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Determinants of Student Attitudes towards Cultural Diversity in Schools

Abstract: The aim of this study was to explore the possibilities of predicting student attitudes towards the schooling of children and youths of different ethnicities on the basis of selected social and demographic features, school achievement, knowledge of foreign languages, interethnic contacts and attitudes towards multicultural society, and school integration or assimilation. A survey research was used to collect data from selected secondary school students in Croatia. On the basis of regression analysis results, four variables appeared to be strong predictors of attitudes towards school integration of children from different ethnic backgrounds: attitudes towards multicultural society, ethnic status, interethnic contact, and gender. Moreover, three variables stood out as significant predictors of student attitudes towards school assimilation: attitudes towards multicultural society, ethnic status, and gender. The article discusses the implications for developing positive interethnic relations in schools and offers recommendations for further research.

Keywords: student attitudes, integration, assimilation, interethnic relations, multicultural society, Croatia

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Introduction

Reactions towards cultural diversity largely depend on the dominant cultural policies in society. According to Giddens (2007), two fundamental models of social integration in multiethnic countries can be distinguished: (a) a model of assimilation, and (b) a model of cultural pluralism. The assimilation approach is based on the necessity of accepting the values and norms of the majority culture and abandoning the minority language, customs and other cultural peculiarities to achieve successful, stable integration. Parallel with this approach, a cultural pedagogy occurs, which aims at assimilating the minority groups (Portera 2008). At the beginning of the 20th century, Kallen (1915) criticised the assimilation policy in America. He emphasised that ethnic ties cannot be changed because they correspond to the original human needs for identity, and that ethnic diversity can contribute to the enrichment of American civilisation (Schlesinger, 1998 as cited in Puzić 2005). According to Giddens (2007), the model of cultural pluralism is the most appropriate way of creating a genuine plural society because it attaches equal value to different cultures. Kymlicka (1995), Čačić-Kumpes (2004), and Čorkalo Biruški and Ajduković (2012a) point out that the principle of educational multiculturalism, i.e. interculturalism, emphasises the need to preserve the cultural characteristics of minority groups, and it is characterised by the mutual acceptance of cultural elements with a view to fostering dialogue between members of the majority and minority cultures.

In the context of European integration and new migrations, Croatia as a multicultural society¹, seeks to improve interethnic relations. Systematic recognition of the national minority rights in Croatia did not commence until 2000 and after the

¹ According to the latest census in 2011, there are about 328,738 members of diverse ethnic groups in the Republic of Croatia—about less than a tenth of the population. Most are Serbs (4.36%) while other ethnic groups (Bosniaks, Italians, Albanians, Roma, Hungarians, Slovenes, Czechs, Austrians, Bulgarians, Jews, Germans, Montenegrins, Macedonians, Poles, Romanians, Russians, Ruthenians, Turks, Ukrainians, and Vlachs) do not exceed 1% of the population (Statistički ljetopis Republike Hrvatske 2012).

end of the war and transition adversities.² Today, there is a comprehensive model for the protection of national minorities in different areas (political representation and participation in the government, access to the media, cultural activities and education offered in the minority languages). The rights of the national and ethnic minorities in the field of education are regulated by the Croatian Constitution, Law on Education in the Languages and Scripts of National Minorities, laws on primary and secondary education, the National Framework Curriculum, and other legal and subordinate acts and statutes. The schooling of national minorities is an integral part of the regular educational system. In accordance with the existing regulations and organisational capacities for its realisation, members of the national minorities choose and propose the model of education to be offered in the language and script of the national minorities. Depending on the number of minority students, education and teaching in the minority vernacular language and script are conducted in separate schools/classes or in supplementary classes and programmes (Crnić-Grotić 2002).

