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Intercultural Sensitivity of Religious Education Teachers in Croatia: The Relationship between Knowledge, Experience, and Behaviour

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Abstract: Intercultural education and the pedagogy of recognition are among the fundamental dimensions of contemporary education in European schools. The recognition of the role that learning about religions and drawing lessons from them plays in creating a cohesive society is becoming more widespread. European educational policies suggest integrating intercultural competence into the professional identity of teachers in all subjects, including religious education teachers. Intercultural learning is a constitutive part of shaping the identity of all religious communities. The intercultural sensitivity of religious education teachers, along with attitudes and behaviours that reflect openness, adaptability, and communication with those of different cultural and religious backgrounds, influences the development of intercultural competence in students. This paper examines differences in the intercultural sensitivity of religious education teachers from various religious communities in Croatia in relation to their intercultural experiences, gender, and acquired theoretical knowledge. The research utilised a quantitative methodology, and the analysis of results incorporated descriptive and differential statistics (*t*-test). Although the teachers demonstrated a relatively high level of intercultural sensitivity, differences were still evident among the groups. Understanding the concept of the religious dimension of intercultural education emerged as a significant factor influencing the ethnocentric or ethnocentric attitudes and behaviours of religious education teachers. Differences observed in intercultural experiences and gender lead to the conclusion that there is a need to create equal opportunities in intercultural education for both men and women. Additionally, there is a need to increase opportunities for intercultural exchanges and encounters with members of other cultures and religions to enable teachers to develop a more open identity.

Keywords: intercultural education; intercultural sensitivity; intercultural experiences; intercultural knowledge; religious education teachers



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1. Theoretical Background and the Importance of Intercultural Learning

Increased migrations and the blending of cultures, notably evident in recent decades, are primarily caused by globalisation processes, driven by economic factors and facilitated by the development of new information and communication technologies. The rise in migrations and the formation of multicultural environments have been influenced by various sociopolitical and economic conditions (or lack thereof) in many countries worldwide, as well as by armed conflicts and climate changes. Emerging multicultural situations require the ability to deal with diversity and the development of intercultural competencies (Filipović 2017, pp. 127–33). Croatia has been historically more of an emigration country than an immigration country. A new wave of emigration from the country followed Croatia's accession to the European Union on 1 July 2013. In the past few years, however, Croatia has become a country of immigration. At the beginning of 2021, Croatia abolished a quota system for employing foreign workers, resulting in the proliferation of agencies mediating services related to their employment. Among the top ten countries to which the Ministry of

Interior of the Republic of Croatia issued employment and residence permits in 2023 are not only neighbouring countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia or countries from the neighbouring region such as Kosovo, North Macedonia and Albania, but also many Far Eastern countries such as Nepal, India, the Philippines, Bangladesh and the European and Middle Eastern Turkey (Republic of Croatia, Ministry of Interior/[Republika Hrvatska, Ministarstvo Unutarnjih Poslova 2023](#)).

Today, intercultural competence is needed in all professions, especially in the field of education. Awareness of the need to develop the intercultural dimension of education as an essential dimension has been observed in Western Europe since the beginning of the 1980s, under the influence of the guidelines of the Council for Cultural Cooperation of the Council of Europe. The Council of Europe then abandoned the special education project for migrant children and opted for intercultural education. Therefore, intercultural competence is required as part of the professional development of teachers ([Perotti 1995](#), pp. 7–28). Drawing from social philosophical and ethical reflections on the foundation of egalitarian acceptance and respect for ethnic, cultural, religious, and other differences (such as gender, health conditions, etc.) in human rights and the demand for justice ([Honneth 1992](#); [Taylor 1992](#); [Ricoeur 2005](#)), pedagogical concepts of the pedagogy of diversity ([Prengel 1993](#)), pedagogy of recognition ([Stojanov 2006](#); [Filipović 2021a](#)), as well as intercultural pedagogy, have been developed. Intercultural education is understood as the principle on which all activities of the school and the educational community are based. It refers to both teaching and the overall culture of the school ([Filipović 2017](#), pp. 103–12). Among the analytical tools for evaluating schools and promoting an inclusive culture, policies, and practices, the Index for Inclusion stands out, developed by Tony Booth and Mel Ainscow based on the previous works of many experts ([Booth and Ainscow 2000](#)).

The religious dimension of intercultural education at the level of the Council of Europe guidelines has gained greater recognition and saw more intensive development after the terrorist attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001. This has also influenced the acknowledgement of religion in public discourse in former socialist countries, which emerged as an issue following the collapse of communist regimes in 1989/1990 and the subsequent wars on the territory of the former Yugoslavia. From *The Recommendation on the dimension of religions and non-religious convictions within intercultural education* from 2008 ([Council of Europe 2008](#)) onwards, intercultural education in theoretical frameworks includes the religious dimension; religion and culture are placed in a relationship that achieves social cohesion and active citizenship ([Milot 2007](#)). As one of the fundamental conditions for achieving the goals of intercultural education, the intercultural competence of all citizens is presupposed. Due to the increasingly comprehensive and rapid consequences of globalisation processes and European policies, intercultural competence is considered a fundamental outcome of the educational process ([Hiller and Woźniak 2009](#), p. 113). The intercultural competence of teachers encompasses a dimension of knowledge and awareness of the value of other cultures, as well as a relational dimension that includes openness to others and to those who are different, motivation for understanding, breaking down one's own prejudices, and presenting one's own views in a reasoned manner ([Bennett 2004](#); [Filipović 2021b](#), p. 556).

In addition to intercultural competence, religious education teachers need to develop interreligious competence, understood as a set of relevant knowledge and abilities to interpret, assess, and act in a multireligious environment. It involves a range of different knowledge and skills necessary for dealing with religious pluralism and the challenge of otherness ([Filipović 2021a](#)). The theological foundation of intercultural understanding and intercultural learning in the Catholic Church, as well as in theology and religious pedagogy, has been extensively examined and called into question, particularly after the Second Vatican Council and especially in recent decades ([Congregazione per l'educazione cattolica 2013](#)). Intercultural and interreligious learning is not just a demand of a "post-Christian" society but an integral part of the Christian identity itself, evolving within intercultural exchange and interreligious openness. The same holds true for interreligious learning

in other religious communities (Altmeyer 2016). Given the interreligious dimension of dialogue, the document “Dialogue and Proclamation” from the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue in 1991 is particularly significant (Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue 1991, No. 42).

