EXAMINING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCIES AMONG BOSNIAN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Senad Bećirović
International Burch University, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Belma Delić
International Burch University, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Amna Brdarević-Čeljo
International Burch University, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Abstract

A period of globalisation and the interconnectedness of people across the world has increased the demand for greater intercultural competences among young people in particular. Being interculturally competent entails modifying behaviour in culturally appropriate ways when establishing contact with diverse cultures. The development of this competence is a long and never-ending process that which is influenced by a variety of factors, some of the most important being school policies, surroundings, individual work, personal needs and curiosity. The purpose of the current study was to investigate the impact of grade level, grade point average (GPA) and gender on intercultural competences by distributing the questionnaire developed by Portalla and Chen (2010) to 211 Bosnian high school students. The results showed that the students' grade levels and GPAs did not have a statistically significant influence on their intercultural competences, whereas gender only had a significant impact on their intercultural competences on the Interactant Respect subscale. Due to the fact that the students should be taught intercultural competence at school, their competence is expected to improve in each study grade; thus, based on the students' GPAs, this study may help teachers to identify a gap in their instruction and to modify their teaching content so that it contributes to the development of the students' intercultural competence, as well as to the promotion of the importance thereof.

Keywords: Intercultural competence; Grade level; Grade point average (GPA); Gender.

1 Introduction

At present, we are witnessing a world that is becoming a huge melting pot. People are moving from their homelands to other countries for different economic, social and political reasons, which results in substantial cultural variations occurring in diverse contemporary societies. Thus, intercultural communication has become part of people's daily experiences and social interactions with foreigners, whether as a

result of tourist development, intercultural and international business, giving and asking for directions, or making new friendships.

Consequently, globalisation and international exchanges are leading to an increase in multilinguistic and multicultural experiences that are based on intercultural competencies, and being competent with regard to communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds has increased in importance in line with the prevailing trend towards globalisation and internationalisation (Fritz, Möllenberg, & Chen 2002). Becoming a successful and experienced intercultural communicator requires the comprehensive knowledge and possession of intercultural competencies (Sen Gupta 2002; Sercu 2002; Sercu et al. 2005; Byram, & Feng 2005; Byram 2008; Atay et al. 2009; Penbek, Yurdakul, & Cerit 2009; Zheng 2014), as well as a profound understanding of different beliefs, values, attitudes and customs, and the acquisition of intercultural knowledge and different skills (Byram 1997: 10).

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a culturally and ethnically diverse social context in which different ethnic and cultural groups, religions, and languages intersect and interact on a daily basis. This immense internal diversity has increased gradually in the last few decades due to the influx of immigrants, foreign tourists, entrepreneurs and international students studying at different international universities that have been established in the country (Bećirović, Brdarević-Čeljo, & Sinanović 2017; Bećirović, & Brdarević-Čeljo 2018). Improvements in education and the curricula used in different educational levels might contribute to the country's social cohesion and development (Kasumagić 2008; Bećirović, Brdarević-Čeljo, & Zavrl 2019). Thus, developing and learning intercultural skills, competencies and attitudes might contribute to developing greater tolerance and acceptance of people with different cultural backgrounds (Bećirović 2012; Bećirović, & Brdarević-Čeljo 2018). Intercultural education should be fostered via the educational system, and intercultural values should be promoted directly; the current paper constitutes a step forward in that direction. Its importance is further heightened by the fact that this field has not been researched extensively in the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Thus, this paper aims to investigate the impact of grade level, GPA and gender on Bosnian high school students' intercultural communication competences, particularly with regard to the effectiveness of intercultural communication. The identification of the relationship among these factors and IC is beneficial, and the results can be employed as guidelines in the process of curriculum adjustment and improvement.

2 Literature Review

Intercultural competence is sometimes defined as a process of personal maturation in which a learner advances from lower to higher levels of intercultural awareness (Bennett 1986, 1998) and has the ability to function effectively across cultures (Whaley & Davis 2007). Hammer, Bennett and Wiseman (2003: 422) were of the

opinion that intercultural competence is the ability to act and think in interculturally suitable ways, while Portalla and Chen (2010: 21) maintained that intercultural communication competence may be conceptualised as "an individual's ability to achieve their communication goal while effectively and appropriately utilizing communication behaviours to negotiate between the different identities present within a culturally diverse environment".