There are three models of schooling in primary and secondary schools (Report on the implementation ... 2018). In *Model A*, all classes are taught in the vernacular language and script of the national minority; Croatian language lessons are mandatory and comprise the same number of class hours as the minority language ones. The curriculum in the language and script of a national minority is identical to the programme in the Croatian language and includes mandatory additional contents relevant to the preservation of the national culture (mother tongue language and literature, history, geography, music and art). It is mostly carried out in separate schools, but there is a possibility that it can be carried out in separate classes in schools where students are taught in Croatian. *Model B* offers a curriculum identical to the one in *Model A*; however, classes are bilingual: natural science classes are given in Croatian language, while social sciences and humanities are taught in the minority vernacular language and script. Instruction is carried out in special classes in schools where students are taught in Croatian.³ *Model C* is specific in that all students are taught in Croatian language while national culture classes are elective. This is a special programme for fostering the national culture and language taught in additional classes (2 to 5 hours per week). In addition, there are also special forms of instruction: correspondence-consultative classes⁴, summer and winter schools, and special programmes for the inclusion of the Roma people into the educational system.

² Peoples of the former state of Yugoslavia primary appeared as national minorities following its collapse (Mesić 2004).

³ National minority children included in Models A and B learn Croatian language four hours per week (National Report on Educational Development in the Republic of Croatia 2001).

⁴ This form of distance learning (by phone/letter/e-mail) is intended for students who are unable to attend national group of subjects and still want to learn more about mother tongue language and culture (minority language and literature, history, geography, music and arts). Teaching is performed according to the curriculum accepted and funded by the Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Croatia. Teachers compile and send the didactic materials for the learners to complete and send back to the teachers (Srpsko kulturno društvo ... n.d.).

Since some national minorities are under-represented or territorially dispersed, the provision of minority education has developed somewhat differently, allowing for smaller classes. Educational activities in the minority schools are sponsored by the Republic of Croatia. Minority programmes can be taught by the minority teachers or the majority members who are expert in a particular subject and the minority language (National Report on Educational Development in the Republic of Croatia 2001). According to the Report on the implementation of the constitutional law on rights of national minorities (2018), in the school year 2015-16, a total of 7100 students attended minority language classes in 160 primary schools (747 classes and 917 teachers), while a total of 1563 secondary school students attended minority language classes in 28 secondary schools (170 classes and 404 teachers) across all models of schooling (A, B and C).⁵ In accordance with the Law on Education, Law on Education in the Language and Script of National Minorities and the National Pedagogical Standards, minority vernacular teaching plans and programmes, along with the mandatory subjects, contain contents aimed at the cultural particularities of the national minority (minority language, literature, history, geography, art and music). These provisions were established and adopted by the Ministry of Science and Education after the opinion given by National Minority Association. Since 2012, the Agency for Education and Training is responsible for developing teaching curricula and programmes for all models of schooling.

Education is traditionally thought of as the fundamental integrative factor of society (Gallagher 2004). However, the realisation of this function becomes questionable due to the existence of separate forms of education for national minorities. Even though the goal of existing forms of national minority education is to enable the implementation of the right to the preservation and fostering of the minority language and culture, attendance at separate schools and classes certainly does not aid the process of integration of the minority students or the encouragement of interethnic contact, especially in ethnically divided communities. Nansen Dijalog Centar (2005) conducted a research in the late 2004 and early 2005 in Vukovar with a sample of 256 families having school-age children. It was found that the majority of parents, regardless of their nationality, did not consider the model of education for national minorities to be satisfactory for their children and for the process of social reconstruction of community where they live. As Donnelly and Hughes (2004) highlight, contradictory messages that children receive, about the school being a place of tolerance on the one hand and being ethnically divided on the other, can contribute to the enforcement of ethnic division in community.

The issues of separate schools influence on interethnic attitudes and behaviours and the maintenance of community-based separation in Vukovar have been systematically investigated by Čorkalo Biruški and Ajduković (2008). Comparing

⁵ In Model A, there were 1260 students, of which 38 students were Hungarian, 675 students were Serbian, and 547 students were Italian. In Model B, there were 25 students who were Czech. In Model C, there were 278 students from the following nationalities: Czech (46), Slovenian (82), Slovakian (75), Serbian (12), Italian (22), Macedonian (29) and Hungarian (12) (Report on the implementation of the constitutional law on rights of national minorities, 2018).

the attitudes of Croatian and Serbian students attending separate schools or classes and their parents and teachers in Vukovar—as the most pronounced example of a divided community in Croatia—the authors found that children and youths displayed strong tendency towards ethnic discrimination. They added that the existing (separate) schooling system in the region of Vukovar does not encourage children to make interethnic contacts for the sake of a better understanding. According to Čorkalo Biruški and Ajduković (2012b), the interethnic contact of students who attend separate schools, classes or split shifts takes place at the level of ‘us’ and ‘them’, rendering unattainable the goal of overcoming discriminatory attitudes.