The fundamental construct of this paper is intercultural sensitivity, which denotes attitudes and behaviours reflecting the behavioural–affective dimension of intercultural competence (Council of Europe 2008; Deardorff 2020; UNESCO 2013). Chen and Starosta (2000, p. 4) conceive intercultural sensitivity as the ability to develop positive emotions directed towards understanding and accepting cultural differences, manifested in acceptable behaviour. According to Bennett (2009, p. 426), ethnocentrism is expressed through the rejection of cultural differences, either by opposing or downplaying their significance. Ethnorelative behaviour is recognised in the validation of cultural differences, the understanding of identity as one that is culturally diverse, and the ability to take the perspective of others different from oneself. In this paper, intercultural sensitivity was assessed using the scale developed by E. Piršl, but in which the religious dimension has been incorporated. The scale examines ethnorelative and ethnocentric behaviours, indicating whether an individual’s culture and religion are the main criteria shaping their view of society, or if they are interculturally sensitive, possessing an awareness of the importance of cultural and religious diversity that they can incorporate into their identity and interact appropriately with people of different cultures and religions (Piršl et al. 2016).

2. Research among Religious Education Teachers in Croatia: Objective and Methodology

Within the project “Contribution of Religious Education to Coexistence in Multicultural Society”,¹ intercultural competence of religious education teachers in Croatia, along with their attitudes, opinions, and specific behaviours, were explored. One of the goals of the research on “Intercultural Competence: Attitudes, Opinions, and Specific Behaviours of Religious Education Teachers” was to define the fundamental characteristics of the religious dimension of intercultural education and to examine the attitudes and behaviours of religious education teachers towards members of different cultures and religions.

This paper aims to demonstrate the relationship between the knowledge, experience, and behaviour of religious education teachers. Specifically, to examine whether there is a statistically significant difference in attitudes and behaviours related to intercultural sensitivity among religious education teachers with regard to (a) understanding the fundamental aspects of the concept of the religious dimension of intercultural education, and (b) realised or unrealised intercultural experiences. Additionally, (c) differences in attitudes and behaviours based on gender were examined.

The phenomenon of attitudes and behaviours towards those who are religiously and culturally different has not been previously examined in the population of religious education teachers in Croatia. Attitudes and behaviours of religious education teachers towards members of other cultures and religions were examined using the following variables: awareness of tolerance, the need to respect the right to diversity, knowledge of minority languages, awareness of a multicultural society, ability to empathise and feel for others and those who are different, adjustment of behaviour when encountering members of a minority/majority, and the understanding of identity, specifically its religious and cultural characteristics (Piršl et al. 2016, p. 116). The variables were created in the Croatian context to examine the level of ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism (intercultural sensitivity). They were previously used in research among students of teacher studies at the Juraj Dobrila University in Pula and the University of Rijeka. (Piršl et al. 2016) Understanding the concept of the religious dimension of intercultural education relies on the European context and the guidelines of the Council of Europe. This was examined using the following determinants that define its meaning: knowledge of other religions and non-religious beliefs, understanding religious differences, communication with others, awareness of stereotypes, critical self-reflection, non-violent conflict resolution, knowledge

of religious language, educational dimension, and understanding of religion as part of culture (Council of Europe 2008).

Participants in the study were religious education teachers in the Republic of Croatia working in primary and secondary schools. The study included 460 participants, of whom 103 (22.4%) were male and 357 (77.6%) were female. In Croatia, the subject of religious education is taught in public schools in various denominational and religious versions representing different religious communities. It is an optional subject in primary (years 1–8), and secondary school (years 9–12, i.e., 1–4), and once chosen, it becomes compulsory. For this purpose, religious education teachers belonging to the following groups were surveyed: Catholic Church, Orthodox Church, Churches of the Reformation Heritage, and the Islamic Community. The realised sample of the study consists of 375 Catholic religious education teachers (81.5%), 65 religious education teachers belonging to Churches of the Reformation Heritage (14.1%), 18 Orthodox religious education teachers (3.9%), and 2 Islamic religious education teachers (0.4%). This structure of the sample partly reflects the religious affiliation of Croatian society, where most of the population (78.97%) is Catholic (Republic of Croatia, Croatian Bureau of Statistics 2021), but also shows higher motivation of Catholic religious education teachers as well as of religious education teachers belonging to Churches of the Reformation Heritage, and the lower interest of members of other religious communities. Religious education teachers in the realised sample mostly teach in primary school (87.4%), as well as in high school (29.6%). The largest number of respondents is 41 to 50 years old (44.8%) and 31 to 40 years old (25.7%). Most religious education teachers completed graduate studies (87%), and 5.4% completed postgraduate studies. 4.8% of religious education teachers indicate undergraduate study as their level of education, and 2.8% the high school level. The survey was conducted using a questionnaire in the period from November 2021 to January 2022. The survey was conducted online. Prior to completing the survey, respondents signed an informed consent and were briefed about the anonymity of the data. The most commonly used response format was the Likert scale. The scale examining the attitudes and behaviours of religious education teachers regarding ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism, exploring intercultural sensitivity, and factors influencing the development of intercultural sensitivity was adopted from the original instrument “Questionnaire for Teachers” (Piršl et al. 2016). The data were processed and analysed using the social sciences software package, i.e., the SPSS 29.0. In order to determine descriptive indicators that had an impact on the development of intercultural sensitivity, the representation of intercultural experiences and attitudes and behaviour towards members of other cultures and religions, descriptive parameters were used to show absolute and relative frequencies. *T*-test analysis was used to determine differences in attitudes and behaviours related to the intercultural sensitivity of religious education teachers with regard to their understanding and knowledge of the concept of the religious dimension within intercultural education, the representation of intercultural experiences, and gender.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Intercultural Sensitivity of Religious Education Teachers: Influencing Factors, Behaviours and Attitudes

Religious education teachers responded to each statement on a rating scale from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree”. The obtained values for the assessments of each statement (item) are presented in two categories: “Yes” and “No”. The “Yes” category includes assessments of 4 = “agree” and 5 = “strongly agree”, while the “No” category includes assessments from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 3 = “neither agree nor disagree”. The recoding of the response scale has been adapted for statistical reasons and for a simpler and more transparent comparison of the results.

Based on the obtained results (Table 1), it can be concluded that personal contact with members of other cultures and religions is the most important factor for the development of intercultural sensitivity for religious education teachers (92.8%). In the second place are

intercultural experiences (85%), and in the third, religious affiliation and family (76.1%). While religious education teachers recognise the importance of intercultural experiences, it should be noted that only 48% of them report having had intercultural experiences. Others clearly recognise this importance on the basis of other people's experiences. The experience of staying among other cultures certainly affects the development and adoption of intercultural competence. According to American sociologist Milton J. Bennett, the creator of the DMIS model for the development of intercultural competence, intercultural experience is essential for achieving and practising intercultural teaching and learning. According to his understanding, intercultural learning necessarily occurs as a process of intercultural study experience or exchange programmes, during which intercultural competencies are developed, and intercultural knowledge is acquired, which can then be transferred into the experience and coexistence of one's own culture and relationships (Bennett 2009, p. 3). As Croatia has only recently become a country experiencing increased immigration from very distant and different cultures, a significant number of religious education teachers have not had the opportunity to gain such experiences, as evidenced by other results. Also, only the younger population of religious education teachers has had more opportunities for international experiences through programmes such as Erasmus and other student exchange initiatives. Moreover, the opportunities for such experiences increased after Croatia's accession to the European Union on 1 July 2013, which facilitated opportunities for foreign stays.