Different models of intercultural competence have been adopted, and they all incorporate intercultural knowledge and skills, awareness and an open-minded attitude (Bennet 1993; Byram 1997; Chen & Starosta 1996, 1998; Deardorff 2006; Gudykunst & Kim 1984). In the model developed by Chen and Starosta (1996, 1998), intercultural competence incorporates three different dimensions, namely cognitive, affective and behavioural aspects. The cognitive dimension is represented by intercultural awareness, which incorporates two components, namely self-awareness and cultural awareness. Intercultural awareness is related to the ability to understand differences between cultures and cultural conventions, and thus think and behave accordingly. Intercultural sensitivity represents the affective dimension of intercultural competence and includes different components, such as self-esteem, self-monitoring, open-mindedness, empathy, interaction, involvement and non-judgement. It denotes a person's real desire to comprehend, appreciate and accept the existing differences among cultures (Chen & Starosta 1998: 231). Furthermore, the behavioural dimension is represented by intercultural adroitness or effectiveness, which is referred to as "the ability to get the job done and attain communication goals in intercultural interactions" (Chen & Starosta 1996: 367).

Corresponding to communications skills, intercultural adroitness comprises verbal and nonverbal behaviours, such as message skills, appropriate self-disclosure, behavioural flexibility, interaction management and social skills, which "enable us to be effective in interactions" (Chen & Starosta 1996: 367). As intercultural effectiveness and intercultural competence were often used interchangeably by scholars, which resulted in conceptual ambiguity (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman 2003; Portalla & Chen 2010), and as there seems to be a lack of research on the concept of intercultural effectiveness (Portalla & Chen 2010: 21), a separate instrument measuring intercultural effectiveness, namely the Intercultural Effectiveness Scale comprising six factors, namely behavioural flexibility, interaction relaxation, interactant respect, message skills, identity maintenance, and interaction management, was developed by Portalla and Chen (2010); this instrument has been used as the theoretical basis for this research study.

Intercultural communication competence is believed to be linked directly to foreign-language teaching. Thus, Byram (1997) maintained that foreign-language courses should not only teach students the language. Language is a mechanism whereby culture is represented and conveyed, but intercultural competence involves much more than simply knowing the language, as it entails the ability to use the language appropriately in different situations with different interlocutors (Brown 1994; East 2012). Thus, language learners must be aware of

cross-cultural differences, as well as of suitable ways to address people from different cultural backgrounds, and they ought to learn how to express gratitude, make requests, give orders, and show agreement or disagreement with culturally different interlocutors (Krasner 1999). When students learn about cultures from an intercultural perspective, they become able to understand why speakers from different cultures react differently to similar circumstances (Kramch 2003: 32). On the other hand, a lack of inclusion of cultural variations in language learning might lead to frustration, which leads to failure in the language-learning classroom (Holliday1994; Li 1998).

Research has pointed towards among teachers and students regarding the importance of culture, intercultural competence and awareness in foreign-language teaching. Furthermore, Bada (2000), Sercu (2002), Atay (2005), and Sarıçoban and Çalışkan (2011) demonstrated that teachers and students are extremely interested in learning about cultures in the process of language learning, and have positive attitudes towards cultural differences. Moreover, a study conducted in China that surveyed 273 students and 52 academic staff revealed that a substantial number of participants (96.2 %) enjoyed communicating with people from different cultures, and 87.7 % of the participants agreed that cultures should be part of any language course and ought to be integrated into language teaching (Zheng 2014).

A study in Japan showed that 90.8% of 109 students believed that English was the most important international language and that they needed to enhance their knowledge of the English language if they wanted to communicate interculturally (Morita 2013). With regard to teachers' attitudes towards teaching foreign cultures, a study that surveyed 503 EFL teachers indicated that language teachers seemed to be aware of the role that culture plays in foreign-language education, although it is not often integrated into their teaching in order to develop students' intercultural competence (Kahraman 2016).