Separate forms of education also imply distinct lifestyles of ethnically diverse people at the social level. Sharing the same living space does not necessarily translate into cross-cultural familiarisation, understanding and acceptance. There are numerous past and contemporary examples illustrating a lack of communication between different cultures living side by side (Jagić 2002). The failure to accept cultural diversity, as pointed out by Bennet (2004), is the consequence of monocultural primary socialisation, i.e. growing up in culturally homogenous environments or ethnically divided environments. Separate education ethnically divides children and reduces the possibility of contact as an important precondition for resolving conflicts between groups (Čorkalo Biruški and Ajduković 2008).

Schools can be environments conducive to the formation of intergroup relations (cf. Gallagher 2004; Hayes et al. 2007). Research results support the view that creating opportunities for interethnic contacts in schools can facilitate the development of interethnic friendships (DuBois and Hirsch 1990; Howes and Wu 1990); it can also have an adverse effect on the manifestation of prejudice in adulthood (Wood and Sonleitner 1996). Niens and Cairns (2005) point out that contact alone is not a sufficient prerequisite for fostering positive relationships. Significant number of studies indicate that exposure to cultural diversity itself is not sufficient for the development of openness towards cultural diversity. Referring to Bloom (1971), Mitchell (1968), and Tajfel and Dawson (1965), Bochner (1986) states that increased contact does not necessarily result in a reduction in tensions; conversely, they may even lead to prolonged, deep conflicts between groups in turbulent social or political contexts (Bekerman 2004). Friendship has been identified for its potential for aiding interethnic contact between members of groups (e.g. Pettigrew 1998). This involves close interactions that will allow self-detection and other mechanisms for establishing friendship. This potential should be taken into account when considering the possibility of joint schooling of children of different nationalities.

As Mesić (2004) highlights, a society that inclines towards normative multiculturalism embraces interculturalism in education for *all* pupils. According to Sikorskaya (2017), intercultural education, as a response to cultural diversity across Europe, has been variously understood. Initially (e.g. 1970s and 1980s), it was mainly focused on the issue of language proficiency. Today, however, it is concentrated on the issue of achieving social cohesion. In culturally diverse societies, intercultural education has been conceptualised as education intended not only for immigrants and minority but for *all* students. In order for students to

engage in mutual learning and development of a common core of values, knowledge and attitudes, underpinned by respect for cultural diversity, integration is indispensable (Leeman and Ledoux, 2003). Intercultural approach to education stresses the need for students' inclusion and participation in learning the rules of coexistence (Batelaan, 2000), leading to social integration, rather than assimilation or separation (Berry, 1997). Learning to live together, as a central tenet of intercultural education, requires education not only as a goal but also a means for its realisation through positive orientation towards otherness within and beyond school contexts: 'Our attitude towards otherness is the fundamental catalyst of the development of active tolerance and an inclusive culture of our societies' (Kroflić 2006, p. 28).

This research intends to determine the possibility of predicting the attitudes of high school students towards joint schooling of members of the majority and minority ethnic groups on the basis of selected sociodemographic variables, school achievement, knowledge of foreign languages, interethnic contacts, attitudes towards school integration/assimilation, and multicultural society. This research intends to investigate whether students' gender, ethnic status, size of the place of residence, type of the secondary school, grade, parents' level of education, school achievement, use of foreign languages, contact with members of other nations, and attitudes towards school assimilation and multicultural society can predict reactions towards (a) school *integration* of members of different ethnic groups, and (b) school *assimilation* of members of different ethnic groups.

