction enjoyment	.130*	-.022	-.082
Respect for cultural differences	.100	-.045	-.121*
Interaction engagement	.116	-.075	-.081
Interaction attentiveness	.040	.176**	-.044
<i>Intercultural Sensitivity Scale</i>	.131*	-.032	-.139*

$N=300$; ** $p<.01$, * $p<.05$

In Table 4. for the sake of clarity, only those variables in which it was shown that there is a statistically significant correlation are shown. Namely, the factors gender, age, length of service and university did not show a statistically significant correlation with *the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale* or with any of the related subscales were therefore omitted. Also, the interrelationships of the *Scale* and subscales, although all statistically significantly positively correlated, were omitted because they are not the subject of this analysis.

It is evident from the above table that there is a statistically significant correlation between the *intercultural sensitivity* of teachers and *the average success of their students* ($\rho=.131$; $p<.05$) and a statistically significant negative correlation between *intercultural sensitivity* and *participation in communication courses* ($\rho=-.139$; $p<.05$). Participation was coded such that 1 = yes and 2 = no, indicating that higher intercultural sensitivity is associated with both higher perceived student success and attendance at communication courses.

Also, it was shown that there is a statistically negative correlation between *Interaction confidence* and *attendance at communication courses* ($\rho=-.182$; $p<.01$). Again, it should be noted that in the coding of this variable, a lower score (1) indicates that the teacher has attended communication courses, while a higher score (2) indicates non-attendance. Therefore, the observed negative correlation suggests that teachers who have attended such courses tend to report higher levels of interaction confidence.

Furthermore, there is a statistically significant positive correlation between *the average success of students* and teachers' *interaction enjoyment* ($\rho=.130$; $p<.05$). This may suggest that teachers who enjoy interacting with members of different cultures tend to perceive their students as achieving slightly higher academic success.

It was also shown that there is a statistically significant negative correlation between *Respect for cultural differences* and *participation in communication courses* ($\rho=-.121$; $p<.05$). These results suggest, due to coding, that higher levels of respect for cultural differences among teachers are associated with their participation in communication courses.

Finally, it can be stated that there is a statistically positive correlation between *Interaction attentiveness* and *participation in courses where communication skills were discussed or practiced* ($\rho=.176$; $p<.01$). These results indicate that attentiveness in interaction increases due to the lack of courses in which communication skills were thematised or practised. One possible explanation

is that those without formal communication training may compensate by being more cautious and deliberate during intercultural exchanges.

All the mentioned correlations, according to Petz et al. (2012), can be considered low or insignificant.

Generally speaking, attending communication courses was shown to be statistically significantly negatively correlated with the largest number of subscales and the total *Intercultural Sensitivity Scale*. At the same time, the average student success was statistically significantly positively correlated with most of the examined variables.

In other words, it can be concluded that a higher level of teachers' intercultural sensitivity, including a greater enjoyment of interaction, is correlated with teachers' perception of their students as achieving slightly higher academic success. On the other hand, a higher level of teachers' intercultural sensitivity, which in this case includes a higher level of self-confidence in interacting with members of other cultures and a higher level of respect and appreciation of cultural differences, is correlated with attending communication courses.

Given that there is no significant correlation between the other variables, it can be confirmed that the second research hypothesis is partially confirmed.

Concerning these data, and to verify the third hypothesis of the research ("There are statistically significant differences in teachers' intercultural sensitivity based on certain socio-demographic factors. It is expected that teachers with higher intercultural sensitivity will have students with better academic success (as reported by the teachers) and will be more likely to have attended communication courses."), One-way ANOVA and t-tests were conducted. Those tests aim to check for statistically significant differences in the level of intercultural sensitivity with regard to the correlations shown in *Table 4*.

Independent samples t-tests showed no statistically significant differences in the level of intercultural sensitivity with respect to participation in communication courses ($F=1.153$, $p=.284$) or attendance of classes focused on communication skills ($F=3.485$, $p=.063$).

On the other hand, one-way ANOVA showed the existence of statistically significant differences in the academic success of students with regard to the level of intercultural sensitivity of their teachers. It should be mentioned that, given that there is a large disparity in the number of respondents in the *Average success - good (3)* group and the other two groups, a non-parametric *Kruskal-Wallis H test of differences* was also conducted, which confirmed the existence

of differences determined by ANOVA. For greater information and clarity, the results of the analysis of variance (ANOVA) are presented below.