The notion of intercultural competence has attracted extensive research interest, and various factors have proven to have had an impact on its development. For example, the factor of time spent abroad travelling, working or studying has been shown to affect a person's intercultural competence and sensitivity (Burdette-Williamson 1997; Czerwionka, Artamonova, & Barbosa 2014; Hismanoglu 2011; Jung 2002; Straffon 2003; Williams 2005). Accordingly, Czerwionka, Artamonova and Barbosa (2014) tracked the development of Spanish students' intercultural competence during a six-week study-abroad programme, and indicated that the students' overall intercultural competencies, as well as their intercultural knowledge and skills, improved significantly in that period. In addition, Jung (2002) and Hismanoglu (2011) showed that studying abroad had a significant impact on the development of intercultural competencies, while Yamaguchi and Wiseman (2003) emphasised that students who were studying abroad needed to undergo a process of acculturation in order to can work efficiently and, eventually, to succeed. Similarly, Jones, Neubrander and Huff (2012) researched how a cultural immersion experience affected the cultural attitudes of nursing students; the results indicated that the students' attitudes towards culturally different others

improved, but not to a significant degree. The next factor that has been researched as an independent factor with and impact on intercultural competence and intercultural sensitivity is gender (Altan 2018; Banos 2006; Demircioğlu & Çakir 2016; Holm, Nokelainen, & Tirri 2009; Matveev 2002; Mellizo 2017; Morales 2017; Patricia 2005). Despite some differences between male and female students' and teachers' intercultural competence and sensitivity, gender has proved to be an insignificant factor in a number of studies (Altan 2018; Matveev 2002; Morales 2017; Patricia 2005). However, in some other studies, female participants exhibited a significantly higher level of intercultural competence or sensitivity (Banos 2006; Demircioğlu & Çakir 2016; Holm, Nokelainen, & Tirri 2009). In this regard, Holm, Nokelainen and Tirri (2009) indicated that female students had a more positive attitude towards culturally different others than did male students - the difference in their levels of intercultural sensitivity was significant, which is traditionally related to the idea that female students are more empathic than are male students.

Such discrepancies in the results point to the fact that further research on the impact of gender on intercultural competence is needed. Moreover, students' academic achievements, as well as their grade levels, have been highlighted as factors that have and impact on intercultural development and sensitivity. In this regard, Demircioğlu and Çakir (2016) showed that students in the eleventh- and twelfth-grade levels of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) and non-IBDP students did not differ significantly in terms of the level of intercultural sensitivity. On the other hand, Holm et al. (2009) showed that higher achieving students had greater awareness of intercultural conceptions, and the differences between average and above-average students proved to be significant in four different dimensions on the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale Questionnaire (ICSSQ).

Research in intercultural education and interculturality in the Balkan region is somewhat scarce, and is frequently focused on the analysis of elements of interculturality in curricula and textbooks. Bećirović and Podojak (2018) showed that intercultural values were promoted systematically in the English-language textbooks used in Bosnian schools. Nonetheless, the textbooks used in English-language classes differ from other textbooks with regard to interculturality, as they are published by international publishers. This was confirmed by Husremović, Powell, Šišić and Dolić (2007), who analysed the history, geography, native language and religious education textbooks used in the educational context of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and detected not only the presence of elements that could enhance intercultural competence, but also elements that could have a negative impact on intercultural skills. Moreover, Bećirović and Brdarević-Čeljo (2018) analysed the development of cross-cultural sensitivity among 219 students at three different universities in the Bosnian educational milieu using the Inventory of Cross-Cultural Sensitivity. The findings indicated that university status, academic achievement and nationality had a significant impact and that gender and grade level had an insignificant impact on the development of cross-cultural sensitivity.