Methodology

Participants

The research included a group of 972 girls and 736 boys from 22 high schools. Instruction in four schools was carried out in the vernacular language and script of national minorities (Model A)—Czech, Hungarian, Italian and Serbian. The research was carried out at different geographical locations in Croatia (Darugar, Dugo Selo, Gospić, Imotski, Karlovac, Križevci, Osijek, Pula, Rijeka, Varaždin, Vukovar, Zadar and Zagreb). In terms of grades, 495 students (29%) attended the first grade, followed by 436 (26%) who attended the second grade; 423 students (25%) were at the third grade, and 354 students (21%) studied at the fourth grade. In terms of school types, 587 students (34%) attended grammar schools while 787 student (46%) studied at technical and related schools; another 334 students (20%) attended industrial and trade schools. In terms of ethnicity, 1523 students (89%) declared that they were Croats whereas 66 students identified themselves as Serbian (3.86%), 43 as Hungarian (2.52%), 23 as Czech (1.35%), 20 as Italian (1.17%), and 33 (1.93%) as members of other nationalities.

Instrument and procedures

The survey consisted of three parts. The first part was used to collect data on participants' social and demographic characteristics: gender, ethnic status (majority or minority), size of the place of residence (by number of residents), type of the high school, grade, parents' education level (mother and father), school achievement (final mark in the previous grade), the number of foreign languages they use, and contact with members of other ethnicities. The response categories ranged from 'no contact' to 'acquaintance-level contact' and 'friendship-level contact'.

The second part of the survey examined the students' attitudes towards the schooling of members of different ethnic groups. The scale, attitudes towards school integration, comprised six items ($\alpha = 0.85$), adapted from the scale of attitudes towards the integration of Croatian and Serbian children at schools (Čorkalo Biruški and Ajduković 2007). Some of the item examples are as follows:

- a) Children of different nationalities should attend school together because they will get to know each other better in this way.
- b) All children should be schooled together; children should not be segregated in special schools or classes according to their nationalities.

The scale, attitudes towards school assimilation, contained five items ($\alpha = 0.74$). The statements were adapted from the scale of attitudes towards national minority assimilation (ibid.). Examples of statements are as follows:

- a) The majority people should determine what education will be like in this country.
- b) Since the schools are in Croatia, all students should attend classes taught exclusively in Croatian.

The third part of the questionnaire concerned attitudes towards multicultural society. It consisted of seven items ($\alpha = 0.81$). Examples of statements are as follows:

- a) There are too many members of other nations in Croatia.
- b) It is a good thing for the Republic of Croatia that different nations whose cultures differ live here.

All the three scales had response options that ranged from 1 (I strongly disagree) to 5 (I strongly agree). Responses were coded so that a higher score illustrated a more positive attitude towards school integration and multiculturalism and school assimilation.

The survey took place in the 2011-2012 school year after consent about the research purpose and methodology was obtained from the school principals. The survey was conducted in as many classes in each school as the planned deadlines permitted. All research participants were informed about the purpose of the research and the manner of completing the questionnaires. Participation in the research was voluntary and anonymous.

Results

Regression analysis was implemented for the attitudes towards integration as criterion variable. All other variables from intercorrelation matrix were taken as predictors (Table 1).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Gender													
Ethnic status	.06*												
Size of residence	-.06*	-.04											
Secondary school	.01	-.23**	-.05*										
Grade	.11**	.01	-.02	-.13**									
School achievement	.08**	.08**	-.02	-.40**	-.03								
Father's education	.05*	.03	.18**	-.31**	.09**	.14**							
Mother's education	-.13**	.04	.24**	-.35**	.06*	.16**	.44**						
Foreign language	.04	.25**	.04	-.45**	.04	.30**	.17**	.21**					
Interethnic contact	-.04	.16**	.10**	-.05*	-.03	-.02	.04	.06*	.14**				
School integration	.27**	.02	.02	-.09*	.11**	.12**	-.01	-.04	.13**	.17**			
School assimilation	-.22**	-.36**	.05*	.14**	.01	-.05*	.01	-.02	-.17**	-.13**	-.20**		
Multiculturalism	.30**	.17**	-.02	-.12**	.09**	.12**	-.02	-.05*	.18**	.18**	.59**	-.44**	

*Correlations significant on a 5% level; **correlations significant on a 1% level.