Normality of distribution was assessed using the Shapiro-Wilk test. The results indicated no significant deviations from normality across the groups (Grade 3: $p=.779$; Grade 4: $p=.069$; Grade 5: $p=.386$). Levene's test for homogeneity of variances was not statistically significant ($p=.795$), indicating that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was met.

Table 5. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) of intercultural sensitivity with regard to average student academic achievement

Average success	n	Intercultural Sensitivity Scale	
		M	SD
Good (3)	8	3.40	.379
Very good (4)	122	3.81	.434
Excellent (5)	155	3.87	.432
F _(2,282)	4.942**		

N=285; ** $p<.01$.

From Table 5., it is evident that there is a statistically significant difference in the level of intercultural sensitivity of teachers concerning the school success of their students ($F=4.942$; $p<.01$). The Tukey HSD post-hoc test determined that there is a statistically significant difference in the level of intercultural sensitivity of teachers, considering whether the average grade in their class is good (3) or very good (4) ($p=.028$) and considering that whether the average grade in their class is good (3) or excellent (5) ($p=.008$).

By looking at the arithmetic averages of the mentioned groups, it can be concluded that students of teachers who demonstrate a lower level of intercultural sensitivity also achieve lower average academic success – as reported by the teachers themselves. In the context of teachers' intercultural sensitivity, those teachers who reported that their students achieve good (3) results on average have a lower level of intercultural sensitivity ($M=3.40$; $SD=.379$) than those whose students achieve very good (4) ($M=3.81$; $SD=.434$) or excellent (5) success ($M=3.87$; $SD=.432$). However, due to the small sample size in the group with average grade 3 ($n=8$), this result should be interpreted with caution. The effect size ($\eta^2=.03$) indicates a small effect, according to the conventions proposed by Cohen (1988).

Based on all that has been said, it can be concluded that the third research

hypothesis is partially confirmed.

Given that a relatively small number of socio-demographic variables were shown to be correlated with the level of intercultural sensitivity (two out of seven), it was concluded that further statistical analyses, such as regression analysis, would not yield useful results for a more detailed explanation of this relationship.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Considering that there is almost no modern society that is not permeated and interwoven with various cultural influences at all levels, any talk about monocultural relations in a community or society is mainly based on political-populist discourses of the extreme right. With this in mind, it should be emphasised that upbringing and education are extremely effective ways of reducing or mitigating such extreme views of society and its cultural complexity. However, although teachers are the first and immediate bearers of an organised education system, their work in terms of developing intercultural sensitivity should not be seen only as preparing students for life in modern and multicultural societies. Namely, with their educational work, teachers influence the entire society and its attitude towards cultural differences. In this regard, their role is both mediation (Previšić, 2007) and moderation (Hrvatić, 1999). With their professional knowledge, skills and developed positive attitudes towards cultural differences, they stand between students on the one hand and the influence of different cultures on society as a whole, on the other. At the same time, they try to instil positive values in students concerning cultural differences, but also to reduce external negative influences concerning these differences. In this way, intercultural education appears to offer one of the most promising responses to the challenges of globalization (Portera, 2008). However, it should be kept in mind that educational components regarding interculturalism in the classroom are not sufficient (Hrvatić, 2007). The teacher must necessarily influence the students in terms of the development of tolerance, cooperation and coexistence in a culturally plural society, i.e. have an influence not only on the students but also on their parents, extended families and society as a whole.

Considering that unadopted knowledge, skills, and attitudes cannot be effec-

tively transmitted, this research primarily examined the level of intercultural sensitivity of teachers. The results showed that the examined teachers demonstrate moderately positive intercultural sensitivity. These results are partially expected. Although previous research indicates that future teachers show a highly developed intercultural sensitivity (Jurković, 2023), research among teachers also shows a fairly large number of those with ethnocentric attitudes (Tabatadze & Gorgadze, 2014). In other words, there are many who reject the fact that cultural differences exist, defend themselves against them, or minimize them. The aforementioned ethnocentric attitudes can lead to the misinterpretation of possible difficulties or different behaviours of students as inappropriate, while in essence they are about cultural differences between students and teachers. In this regard, Warren (2002) also states that two-thirds of teachers generally do not take into account the cultural heritage of their students when assessing their academic success, and attribute poorer performance solely to lack of effort in school. The difference in intercultural sensitivity of teachers and teacher studies students is primarily attributed to the difference in age, but also the difference in their educations. Namely, it is expected that younger people, especially students, are more open to differences and during their studies, mainly due to the modernisation of study plans and programs, they had more opportunities to participate in courses that promoted or thematised interculturalism.