Table 1. Factors for the development of intercultural sensitivity of religious education teachers.

Factors	No (%)	Yes (%)
<i>Media</i>	48	52
<i>Initial education</i>	40.4	59.6
<i>Professional training</i>	33	67
<i>Intercultural experiences</i>	15	85
<i>Knowledge of other languages</i>	35.2	64.8
<i>Religious affiliation</i>	23.9	76.1
<i>Family</i>	23.9	76.1
<i>Personal contact with members of other cultures and religions</i>	7.2	92.8

A scale of 8 statements examined the intercultural sensitivity of religious education teachers, specifically their ethnorelative or ethnocentric attitudes. Teachers responded to each statement on a rating scale from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree". The obtained values of assessments for each statement (item) are presented in two categories, "Yes" and "No". In the "Yes" category, assessments of 4 and 5 are combined, while in the "No" category, assessments from 1 to 3 are included.

The ethnorelative approach is characterised by "emphasising the importance of the existence and understanding of cultural diversity, aligning one's own views with the views of others, and integrating significant elements of diversity into one's own personal identity. Therefore, the goal of the ethnorelative approach is to increase personal awareness of each individual and make them interculturally sensitive when in situations with culturally different individuals" (Piršl et al. 2016, p. 116).

Based on the obtained results (Table 2), it can be concluded that religious education teachers express a high degree of ethnocentrism in statements 1, 2, 3, 6, and 7, which is reflected in developed awareness of tolerance, the need to respect the right to diversity, knowledge of the languages of other ethnic groups, awareness of a multicultural society, as well as the ability to empathise and feel for others and those who are different. In statements related to adjusting behaviour when encountering members of another cultural, ethnic, and religious group, the results show ethnocentric behaviours. A total of 68% of respondents do not adjust their behaviour towards members of a minority culture or

religion, and 73% of respondents do not adjust their behaviour towards members of the majority culture or religion. The responses are consistent for statements related to both minority and majority members.

Table 2. Intercultural sensitivity—attitudes and behaviours.

Attitudes and Behaviours:	No (%)	Yes (%)
1. <i>The customs of minority cultures and religions should be respected by all.</i>	16.5	83.5
2. <i>Inadequate knowledge of the minority language is often the cause of misunderstandings in communication between the minority and the majority.</i>	16.5	83.5
3. <i>I am aware of the existence of cultural and religious differences in my surroundings.</i>	8.5	91.5
4. <i>In encounters with members of a minority culture and religion, I adjust my behaviour to adapt to them as much as possible.</i>	68	32
5. <i>In encounters with members of the majority culture and religion, I adjust my behaviour to adapt to them as much as possible.</i>	73	27
6. <i>I am capable of viewing problems from the perspective of members of a minority culture and religion.</i>	27.8	72.2
7. <i>I am capable of viewing problems from the perspective of members of the majority culture and religion.</i>	24.1	75.9
8. <i>I believe that I do not belong to any culture or religion.</i>	96.1	3.9

One possible explanation for such behaviour is the need to preserve one's own identity, both personal and collective. A strong national identity is not open to change. Considering the statement related to religious and cultural identity, the results show that 96% of the respondents have a clear awareness of their own religious and cultural identity, i.e., they disagree with the idea that they lack it. Therefore, we can talk about a strong identification with one's own culture and religion, which may indicate an ethnocentric perception of identity, a static and closed identity that is not open to changes when encountering members of other cultures or religions. Such an identity characterises “mostly monocultural individuals who primarily experience life from the perspective of one dominant culture and are unable to perceive differences based on this monocultural perspective. On the other hand, individuals with a broad world view and understanding are generally capable of comprehending and even accepting different cultural perspectives and viewpoints” (Piršl 2007, p. 282). The historical experiences of Croatia and neighbouring countries have shaped traditional ethno-religious or ethno-confessional affiliations that, despite processes of modernisation, continue to influence the awareness of identity among ethnic, cultural, and religious communities in Croatia (Nikodem and Zrinščak 2019, pp. 447–48) and broader Southeastern Europe. In addition, there is the already observed lack of intercultural experiences among religious education teachers, which is crucial for the development of intercultural sensitivity and the cultivation of an open, dynamic identity, as well as a broader adoption of a multicultural perspective on society.

3.2. Differences in Intercultural Sensitivity in Relation to Intercultural Experiences

The *t*-test analysis showed that teachers with intercultural experiences ($M = 4.39$) significantly differ ($p = 0.002$, $t = -3.083$) in awareness of the existence of religious and cultural differences in their surroundings compared to teachers without such experiences ($M = 4.19$). No statistical significance was established in other variables (Table 3). Clearly, the experience of diversity influences the perception of diversity as well as the need for accommodating or adjusting to others and those who are different. The importance of intercultural experiences is also highlighted by a study conducted among teachers in Turkey, which demonstrated higher intercultural sensitivity among teachers with interna-

tional experiences compared to those without, as well as among foreign language teachers compared to teachers of other subjects (Gedik Bal 2023, pp. 11–12).

Table 3. Differences in intercultural sensitivity and intercultural experiences.

Attitudes and Behaviours:	Intercultural Experiences	M	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
1. The customs of minority cultures and religions should be respected by all.	No	4.15	0.847	0.460	0.646
	Yes	4.12	0.830		
2. Inadequate knowledge of minority language is often the cause of misunderstandings in communication between minority and majority.	No	3.41	0.964	0.273	0.785
	Yes	3.39	1.086		
3. Adjustment of behaviour when encountering a member of a minority culture and religion	No	2.82	1.098	−1.960	0.051
	Yes	3.02	1.106		
4. Awareness of the existence of cultural and religious differences in the environment	No	4.19	0.680	−3.083	0.002
	Yes	4.39	0.703		
5. Adjustment of behaviour when encountering a member of a majority culture and religion	No	2.77	1.079	−0.063	0.950
	Yes	2.78	1.123		
6. Ability to view problems from the perspective of members of majority culture and religion	No	3.89	0.708	−0.306	0.760
	Yes	3.91	0.806		
7. Ability to view problems from the perspective of members of minority culture and religion	No	3.80	0.779	−0.957	0.339
	Yes	3.87	0.842		
8. I do not belong to any culture or religion.	No	1.28	0.766	0.088	0.930
	Yes	1.27	0.799		