Table 1: Intercorrelation matrix of all variables used in the study

Out of twelve variables, four stood out as significant predictors of attitudes towards school integration in the last step of regression analysis (see Table 2). These variables are gender, ethnic status, interethnic contact, and attitudes towards a multicultural society.

Predictors	Beta	t	p
Gender	.113**	5.47	.000
Ethnic status	-.094**	-4.69	.000
Interethnic contact	.090**	4.48	.000
Multiculturalism	.555**	26.25	.000
	R = .609	R ² = .370	

*p < .05; **p < .01

Table 2: Final step of stepwise regression analysis for the attitudes towards school integration as criterion variable

In total, these four predictor variables explain 37% of the criterion variable variance. The positive correlation between gender, interethnic contact, and multicultural attitudes and the criterion variable illustrates that girls tend to display a more positive attitude towards school integration, individuals who are in a closer contact with members of other nations, and those who foster a more positive attitude towards a multicultural society. On the other hand, negative correlation with ethnic status shows that members of the majority express more support for school integration.

A stepwise regression analysis was implemented for another criterion variable—attitudes towards school assimilation (Table 3), while all other variables from the intercorrelation table were used as predictors.

Predictors	Beta	t	p
Gender	-.092**	-4.2	.000
Ethnic status	-.296**	-14.0	.000
Multiculturalism	-.361**	-16.3	.000
	R = .535	R ² = .285	

*p < .05; **p < .01

Table 3: Final step of stepwise regression analysis for the attitudes towards school assimilation as criterion variable

In the final step of the regression analysis, three variables stood out as significant predictors: gender, ethnic status, and attitudes towards a multicultural society. Those predictors are negatively associated with the criterion. Negative correlations show that boys, members of the majority, and individuals who show less support for multiculturalism in society are more supportive of school assimilation. These three variables jointly explain 28.5% of variance of the criterion variable.

Discussion and conclusion

The contemporary approach to intercultural education emphasises social cohesion and integration (cf. Leeman and Ledoux 2003; Sikorskaya 2017). However, its realisation is more difficult in cases where schooling is segregated, preventing children and youths from coming into interethnic contact in an environment where they spend much of the day. This claim is supported by research results about attitudes towards schooling of students, their parents and teachers in Vukovar in 2001 (Čorkalo Biruški and Ajduković 2003). Even though positive curricular changes, such as interculturalism, have been introduced into the educational system of the Republic of Croatia via the National Curriculum Framework, further changes need to be made about the issue of divided schools and classes.

The aim of this research was to explore the possibilities of predicting student attitudes towards school integration of children from different ethnic backgrounds on the basis of selected social and demographic features. Results of this empirical

research illustrate that multicultural attitudes are the best determinants of attitudes towards school integration and assimilation. Ethnic status, albeit a common predictor for both criteria, contributes significantly towards explaining attitudes towards school assimilation. On the other hand, gender explains both criteria equally, but to a considerably lower degree. Interethnic contact represents a determinant of attitudes towards school integration, but not towards assimilation. Its contribution to the explanation of this criterion is relatively modest. The results of regression analyses also suggest that other sociodemographic features (size of residence, secondary school, grade, parents' education), school achievement, and knowledge of foreign languages do not represent significant determinants of attitudes towards school integration and assimilation. Moreover, the research indicates that the attitudes towards school assimilation is not a significant predictor of attitudes towards school integration and vice versa.

It was also found that attitudes towards multiculturalism have a powerful influence on predicating attitudes toward school integration. Students who express more favourable attitudes towards a multicultural society show greater support for the possibility of integration of majority and minority children and youths within the school context. The results are consistent with the research conducted by Čorkalo Biruški and Ajduković (2012b) in 2001 and 2007 on Croatian and Serbian children in Vukovar. They found that a positive attitude towards multiethnicity contributes to a more positive attitude towards social and school integration. Since the acceptance of cultural diversity on a wider, societal level implicates attitudes towards the possibility of joint schooling, nurturing multiculturalism as a community value should constitute a mandatory part of activities directed towards improving interethnic relations (*ibid.*).