In addition, Bećirović, Brdarević-Čeljo and Zavrl (2019) conducted research on intercultural effectiveness in Bosnia and Herzegovina among 184 students at different universities in Bosnia and Herzegovina and showed that the participants' fields of study, GPAs, genders and nationalities had a significant impact on their levels of intercultural effectiveness, whereas the effects of grade level and university status proved to be insignificant. As the participants in the aforementioned studies were university students, the novelty of the current study is that it investigates the levels of intercultural competence and the impact of different factors on the intercultural competence of high school students in the same social context. Thus, the following hypotheses were tested:

H1. The grade level will have a significant influence on the combined variables of intercultural competences,
H2. There will be a significant difference in the combined variables of intercultural competences based on the GPAs.
H3. Gender will have a significant effect on the combined variables of intercultural competences.

3 Methodology

3.1 Participants

The research sample consisted of 211 high school students from three different schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina. There were 49 first grade students (23.2%), 67 second grade students (31.7%), 57 third grade students (27%) and 38 fourth grade students (18%); of these, 76 students were female (36%) and 135 students were male (64%), and their ages ranged from 14 to 18 years ($M = 16,2$, $SD = .93$).
Based on the students' achievements, the sample was divided into five groups of participants, namely Group 1 with GPAs of 1-1.4, Group 2 with GPAs of 1.5-2.4, Group 3 with GPAs of 2.5-3.4, Group 4 with GPAs of 3.5-4.4 and Group 5 with GPAs of 4.5-5.0. A full description of the research sample is provided in Table 1. With regard to the students' success at school, their overall GPAs and their GPAs obtained in the English-language course are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Descriptive analysis of the participants*

		Number	Percentage
Grade	First	49	23.22%
	Second	67	31.75%
	Third	57	27.01%
	Fourth	38	18 %
GPA group	1-1.4	-	-
	1.5 -2.4	5	2.36 %
	2.5-3.4	56	26.56%

	3.5-4.4	88	41.7%
	4.5-5.0	61	29.38%
Gender	Male	135	63.98%
	Female	76	36.01%

3.2 Instruments and procedures

The questionnaire constructed by Portalla and Chen (2010) was used to collect data pertaining to the learners' intercultural competences. The questionnaire consisted of 20 statements and a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. It incorporated the following subscales:

1. Behavioural flexibility (example: I often act like a very different person when interacting with people from different cultures) ($\alpha = 0.53$),
2. Interaction relaxation (example: I find it is easy to get along with people from different cultures) ($\alpha = 0.78$),
3. Interactant respect (example: I always show respect for the opinions of my culturally different counterparts during our interactions) ($\alpha = 0.58$),
4. Message skills (example: I often miss parts of what is going on when interacting with people from different cultures) ($\alpha = 0.69$), and
5. Interaction management (example: I am able to express my ideas clearly when interacting with people from different cultures) ($\alpha = 0.49$).

The questionnaire was distributed to students at three different high schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The participants were selected non-randomly; in other words, convenience sampling was used. The participants were surveyed during classes in the classroom, and the supervisors observed and monitored them. The participants were asked to read each statement in the survey carefully, to be honest and to respond to each statement.

4 Results

4.1 Data analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 23.0 was used to analyse the data. A descriptive analysis, including the means and standard deviations, was conducted. An ANOVA and a one-way MANOVA were used to test the relationships among the variables.

4.2 Preliminary results

The participants achieved the highest score on the Interactant Respect subscale (*M* = 3.74, *SD* = .80), which indicates that they felt deep respect when interacting with culturally different others. Furthermore, the students expressed a high level of interaction relaxation (*M* = 3.49, *SD* = .92) when meeting culturally diverse people. However, they obtained the lowest score on the behavioural flexibility subscale (*M* = 2.78, *SD* = .74), which might indicate that the students considered their cultural identity to be quite important. The results showed the highest correlations between interaction management and message skills *r* (210) = .59, *p* < .001 and between behavioural flexibility and message skills *r* (210) = .57, *p* < .001. With regard to the correlations with the full scale, the results showed significant, moderate to high correlations with all the subscales. The descriptive results, including Cronbach's Alpha reliability scores, are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 *The descriptive results*