3.3. Differences in Intercultural Sensitivity in Relation to Gender

Following the conducted analyses, the results of Levene’s test on variance equality indicate that the assumption of homogeneity of variances between the analysed groups and variables 1–5 has not been compromised, but it has been compromised for variables related to the ability to empathise with members of majority culture and the understanding of identity. From the presented results (Table 4), it can be concluded that in statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$), men have more ethnorelative attitudes than women. In variables 1, 3, 4, and 5, men demonstrate greater intercultural sensitivity. Women have a higher awareness ($M = 3.45$) of the importance of knowing minority languages compared to men ($M = 3.21$). Although the percentage of surveyed men is significantly smaller (22.4%) compared to women, it mostly corresponds to the ratio of male religious education teachers in the total population of religious education teachers (Filipović 2017, p. 371). The greater intercultural sensitivity and openness observed among male religious education teachers can be attributed to gender inequalities, i.e., greater opportunities for men in terms of mobility, travel, absence from home, and participation in public life, including encounters with diversities, which are evident in still predominantly patriarchal societies.

One of the first studies on intercultural sensitivity of teachers in Croatia was conducted in 2010 among teachers in schools in the city of Pula, located in Istria, a multicultural region of Croatia with a higher share of inhabitants of Italian, Slovenian, and various other ethnic origins. The study showed that teachers are interculturally sensitive and that there is no statistically significant difference among them based on other characteristics (Drandić 2016, pp. 846–47, 857). This can certainly be associated with a greater emphasis on intercultural education in the training of local teachers, as well as a heightened multicultural awareness and openness at the cultural and political levels in the region overall. It follows from the foregoing that regional affiliation is an essential factor capable of influencing the existence of differences in intercultural sensitivity with respect to gender and the openness of higher

education teachers to intercultural content. Religious education teachers from various parts of Croatia participated in our study. In contrast to research among teachers in Pula (Drandić 2016) and among teachers in Turkey (Gedik Bal 2023), where no differences were found based on gender, our research sample of religious education teachers does show such distinctions. These results point to a conclusion about the inadequacy of education for intercultural sensitivity at the levels of higher and lifelong education for religious education teachers.

Table 4. Differences in intercultural sensitivity and gender.

Attitudes and Behaviours:	Gender	M	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
1. The customs of minority cultures and religions should be respected by all.	male	4.28	0.821	1.994	0.047
	female	4.10	0.839		
2. Inadequate knowledge of minority language is often the cause of misunderstandings in communication between minority and majority.	male	3.21	1.160	−2.107	0.036
	female	3.45	0.975		
3. Awareness of the existence of cultural and religious differences in the environment	male	4.41	0.550	2.075	0.039
	female	4.25	0.731		
4. Adjustment of behaviour when encountering a member of a minority culture and religion	male	3.13	1.160	2.232	0.026
	female	2.85	1.082		
5. Ability to view problems from the perspective of members of minority culture and religion	male	3.99	0.786	2.285	0.023
	female	3.78	0.811		

3.4. Differences in Intercultural Sensitivity in Relation to Knowledge of the Concept of the Religious Dimension of Intercultural Education

When it comes to religious education teachers, it is crucial to examine the relationship between intercultural sensitivity and knowledge about the fundamental determinants of the concept of the religious dimension of intercultural education. The concept of the religious dimension of intercultural education was examined using nine statements that represented the determinants of this concept. Intercultural sensitivity, expressed in attitudes and behaviours towards members of other cultures and religions, was examined using the following variables: awareness of tolerance, the need to respect the right to diversity, knowledge of minority languages, awareness of a multicultural society, the ability to empathise and feel for others and those who are different, adjustment of behaviour when encountering members of a minority or majority, and the understanding of identity, specifically its religious and cultural characteristics (Piršl et al. 2016, p. 116). Religious education teachers indicated their agreement or disagreement with each determinant of the concept of the religious dimension of intercultural education. Within the specified groups, differences in intercultural sensitivity were examined, i.e., the attitudes and behaviours of religious education teachers towards other religions and cultures. Each table shows the differences between two groups of religious education teachers: those who have expressed agreement with a particular determinant of the concept and those who have expressed disagreement or showed a lack of knowledge of the concept. While attitudes and behaviours related to intercultural sensitivity were assessed using a scale of 8 statements, the results for only 5 of them are presented in the tables—specifically, in two tables of 6 each. Following the conducted analyses, the results of Levene’s test for equality of variances in the tables indicate that the assumption of homogeneity of variances between the analysed groups and the displayed variables has not been compromised. However, it has been compromised for variables related to the ability to empathise and feel for others and those who are different, as well as to the understanding of identity; therefore, they are excluded from the analysis.

The aim was to examine whether there is a difference between religious education teachers who believe that knowledge of religions and non-religious beliefs does not define the concept of the religious dimension of intercultural education and another group that

disagrees. The results show that teachers for whom knowledge of other religions and cultures is a significant determinant of the concept exhibit greater intercultural sensitivity, as they statistically significantly differ in three areas: awareness of tolerance and the need to respect the right to diversity, knowledge of minority languages, and awareness of a multicultural society (Table 5). The group that believes that knowledge and understanding of religions and non-religious beliefs determine the religious dimension of intercultural education ($M = 4.22$) statistically significantly differs ($p < 0.001$, $t = -4.184$) in awareness of tolerance and the need to respect the right to diversity from the group that does not consider it so ($M = 3.81$). The same group of religious education teachers, who more strongly advocate for the importance of knowledge as a component of the concept and recognise the significance of knowing minority languages for communication ($M = 3.44$), differs from the first group ($M = 3.22$). The difference in average ratings of awareness of a multicultural society is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$, $t = -4.339$), indicating that teachers who are aware of the importance of knowledge and understanding of other religions and non-religious worldviews have higher average ratings in evaluating the need to respect the right to diversity ($M = 4.45$) than the group of teachers who do not attach importance to knowing and understanding other religions and non-religious worldviews as determinants of the religious dimension of intercultural education ($M = 4.00$).

Table 5. Intercultural sensitivity and knowledge of religions and non-religious beliefs.