Furthermore, it was also examined whether there is a correlation between the intercultural sensitivity of teachers and some of their socio-demographic factors. It was shown that there is a negative correlation between the level of intercultural sensitivity and attending communication courses, which is, given the nature of the questions asked, expected result. Given that intercultural sensitivity is the foundation on which intercultural communication competence is built, it was to be expected that with the increase in participation in communication courses, the development of intercultural sensitivity would also increase. One possible explanation for these results may be found in the survey of teacher studies students who believe that intercultural upbringing and education relate to the ability to communicate with culturally different people (Piršl et al., 2016). Given that no previous research in Croatia was found that connected the intercultural sensitivity of teachers and attendance at communication courses, it would be scientifically interesting to check what kind of courses were conducted, who conducted them and in what way. However, there is re-

search available by Tuncel & Paker (2018) which shows that participation in an intercultural communication course positively contributes to the development of intercultural sensitivity of students in Turkey. On the other hand, some research (Karras, 2017) suggests that such courses are useful for the development of intercultural sensitivity for those who already have a desire and need to understand other cultures. All of the above points to caution when interpreting these and similar results. Namely, it is possible that, especially due to the rather weak correlation, intercultural sensitivity and communication courses have no real connection, but that the existence of intercultural sensitivity is the reason for attending communication courses. Since t-test did not show a difference in the level of intercultural sensitivity with respect to attending communication courses, in this case such a conclusion seems logical.

On the other hand, it was shown that there is a positive correlation between the reported average success of students and the intercultural sensitivity of teachers, but also that there is a difference in student academic success with respect to the level of intercultural sensitivity of their teachers. Such results are expected because previous research has shown that students who learn in an environment that encourages and appreciates diversity better develop critical thinking and cooperate better with others (Goodear, 2001), which are solid foundations for better academic success. On the other hand, students whose teachers use culturally inadequate methods and have less developed intercultural sensitivity also achieved lower academic success (Talbert-Johnson, 2004). All of the above was also shown in this research. Teachers with less developed intercultural sensitivity have reported the lower academic success of their students. This suggests that teachers who are more open and confident in intercultural interactions may create classroom environments that support diverse student needs more effectively. But, the correlational nature of the study does not allow for causal inferences, and other unmeasured factors may also influence student academic outcomes. Also, since teachers self-reported their students' average grades, there is a possibility of reporting bias, which could affect the accuracy of the data.

It should be emphasised that the additional implementation of interculturalism in teaching is a two-way street. Educational policies should enable and encourage teachers to develop intercultural sensitivity. For example, although not all multicultural experiences encourage the development of intercultural sensitivity (cf. Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011; D'Souza, 2016; Mendoza et al., 2017),

many studies (cf. Davilla et al., 2013; Roh, 2014; Jurković, 2023) have shown that, along with education, they are one of the most effective ways to develop this sensitivity. For example, they can be implemented through more accessible opportunities for learning foreign languages (in terms of price and/or time), more opportunities to participate in various seminars, and greater and more frequent opportunities to meet people from different cultures. Of course, as many studies show (cf. D'Souza, 2016; Rissanen et al., 2016; Morales, 2017), these experiences must be supported by targeted education related to the development of intercultural sensitivity, as well as the inclusion of interculturalism in teaching.

On the other hand, teachers should take greater initiative for their own learning and teaching. Either through self-initiated familiarization with different cultures, additional development of active teaching or personal development in leisure time (cf. Kabaklı Çimen, 2019; Şekerci & Doğan, 2020; Ching et al., 2021; Suntana & Tresnawaty, 2021; Jurković, 2024), teachers should strive to develop their views on different cultures, but also methods and ways to convey to their students a positive view of cultural differences that surround them.