Variable	N	M	SD	A	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Behavioural flexibility	211	2.78	.74	.53	1	-.26**	-.23**	.57**	.32**	.27**
2. Interaction relaxation	211	3.49	.92	.78	-.25**	1	.47**	-.05	.24**	.26**
3. Interactant respect	211	3.74	.80	.58	-.23**	.47**	1	-.07	.20**	.24**
4. Message skills	211	3.05	.83	.69	.57**	-.05	-.07	1	.54**	.59**
5. Identity maintenance	211	3.15	.70	.66	.32**	.24**	.21**	.54**	1	.46**
6. Interaction management	211	3.33	.76	.49	.27**	.26**	.24**	.59**	.46**	1
TOTAL	211	3.27	.432	.73	.37**	.59**	.56**	.56**	.70**	.66**

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

4.3 Results

The one-way MANOVA results did not indicate that grade level had a significant influence on the combined variables of intercultural competences: Wilks' λ = .946, *F* (18, 571) = 0.634, *p* =. 874, η^2 = .018. Similarly, the univariate ANOVA results showed that the grade level did not have a significant effect on behavioural flexibility *F*(3, 207) = .615, *p* = .606, η^2 = .009, interaction relaxation *F*(3, 207) = .506, *p* = .679, η^2 = .007, interactant respect *F*(3, 207) = 1.85, *p* = .906, η^2 = .003, message skills *F*(3, 207) = 1.36, *p* = .256, η^2 = .019, identity maintenance *F*(3, 207) = 0.283, *p* = .838, η^2 = .004, or interaction management *F*(3, 207) = 1.53, *p* = .210, η^2 = .022. The adjusted and unadjusted group means for intercultural competences based on the grade levels are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3 *Adjusted and unadjusted group means for intercultural competences based on the grade level*

	Behavioural flexibility		Interaction relaxation		Interactant respect		Message skills		Identity maintenance		Interaction management	
	Adj. M	Unadj. M	Adj. M	Unadj. M	Adj. M	Una. M	Adj. M	Unadj. M	Adj. M	Unadj. M	Adj. M	Unadj. M
First grade	2.87	2.87	3.58	3.58	3.67	3.67	3.21	3.21	3.03	3.03	3.48	3.47
Second grade	2.81	2.81	3.54	3.54	3.75	3.75	3.10	3.09	3.10	3.09	3.39	3.38
Third grade	2.71	2.71	3.42	3.42	3.79	3.79	2.94	2.94	2.94	2.93	3.25	3.25
Fourth grade	2.69	2.68	3.38	3.38	3.73	3.72	2.93	2.92	3.05	3.05	3.16	3.16

The one-way MANOVA pointed to an insignificant influence of GPA on the combined variables of intercultural competences: Wilks' $\lambda = .868$, $F (24, 702) = 1.22$, $p =. 219$, $\eta^2 = .035$. Furthermore, the univariate ANOVA showed that the participants' GPAs had an insignificant effect on behavioural flexibility $F(4, 206) = .986$, $p = .417$, $\eta^2 = .019$, interaction relaxation $F(4, 206) = 1.52$, $p = .198$, $\eta^2 = .029$, interactant respect $F(4, 206) = 0.362$, $p = .836$, $\eta^2 = .007$, message skills $F(4, 206) = 0.987$, $p = .416$, $\eta^2 = .019$, identity maintenance $F(4, 206) = 1.524$, $p = .197$, $\eta^2 = .029$, and interaction management $F(4, 206) = 0.961$, $p = .430$, $\eta^2 = .018$. The adjusted and unadjusted group means for intercultural competences based on the GPA are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4 *Adjusted and unadjusted group means for intercultural competences based on the GPA*