Attitudes and Behaviours:	Determinant: Knowledge of Religions and Non-Religious Beliefs	M	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
1. The customs of minority cultures and religions should be respected by all.	No	3.81	0.964	−4.184	<0.001
	Yes	4.22	0.786		
2. Inadequate knowledge of minority language is often the cause of misunderstandings in communication between minority and majority.	No	3.22	1.031	−1.804	0.036
	Yes	3.44	1.018		
3. Adjustment of behaviour when encountering a member of a minority culture and religion	No	3.12	1.126	2.008	0.045
	Yes	2.86	1.095		
4. Awareness of the existence of cultural and religious differences in the environment	No	4.00	0.866	−4.339	<0.001
	Yes	4.35	0.633		
5. Adjustment of behaviour when encountering a member of a majority culture and religion	No	2.91	1.135	0.965	0.193
	Yes	2.74	1.089		

In variable 3, average ratings are different. *T*-test results showed that there is a statistically significant difference ($p = 0.045$, $t = 2.008$) among religious education teachers in adjusting behaviour when meeting members of minorities depending on the definition of the cognitive determinant of the religious dimension of intercultural education. Religious education teachers who do not consider knowledge of other religions and non-religious worldviews as significant are more likely to adjust their behaviours when encountering members of a minority ($M = 3.12$) compared to the teachers in the other group ($M = 2.86$). There was no statistical significance achieved for the behavioural adjustment variable when encountering members of the majority ($p > 0.05$). Given that no statistical significance was assessed in all tests, we can conclude that knowledge of the cognitive dimension of the concept partially affects the positive attitude and behaviour towards members of other cultures and religions.

The *t*-test results (Table 6) demonstrate that religious education teachers who are familiar with the behavioural determinant of the concept of intercultural competence exhibit greater intercultural sensitivity in two areas: awareness of tolerance and the need

to respect the right to diversity, as well as awareness of a multicultural society. The *t*-test results showed that, at a significance level of 1% ($p < 0.001$, $t = -3.864$), teachers who are knowledgeable about the behavioural determinant of the concept of intercultural education more strongly agree that customs of minority cultures and religions should be respected by all ($M = 4.20$) compared to those without this knowledge ($M = 3.079$). The same group of teachers who demonstrated knowledge of the behavioural determinant of the concept also significantly differs from the first group in their awareness of a multicultural society ($p = 0.001$, $t = -3.224$). Teachers who are familiar with the behavioural determinant of the concept ($M = 4.33$) are more aware of the existence of religious and cultural differences in their surroundings than those without this knowledge ($M = 4.04$). Given that statistical significance was not achieved in all tests, we can conclude that knowledge of the behavioural dimension of the concept partially affects the positive attitude and behaviour towards members of other cultures and religions.

Table 6. Intercultural sensitivity and awareness of stereotypes.

Attitudes and Behaviours:	Determinant: Awareness of Stereotypes	M	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
1. The customs of minority cultures and religions should be respected by all.	No	3.79	0.992	−3.864	<0.001
	Yes	4.20	0.791		
2. Inadequate knowledge of minority language is often the cause of misunderstandings in communication between minority and majority.	No	3.22	1.091	−1.608	0.108
	Yes	3.43	1.008		
3. Adjustment of behaviour when encountering a member of a minority culture and religion	No	2.94	1.185	0.262	0.793
	Yes	2.91	1.091		
4. Awareness of the existence of cultural and religious differences in the environment	No	4.04	0.926	−3.224	0.001
	Yes	4.33	0.638		
5. Adjustment of behaviour when encountering a member of a majority culture and religion	No	2.68	1.149	−2.510	0.433
	Yes	2.79	1.090		

The *t*-test results (Table 7) showed that, at a significance level of 1% ($p < 0.001$, $t = -3.864$), religious education teachers who have knowledge of the communicative determinant of the concept agree to a greater extent that the customs of minority cultures and religions should be respected by all ($M = 4.20$) than those who do not have this knowledge ($M = 3.77$). At a significance level of 1% ($p < 0.001$, $t = -4.491$), teachers who are familiar with the communicative determinant of the concept ($M = 4.34$) are more aware of the existence of religious and cultural differences in their surroundings than those without this knowledge ($M = 3.94$). Given that statistical significance was not achieved in all tests, we can conclude that knowledge of the communicative dimension of the concept partially affects the positive attitude and behaviour towards members of other cultures and religions. Religious education teachers who are familiar with the communicative dimension have a greater awareness of tolerance and the need to respect the right to diversity, as well as a greater awareness of multicultural society than those without this knowledge.

Table 7. Intercultural sensitivity and communicative determinant.

Attitudes and Behaviours:	Determinant of the Concept: Communication	M	SD	t	p
1. <i>The customs of minority cultures and religions should be respected by all.</i>	No	3.77	0.942	−4.031	<0.001
	Yes	4.20	0.802		
2. <i>Inadequate knowledge of minority language is often the cause of misunderstandings in communication between minority and majority.</i>	No	3.19	1.061	−1.869	0.062
	Yes	3.44	1.013		
3. <i>Adjustment of behaviour when encountering a member of a minority culture and religion</i>	No	2.91	1.172	0.000	1.000
	Yes	2.91	1.094		
4. <i>Awareness of the existence of cultural and religious differences in the environment</i>	No	3.94	0.906	−4.491	<0.001
	Yes	4.34	0.637		
5. <i>Adjustment of behaviour when encountering a member of a majority culture and religion</i>	No	2.77	1.139	−0.047	0.962
	Yes	2.77	1.093		

The results of the *t*-test (Table 8) show that religious education teachers who have knowledge of the mediating determinant of the concept have more ethnorelative attitudes and behaviours towards members of other cultures and religions, which is evident in four statements related to intercultural sensitivity: awareness of tolerance and the need to respect the right to diversity, awareness of the need to know minority languages, awareness of a multicultural society, ability to empathise and feel for members of minorities. The difference between the groups follows a pattern according to which participants with knowledge of the mediating determinant of the concept record higher average scores compared to participants without that knowledge. The results of the *t*-test showed that there is a statistically significant difference among religious education teachers in awareness of tolerance and the need to respect the right to diversity ($p = 0.017$, $t = -2.389$), awareness of the need to know the language of minorities ($p = 0.028$, $t = -2.203$), awareness of multicultural society ($p < 0.001$, $t = -3.636$) and in the ability to empathise and feel for members of a minority ($p = 0.0128$, $t = -2.209$) depending on the definition of the mediating determinant of the concept of the religious dimension of intercultural education. Religious education teachers who have knowledge of the mediating determinant of the concept of the religious dimension of intercultural education ($M = 4.18$) have a greater awareness of tolerance and the need to respect the right to diversity than those who do not have that knowledge ($M = 3.94$). The second group also has higher average scores ($M = 3.45$) in regard to the awareness of the need to know minority languages compared to the first group ($M = 3.18$). Religious education teachers who have knowledge of the mediating determinant of the concept ($M = 4.34$) are more aware of the existence of cultural and religious differences in the environment than those who lack this kind of knowledge ($M = 4.04$). They also have a greater ability to view problems from the perspective of members of minority cultures and religions ($M = 3.87$) than those who are not familiar with mediation as a determinant of the concept ($M = 3.65$).

Table 8. Intercultural sensitivity and mediating determinant.