Ethnic status and interethnic contact equally account for attitudes towards school integration, but to a lower degree than that of a multicultural attitude and gender. It was found that Croatian high school students expressed a more favourable attitude towards school integration. The fact that members of minorities expressed a less positive stance on school integration could be explained by their concern that if education were organised differently, they would not be able to get the same amount of education in minority languages, or that school members would behave differently towards them, especially in divided communities, such as Vukovar. Čorkalo Biruški and Ajduković (2008) found that, even though they supported attitudes that respect diversity, parents of students who attended classes in their mother tongue language and script regarded segregated schools as most favourable. This finding can be explained by the fact that such schools contribute most strongly to the preservation and fostering of minority cultures and languages.

This present study also found that a more supportive attitude towards school integration is shown by those individuals who maintain closer contacts with members of other ethnic groups. This finding coheres with the research results on attitudes of majority and minority children and young people in Vukovar (Čorkalo Biruški and Ajduković 2012b). These results illustrate that extensive contacts with members of external groups represent a significant predictor of attitudes towards school integration in both groups (majority and minority). Pettigrew (1998) attributes

considerable value to contacts that offer people the opportunity to establish friendly relations with members of other groups, leading to benefits such as convergence and familiarisation. However, this present study found that the impact of interethnic contact on attitudes towards school integration was relatively moderate. This was probably influenced by the formation of the variable of interethnic contact, which was not specified as bearing a relationship with members of other ethnic groups in Croatia, but as one at a general level. Also, researches show that the quality of contacts has a key impact on interethnic relations (Binder et al. 2009; Vervoort et al. 2011). DuBois and Hirsch (1990), for example, found that 80% of children from integrated schools reported to have friends from other races. They also found that more than a half of children have a close friend from a different race. Even though these are promising results about schools being centres of interethnic friendships, in the same study DuBois and Hirsch found that only a fourth of children maintained contacts with their 'other' friends *outside* the school. This is a fascinating area of research that deserves further investigation.

Gender accounts for attitudes towards school integration to a somewhat greater extent than ethnic status and interethnic contact, but to a significantly lesser extent than the multicultural attitude. Results of this study show that girls have more positive views about ethnic integration. The contribution of gender can be explained on the basis of gender role learning and characteristics associated with¹ prosocial and interethnic relations connected to that process. Girls are taught from the early childhood to be more reconcilable, more sensitive, kind, gentle and inclined to forgiveness (Pokrajac 1993). Noddings (2003) argues that, unlike men, the majority of women tend to approach moral problems differently. They do not consider them as intellectual problems to be addressed by abstract reasoning, but rather as problems to be lived and solved in concrete terms. She argues that women's approach to moral problems is founded in caring. According to Gilligan (1982), women define and judge themselves in terms of human relations and their ability to care. She describes the ethic of care as predominantly feminine. Several other studies have described caring as a predominantly feminine feature (e.g. Ivy and Backlund 2000). In contrast, research results show that, unlike women, men exhibit considerable patriotism, defensiveness and competitiveness regarding cultural affiliation and identity (Grant 1993) and lower intercultural sensitivity (Holm et al. 2009).

Three variables (of twelve) in this study, included in regression analysis, stand out as statistically significant predictors of attitudes towards school assimilation, and these are gender, ethnic status, and multicultural attitudes. Interethnic contact, however, did not appear to be a significant determinant.

Attitudes towards multiculturalism have also appeared to be strong predictors of attitudes towards school assimilation, but to a significantly lesser extent than of attitudes towards school assimilation. Such a result is somewhat expected bearing in mind the fact that multicultural approach represents a reaction to a belief that individuals are best integrated into society if they are assimilated (cf. Mesić 2004; Giddens 2007; Portera 2008). Furthermore, this present study also found that

students who are more supportive of school integration of majority and minority children also accept multiculturalism to a greater extent.