It should be emphasised that attention should be focused on the importance of intercultural sensitivity of teachers even before their employment, if not earlier, then at the teachers' study itself. Namely, intercultural upbringing and education are the basis of every modern educational system, but also of society. Additionally, this highlights the necessity of embedding intercultural sensitivity training as a continuous thread throughout teachers' careers. Developing such competencies early and sustaining them can serve as a cornerstone for creating educational environments that champion diversity and inclusion as central values. Interculturally sensitive and, consequently, competent teachers, as the immediate bearers of changes in the educational system, are the basis of every step towards an equal society that nurtures and emphasises cultural diversity as its strength and wealth.

6. LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE

Since the population of teachers is very large, in many cases, including this one, surveys of their attitudes and opinions have difficulty collecting data at a representative level. Although 300 research participants is not an insigni-

ficant number of participants, it still only makes up a little more than 2% of the surveyed population. Here, the difficulties with the availability of a larger number of teachers in surveys that are not related to specific projects and are not conducted by research teams should certainly be taken into account. Also, the sample was a convenience sample, which may limit the generalisability of the results to the wider population of Croatian primary school teachers.

Furthermore, when talking about surveying attitudes on such sensitive topics as attitudes on cultural differences, it is necessary to keep in mind the possibility of giving socially desirable answers. Also, the use of self-reported measures for both intercultural sensitivity and student academic success may introduce bias, therefore the results should be taken with a slight reserve.

Finally, it should be emphasised that the intercultural sensitivity of teachers in the Republic of Croatia is very poorly researched. Apart from a few bright examples of scientific research and a few graduate and/or doctoral theses, these topics are almost unexplored. The situation is no more positive in the case of surveys of the intercultural sensitivity of teacher studies students. There are slightly more such works in foreign research, but the vast majority of the works date from 5, 10 or more years ago.

This and similar research on the population of teachers can be a good indicator of the current state and space for improvement in terms of intercultural sensitivity. Also, it should also serve as an incentive for further and more detailed research to determine the factors that both the educational system and the system of higher education of teachers can influence to further develop intercultural sensitivity of (future) teachers.

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INTERKULTURALNOST U UČIONICAMA – UVID U INTERKULTURALNU OSJETLJIVOST UČITELJA

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Sveučilište u Zadru, Odjel za nastavničke studije u Gospiću

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osjetljivost, učitelji, Skala
interkulturalne osjetljivosti

U ožujku 2024. godine provedeno je istraživanje interkulturalne osjetljivosti među 300 učitelja iz cijele Republike Hrvatske. U istraživanju je korištena adaptirana i prevedena (Jurković, 2023) Skala interkulturalne osjetljivosti (Chen i Starosta, 2000). Cilj istraživanja bio je utvrditi razinu interkulturalne osjetljivosti učitelja te utvrditi postoji li povezanost nekih od sociodemografskih čimbenika s razinom interkulturalne osjetljivosti. Uz to, pokušalo se ustanoviti postoji li razlika u razini interkulturalne osjetljivosti s obzirom na spomenute sociodemografske čimbenike. Rezultati istraživanja ukazuju na to da ispitani učitelji iskazuju blago iznadprosječnu razinu interkulturalne osjetljivosti ($M=3,83$; $SD=,438$) pri čemu je uživanje u interakciji s pripadnicima različitih kultura ($M=4,22$; $SD=,707$) istaknuto kao najrazvijenija dimenzija ove osjetljivosti, a samopouzdanje u interakciji s pripadnicima različitih kultura ($M=3,58$; $SD=,596$) kao najslabije razvijena. Uz to, ispitana je i povezanost sociodemografskih obilježja učitelja i njihove interkulturalne osjetljivosti te se pokazalo da je pohađanje komunikacijskih tečajeva statistički značajno negativno povezano s razinom ove osjetljivosti ($\rho=-,139$; $p<,05$) dok je prosječni uspjeh učenika s njom statistički značajno pozitivno povezan ($\rho=,131$; $p<,05$). Na koncu, provjereno je i postoji li statistički značajnih razlika u razini interkulturalne osjetljivosti s obzirom na povezane sociodemografske varijable. Pokazalo se da postoji statistički značajna razlika s obzirom na školski uspjeh njihovih učenika ($F(2,282)=4,942$; $p<,01$), i to na način da je bolji učenički uspjeh povezan s višom razinom interkulturalne osjetljivosti učitelja.