Attitudes and Behaviours:	Determinant: Non-Violent Conflict Resolution	M	SD	t	p
1. <i>The customs of minority cultures and religions should be respected by all.</i>	No	3.94	0.827	−2.389	0.017
	Yes	4.18	0.835		
2. <i>Inadequate knowledge of minority language is often the cause of misunderstandings in communication between minority and majority</i>	No	3.18	1.099	−2.203	0.028
	Yes	3.45	1.000		
3. <i>Adjustment of behaviour when encountering a member of a minority culture and religion</i>	No	2.85	1.103	−0.622	0.535
	Yes	2.93	1.106		
4. <i>Awareness of the existence of cultural and religious differences in the environment</i>	No	4.04	0.870	−3.636	<0.001
	Yes	4.34	0.641		
5. <i>Adjustment of behaviour when encountering members of a majority culture and religion</i>	No	2.82	1.088	0.438	0.662
	Yes	2.76	1.103		
6. <i>Ability to view problems from the perspective of members of minority culture and religion</i>	No	3.65	0.871	−2.209	0.028
	Yes	3.87	0.791		

The difference between the groups follows a pattern according to which respondents who recognise religious differences as a determinant of the concept record higher average scores compared to respondents who do not recognise it (Table 9). The group that believes that understanding religious differences determines the religious dimension of intercultural education ($M = 4.22$) statistically significantly differs ($p < 0.001$, $t = -4.642$) in awareness of tolerance and the need to respect the right to diversity from the group that does not consider it so ($M = 3.75$). Teachers who demonstrate knowledge of the determinant of the concept ($M = 3.45$) statistically significantly differ ($p = 0.037$, $t = -2.090$) in awareness of the need to know the language of a minority from the group that does not believe that religious differences determine the concept ($M = 3.19$). The second group ($M = 4.34$) also significantly differs ($p < 0.001$, $t = -3.718$) from the first ($M = 4.02$) in the awareness of the existence of cultural and religious differences in the environment.

Table 9. Intercultural sensitivity and knowledge of religious differences.

Attitudes and Behaviours:	Determinant: Knowledge of Religious Differences	M	SD	t	p
1. <i>The customs of minority cultures and religions should be respected by all.</i>	No	3.75	0.916	−4.642	<0.001
	Yes	4.22	0.798		
2. <i>Inadequate knowledge of minority language is often the cause of misunderstandings in communication between minority and majority.</i>	No	3.19	1.026	−2.090	0.037
	Yes	3.45	1.018		
3. <i>Adjustment of behaviour when encountering a member of a minority culture and religion</i>	No	2.98	1.118	0.558	0.577
	Yes	2.90	1.103		
4. <i>Awareness of the existence of cultural and religious differences in the environment</i>	No	4.02	0.866	−3.718	<0.001
	Yes	4.34	0.644		
5. <i>Adjustment of behaviour when encountering a member of a majority culture and religion</i>	No	2.79	1.115	0.146	0.884
	Yes	2.77	1.097		

The difference between groups follows a pattern according to which respondents who recognise the educational dimension of the concept record higher average scores compared to the respondents who did not recognise it (Table 10). Religious education teachers who believe that learning about religion contributes to positive behavioural patterns in society have more ethnorelative attitudes, are more aware of the need for tolerance and respect for diversity, have knowledge of minority languages and multicultural society, and possess empathy and sensitivity towards minority members. At a significance level of 1%, the second group (M = 4.33) differs ($t = -3.467$) in awareness of the need for tolerance and respect for diversity compared to the first group (M = 4.04). Religious education teachers who are familiar with the educational dimension of the concept (M = 3.46) statistically significantly differ ($p = 0.009, t = -2.627$) in awareness of the existence of religious and cultural differences from the first group (M = 3.13). At a significance level of 1%, the second group (M = 4.20) differs ($t = -3.866$) in awareness of multicultural society from the first group (M = 3.81). Differences between groups are statistically significant ($p = 0.003, t = -3.020$) in behaviour manifested in empathy for members of minority cultures and religions: religious education teachers who recognise learning about religion as a determinant of the concept (M = 3.88) are more empathetic towards minority members than those who do not recognise it (M = 3.58).

Table 10. Intercultural sensitivity and educational determinant.

Attitudes and Behaviours:	Determinant: Learning about Religions Contributes to Coexistence	M	SD	t	p																																										
	1. The customs of minority cultures and religions should be respected by all.	No	3.81	0.935	-3.866	<0.001																																									
Yes		4.20	0.801	2. Inadequate knowledge of minority language is often the cause of misunderstandings in communication between minority and majority.			No	3.13	1.055	-2.627	0.009	Yes	3.46	1.009	3. Adjustment of behaviour when encountering a member of a minority culture and religion	No	2.87	1.125	-0.350	0.727	Yes	2.92	1.102	4. Awareness of the existence of cultural and religious differences in the environment	No	4.04	0.898	-3.467	<0.001	Yes	4.33	0.638	5. Adjustment of behaviour when encountering a member of a majority culture and religion	No	2.67	1.118	-0.915	0.361	Yes	2.80	1.095	6. Ability to view problems from the perspective of members of minority culture and religion	No	3.58	0.871	-3.020	0.003
2. Inadequate knowledge of minority language is often the cause of misunderstandings in communication between minority and majority.	No	3.13	1.055		-2.627	0.009																																									
	Yes	3.46	1.009	3. Adjustment of behaviour when encountering a member of a minority culture and religion			No	2.87	1.125	-0.350	0.727	Yes	2.92	1.102	4. Awareness of the existence of cultural and religious differences in the environment	No	4.04	0.898	-3.467	<0.001	Yes	4.33	0.638	5. Adjustment of behaviour when encountering a member of a majority culture and religion	No	2.67	1.118	-0.915	0.361	Yes	2.80	1.095	6. Ability to view problems from the perspective of members of minority culture and religion	No	3.58	0.871	-3.020	0.003	Yes	3.88	0.788						
3. Adjustment of behaviour when encountering a member of a minority culture and religion	No	2.87	1.125		-0.350	0.727																																									
	Yes	2.92	1.102	4. Awareness of the existence of cultural and religious differences in the environment			No	4.04	0.898	-3.467	<0.001	Yes	4.33	0.638	5. Adjustment of behaviour when encountering a member of a majority culture and religion	No	2.67	1.118	-0.915	0.361	Yes	2.80	1.095	6. Ability to view problems from the perspective of members of minority culture and religion	No	3.58	0.871	-3.020	0.003	Yes	3.88	0.788															
4. Awareness of the existence of cultural and religious differences in the environment	No	4.04	0.898		-3.467	<0.001																																									
	Yes	4.33	0.638	5. Adjustment of behaviour when encountering a member of a majority culture and religion			No	2.67	1.118	-0.915	0.361	Yes	2.80	1.095	6. Ability to view problems from the perspective of members of minority culture and religion	No	3.58	0.871	-3.020	0.003	Yes	3.88	0.788																								
5. Adjustment of behaviour when encountering a member of a majority culture and religion	No	2.67	1.118		-0.915	0.361																																									
	Yes	2.80	1.095	6. Ability to view problems from the perspective of members of minority culture and religion			No	3.58	0.871	-3.020	0.003	Yes	3.88	0.788																																	
6. Ability to view problems from the perspective of members of minority culture and religion	No	3.58	0.871		-3.020	0.003																																									
	Yes	3.88	0.788																																												