Ethnic status emerged as the second significant predictor, representing a relatively stronger determinant of attitudes towards school assimilation, compared to those towards school integration. As expected, members of the majority show greater support for assimilation in schools than the minority members, not least because the majority frequently perceive minorities as a threat to the unity of society and their own culture (Van Oudenhoven et al. 1998). In his research, Verkuyten (2008) determined that members of the majority see assimilation as a suitable solution to regulate the majority-minority relations, while minorities resist such an approach and try to avoid it. Empirical data suggest that a significant percentage of young people support the assimilation approach (Buterin and Jagić 2013). The results of previous research show that adolescents in the majority display a far greater attachment to their own ethnic group than that of their peers from other nationalities (Grant and Millar 1992; Schofield 1995a, 1995b). Bennett (1993) points out that the rejection of cultural diversity in society is the privilege of the dominant groups rather than the minority groups who are constantly reminded that they are different. The lower expression of attitudes towards school assimilation of minority students can be explained by their specific ethnic status. Since they are members of a group that is perceived to be culturally different, they are more readily prepared to understand how important it is to preserve their own language and culture.

Gender has also appeared to be a significant predictor of attitudes towards school assimilation. Boys support assimilation in school to a greater extent than girls who show a greater sensibility towards the preservation of minority cultures. Since those two issues are related, the poorer support to school assimilation shown by girls is not surprising because, compared to boys, they expressed more support to school integration. In their research, Mesić and Bagić (2011) have also found that girls show more positive attitudes towards cultural diversity (*ibid.*).

The conducted research has implications for educational practice, which primarily originate from the perceived importance of certain variables in the development of a more positive attitude towards school integration and addressing the shortcomings of the assimilation approach. When designing and implementing educational activities in schools, with the aim of improving interethnic relations, one should have in mind the role of multicultural attitudes alongside the ethnic status, gender, and interethnic contact.

Since the youths' attitudes towards joint schooling of members of different nationalities is a relatively underdeveloped area of interethnic relations in Croatia, the significance of conducting further research is emphasised. It is also important to bear in mind that the variables discussed in this research only partially explain the attitudes, which illustrates that other factors may be at play. Further research could, for example, be directed towards the exploration of potentially relevant variables such as intercultural competence, close friendship with members of minority groups and maintaining contacts with them, intergroup bias, tendency towards discrimination, etc. Another constraint is the fact that the obtained data are correlative, hinder drawing definitive causal relationships. Moreover, the single-

method survey approach used in this research required a quantitative approach and that participants provide statements, verging on self-reports. Hence, the use of a multimethod research design and a qualitative approach are recommended. It is also recommended that comparative enquiries on attitudes towards joint schooling be conducted on various groups of participants (e.g. students from integrated and separated schools, classes or shifts).⁶

The results of this research make important contributions to our understanding about whether education, both of minority and majority, can be organised differently. Such a form of education should be oriented towards social cohesion, which ensures education for vernacular minority languages and scripts while simultaneously providing opportunities for intercultural dialogue.

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⁶ Sampling issues and response rates in such research were extremely demanding, given the fact that many national minorities are under-represented by number, or geographically dispersed.

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NEKATERE DETERMINANTE ODNOSA DIJAKOV DO KULTURNE RAZNOLIKOSTI V ŠOLI

Povzetek: Cilj raziskave, ki jo predstavljamo v prispevku, je bil raziskati, kako bi bilo mogoče predvideti odnos dijakov do šolanja otrok in mladih različnih narodnosti na podlagi izbranih socialnih in demografskih značilnosti, šolskih dosežkov, znanja tujih jezikov, medetničnih stikov in odnosa do multikulturne družbe ter šolske integracije oz. asimilacije. Podatki so bili zbrani s pomočjo vprašalnika, ki smo ga posredovali dijakom srednjih šol na Hrvaškem. Na podlagi rezultatov regresijske analize smo dokazali, da odnos dijakov do šolske integracije otrok iz različnih etničnih okolij napovedujejo štiri spremenljivke: poleg spola še odnos do multikulturne družbe, njihov etnični status in medetnični stiki. Ob tem so tri spremenljivke izstopale kot pomembni napovedniki odnosa dijakov do šolske asimilacije: spol, odnos do multikulturne družbe in njihov etnični status. Na podlagi rezultatov raziskave v besedilu razpravljamo o nekaterih implikacijah, ki jih imajo ti v kontekstu prizadevanj za pozitivne medetnične odnose v šolskem okolju, predstavimo pa tudi nekaj priporočil za raziskovanje tega področja v prihodnje.

Ključne besede: stališča dijakov, integracija, asimilacija, etnični odnosi, multikulturna družba

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