Statistically significant differences (Table 11) within groups were identified at a 1% significance level in awareness of the need for tolerance and respect for diversity ($t = -4.189$), awareness of the importance of knowing minority languages ($t = -2.589$), and awareness of the existence of cultural and religious differences ($t = -4.351$). Religious education teachers who have knowledge of the cultural dimension of religion as a determinant of the concept of the religious dimension of intercultural education (M = 4.21) have a greater awareness of tolerance and respect for the customs of minority cultures and religions than teachers who have not acquired this knowledge (M = 3.76). The second group (M = 3.45) also differs from the first (M = 3.11) in awareness of the importance of knowing minority languages as a key factor in successful communication. The same group (M = 4.34) is also more aware of the multicultural nature of the environment than the first group (M = 3.96).

Table 11. Intercultural sensitivity and knowledge of religion as an integral part of culture.

Attitudes and Behaviours:	Determinant: Religion is an Integral Part of Culture	M	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
1. The customs of minority cultures and religions should be respected by all.	No	3.76	0.978	−4.189	<0.001
	Yes	4.21	0.792		
2. Inadequate knowledge of minority language is often the cause of misunderstandings in communication between minority and majority.	No	3.11	1.076	−2.589	0.010
	Yes	3.45	1.006		
3. Adjustment of behaviour when encountering a member of a minority culture and religion	No	2.83	1.159	−0.680	0.497
	Yes	2.93	1.096		
4. Awareness of the existence of cultural and religious differences in the environment	No	3.96	0.933	−4.351	<0.001
	Yes	4.34	0.629		
5. Adjustment of behaviour when encountering a member of a majority culture and religion	No	2.68	1.066	−0.816	0.415
	Yes	2.79	1.105		

Statistically significant differences were observed within three variables between religious education teachers who associate religious language with the concept of the religious dimension of intercultural education and those who do not (Table 12). At a 1% significance level ($t = -4.029$), teachers who consider knowledge of religious language a significant determinant of the concept of the religious dimension of intercultural education ($M = 4.21$) have a greater awareness of tolerance and the need to respect the right to diversity ($M = 3.81$). The mentioned group of teachers ($M = 3.47$), which demonstrates knowledge of religious language as a determinant of the concept, differs significantly ($p = 0.002$, $t = -3.115$) in awareness of the importance of knowing minority languages compared to teachers who lack this kind of knowledge ($M = 3.09$). A statistically significant difference was also recorded in the fourth variable ($p < 0.001$, $t = -3.883$). The awareness of the existence of cultural and religious differences is greater ($M = 4.34$) among teachers who demonstrate knowledge of religious language as a determinant of the concept than among teachers who have not demonstrated this kind of knowledge ($M = 4.02$).

Table 12. Intercultural sensitivity and knowledge of religious language.

Attitudes and Behaviours:	Determinant: Religious Language	M	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
1. The customs of minority cultures and religions should be respected by all.	No	3.81	0.901	−4.029	<0.001
	Yes	4.21	0.806		
2. Inadequate knowledge of minority language is often the cause of misunderstandings in communication between minority and majority.	No	3.09	1.025	−3.115	0.002
	Yes	3.47	1.011		
3. Adjustment of behaviour when encountering a member of a minority culture and religion	No	2.78	1.182	−1.248	0.213
	Yes	2.94	1.086		
4. Awareness of the existence of cultural and religious differences in the environment	No	4.02	0.881	−3.883	<0.001
	Yes	4.34	0.635		
5. Adjustment of behaviour when encountering a member of a majority culture and religion	No	2.64	1.147	−1.258	0.209
	Yes	2.80	1.087		
	Yes	2.82	1.091		

Differences in intercultural sensitivity are presented within the group of religious education teachers who have knowledge of critical self-reflection as a determinant of the concept of the religious dimension of intercultural education and those teachers who lack this knowledge. The difference in average ratings of awareness of the need for tolerance and respect for the right to diversity is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$, $t = -4.180$), indicating that the second group (teachers who believe that critical self-reflection determines the religious dimension of intercultural education) has higher average ratings in evaluating the attitude towards the need to respect the right to diversity ($M = 4.21$) compared to the first group of teachers who do not consider critical self-reflection to determine the religious dimension of intercultural education ($M = 3.80$). A statistically significant difference ($p = 0.042$, $t = -2.041$) was also observed in the second variable, where teachers in the second group ($M = 3.45$) exhibited a greater awareness of the need to know minority languages compared to the first group ($M = 3.20$). The same pattern follows the difference ($p < 0.001$, $t = -3.703$) between the groups, indicating that teachers in the second group ($M = 4.34$) have a greater awareness of the multicultural nature of the environment than the first group ($M = 4.03$).

In conclusion, we can observe that the results on intercultural sensitivity, regarding the acquired knowledge of the concept of the religious dimension of intercultural education (Tables 5–13), indicate ethnorelative attitudes among religious education teachers who recognise these knowledge elements as determinants of the concept of the religious dimension of intercultural education. Conversely, there is evidence of ethnocentrism among those who do not recognise them. Similar results are found in research on intercultural sensitivity concerning the understanding of the concept of intercultural education among students in Pula. Students who expressed that the communicative aspect, critical self-reflection, and non-violent conflict resolution define the concept of intercultural education demonstrated more ethnorelative attitudes than those students who did not share this view. Ethnorelative attitudes point to people who are able to adapt their communication and behaviour in a different cultural context and observe the world from the perspective of others (Piršl et al. 2016, pp. 117–18). Teachers have demonstrated that knowledge of the determinants of the concept influences ethnorelative attitudes, such as awareness of tolerance, the need to respect the right to diversity, awareness of the importance of knowing minority languages, awareness of a multicultural society, and the ability to empathise with minority members. In those variables of intercultural sensitivity that indicated ethnocentrism (adjustment of behaviour when encountering members of the minority/majority and the understanding of identity, specifically its religious and cultural characteristics), according to descriptive indicators (Table 2), the assumption of homogeneity of variances is disrupted; therefore, we cannot speak of differences.

Previous research conducted in Croatia has predominantly shown a strong to moderate level of intercultural sensitivity among teachers (Drandić 2016; Filipović 2017; Blažević et al. 2023). A study conducted among Croatian primary school teachers in 2022 showed the complementarity of personal and professional beliefs on differences between students in relation to ethnicity, language, religious beliefs, and cultural differences (Knežević 2023, pp. 16–18). In addition to intercultural sensitivity, the construct of that study included knowledge of intercultural education. The relationship between knowledge and intercultural sensitivity was also examined in a study among primary school teachers in southern Croatia (in the counties of Split-Dalmatia and Dubrovnik-Neretva), confirming a strong connection between some aspects of intercultural sensitivity (interaction enjoyment, as well as interaction engagement and interaction confidence) and multicultural teaching knowledge (Blažević et al. 2023, pp. 194–95).

Although the results of our research indicate knowledge as a significant factor influencing ethnorelative attitudes and behaviours of religious education teachers, the question arises whether this level of knowledge is sufficient for the development of intercultural sensitivity in teaching or if it only manifests at the behavioural–affective level of teachers. This question arises from a comparison with earlier research. The results of a study among

religious education teachers in Croatia regarding their attitude towards differences, including cultural and regional as well as confessional and religious differences, conducted in 2015, indicate that teachers, according to their self-assessment, have a high level of general respect and appreciation for differences. However, they show lower values when it comes to the implementation and adequate didactic transposition of the general appreciation of differences. Such a deviation coincides with unsatisfactory theological knowledge and insufficient support from schools and religious communities in promoting intercultural and interreligious awareness and understanding. According to the 2015 research, factors such as institutional support, length of teaching experience, general maturity, and the personal spirituality of religious education teachers positively support the culture of recognition (Filipović and Rihtar 2017, pp. 378–79).

Table 13. Intercultural sensitivity and knowledge of critical self-reflection.

Attitudes and Behaviours:	Determinant:	M	SD	t	p
	Critical Self-Reflection				
1. The customs of minority cultures and religions should be respected by all.	No	3.80	0.879	−4.180	<0.001
	Yes	4.21	0.810		
2. Inadequate knowledge of minority language is often the cause of misunderstandings in communication between minority and majority.	No	3.20	1.004	−2.041	0.042
	Yes	3.45	1.023		
3. Adjustment of behaviour when encountering a member of a minority culture and religion	No	2.84	1.177	−0.705	0.481
	Yes	2.93	1.089		
4. Awareness of the existence of cultural and religious differences in the environment	No	4.03	0.860	−3.703	<0.001
	Yes	4.34	0.642		
5. Adjustment of behaviour when encountering a member of a majority culture and religion	No	2.58	1.122	−1.806	0.072

4. Conclusions

Increasing awareness of multiculturalism in European societies highlights the necessity to investigate the appropriate skills and competences required for European citizens to coexist. Education is one of the key drivers of this task. Teachers play a crucial role in creating a cohesive society. Taking into account the social trends in Europe and the fact that empirical research on the intercultural sensitivity of teachers in Croatia is still in its early stages, we deemed it important to explore the situation among religious education teachers and demonstrate their readiness to face the challenges of multiculturalism. Pedagogical research has so far mostly explored the requirements of intercultural education and teacher training curricula, and examined the attitudes of students towards interculturality. Only recently have studies begun to explore the intercultural competence of teachers and other educational professionals. Our research focused on religious education teachers, examining their attitudes and behaviours towards members of other cultures and religions in relation to their acquired knowledge concerning the key determinants of the concept of the religious dimension within intercultural education, acquired intercultural experiences, and the gender of the participants. The results indicate that there are differences in all three variables.

At the level of attitudes, religious education teachers have demonstrated a high degree of ethno-relativism. However, to some extent, a closed identity is still present, along with strong identification and a view of society from their own culture and religion, as well as a lack of ability to adjust behaviour when encountering members of other groups. This reflects an ethnocentric understanding of identity as a static and closed religious and cultural identity that is resistant to changes when interacting with members of other cultures or religions. Descriptive indicators suggest the need for the development of

empathy, as well as the ability to adapt and cultivate an open identity capable of embracing dialogue with others. There is also a need to increase opportunities for gaining intercultural experiences. The descriptive indicator of partial openness and closedness among religious education teachers is confirmed by differences in intercultural sensitivity.

In terms of opinions, teachers recognise the importance of interaction and encounters. Personal contact with members of other cultures and religions is considered the most crucial factor in the development of intercultural sensitivity for religious education teachers. However, more than half of the surveyed teachers had no personal intercultural experience. Therefore, differences in intercultural sensitivity in relation to intercultural experiences were observed only in the awareness of the existence of religious and cultural differences in the environment, which is more prevalent among religious education teachers with intercultural experiences. Differences in intercultural sensitivity in relation to gender were also partially identified. In this study, men exhibit more ethnorelative attitudes than women.

A statistically significant difference in attitudes and behaviours related to intercultural sensitivity among religious education teachers was partially determined in relation to the knowledge about the fundamental determinants of the concept of the religious dimension of intercultural education. Teachers who have knowledge of the key determinants of the concept demonstrate more ethnorelative attitudes, show a developed awareness of tolerance and the need to respect the right to diversity, understand the importance of knowing minority languages and have an awareness of a multicultural society. Additionally, they also possess the ability to empathise with minority members. These results suggest that knowledge in the field of the religious dimension of intercultural education is an important factor in the development of attitudes and behaviour towards members of other cultures and religions, especially for dimensions that include communication skills, ability to adapt behaviour, tolerance and respect for the identity of others.

The results indicate coherence between theoretical knowledge and attitudes and behaviours, i.e., the application of knowledge in practice when it comes to encounters with minority members. Religious education teachers who have knowledge of the concept of the religious dimension differ from those who do not in their attitudes and behaviours towards members of other cultures and religions. Based on the observed differences, we conclude that it is necessary to increase intercultural content aimed at developing intercultural sensitivity in the field of initial and professional teacher education. We also believe that efforts should be made to create equal opportunities in intercultural education concerning gender and to increase opportunities for intercultural exchanges and encounters with members of other cultures and religions so that teachers can develop a more open identity.

Since the sample is not representative of all surveyed religious groups of teachers in Croatia, the results are not generally applicable. Therefore, future research, with an increased sample size, has the potential to achieve statistically more significant and relevant results. The practical application of these findings can be realised in the higher education of religious education teachers, as well as in professional development programmes that provide opportunities for encounters among members of different religious and denominational groups. This will undoubtedly lead to increased intercultural experiences, the strengthening of intercultural sensitivity, further development among religious education teachers, and greater collaboration in practice. Future research could enhance the achieved results by conducting qualitative research, organising focus groups with religious education teachers of different faiths and religions, and identifying obstacles beyond the factors examined in this study that religious education teachers undoubtedly encounter in education and working with students.

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