	Behavioural flexibility		Interaction relaxation		Interactant respect		Message skills		Identity maintenance		Inter. mana.	
	Adj. M	Unadj. M	Adj. M	Unadj. M	Adj. M	Unadj. M	Adj. M	Unadj. M	Adj. M	Unadj. M	Adj. M	Unadj. M
1.0-1.4	1.75	1.75	3.00	3.00	3.67	3.68	2.66	2.66	2.00	2.00	3.50	3.50
1.5-2.4	2.94	2.93	3.25	3.25	3.58	3.58	2.91	2.91	2.87	2.87	2.87	2.88
2.5-3.4	2.68	2.68	3.29	3.28	3.64	3.63	3.12	3.12	2.86	2.86	3.22	3.22
3.5-4.4	2.77	2.78	3.50	3.50	3.79	3.78	2.93	2.93	3.00	3.00	3.34	3.33
4.5-5.0	2.87	2.87	3.68	3.68	3.77	3.77	3.18	3.19	3.25	3.25	3.44	3.44

Even though the grade levels and GPAs did not have a significant effect on competencies, gender had a significant impact on the combined dependent variables of intercultural competencies: Wilks' $\lambda = .931$, $F (6, 204) = 2.52$, $p =. 023$, $\eta^2 = .069$. While the results showed that gender had a significant effect on the combined dependent variables of intercultural competencies, the only significant effect was on the interactant respect $F(1, 209) = 6.02$, $p = .015$, $\eta^2 = .028$ subscale, while gender had an insignificant effect on all the other subscales, namely behavioural flexibility $F(1, 209) = .034$, $p = .853$, $\eta^2 = .000$, interaction relaxation $F(1, 209) = .185$, $p = .667$, $\eta^2 = .001$, message skills $F(1, 209) = 3.75$, $p = .054$,

$\eta^2 =$ .018, identity maintenance $F(1, 209) = 2.08, p = .151, \eta^2 = .010$, and interaction management $F(1, 209) = 3.22, p = .074, \eta^2 = .015$. The adjusted and unadjusted group means for intercultural competences based on GPA are displayed in Table 5.

Table 5 *Adjusted and unadjusted group means for intercultural competences based on gender*

	Behavioural flexibility		Interaction relaxation		Interactant respect		Message skills		Identity maintenance		Interaction management	
	Adj. M	Unadj. M	Adj. M	Unadj. M	Adj. M	Unadj. M	Adj. M	Unadj. M	Adj. M	Unadj. M	Adj. M	Unadj. M
Female	2.78	2.78	3.45	3.45	3.88	3.88	3.17	3.17	2.95	3.13	3.43	3.43
Male	2.76	2.76	3.51	3.51	3.61	3.61	2.95	2.95	3.13	2.94	3.24	3.24

5 Discussion and Conclusion

The focus of the present study was on analysing the influence of grade level, GPA and gender on Bosnian high school students' intercultural competences. The first hypothesis stating that there was a significant influence of grade level on the combined variables of intercultural competences was refuted, as the students' grade levels did not have a significant impact on their intercultural competences. These results are in line with Demircioğlu and Çakir's (2016) and Spinthourakis, Karatzia-Stavlioti and Roussakis' (2009) studies, as they also indicated that the difference in intercultural competence was insignificant. Moreover, the findings are aligned with those of Bećirović and Brdarević-Čeljo (2018) in the Bosnian social context to some extent, as these authors also showed that their participants' grade levels did not contribute significantly to the development of cross-cultural sensitivity. In both studies, the first grade students displayed higher levels of intercultural and cross-cultural competence than did the students in higher grade levels in some instances. Many possible reasons can be suggested in support of the insignificant influence of grade level on students' IC, but we assume that the main reason is that insufficient attention has been paid to its development at the high school level. Moreover, since intercultural competencies decrease as students' grade levels increase, it might be the case that cliques and crowds have a specific influence on students' intercultural sensitivity and on their overall intercultural competencies during adolescence. Furthermore, if students do not achieve an increase in intercultural sensitivity as they progress through high school, this might indicate that schools do not seem to be sufficiently effective in the development of students' intercultural competences; the teachers, who should possess skills and expertise in intercultural competence, should help students to develop their own intercultural competence. Teachers ought to teach these skills explicitly to allow the students' intercultural competencies to improve in each grade. As Zhang (2017) showed, this does not seem to be the case, as half of the teachers in the study that

he conducted in China felt that they were not sufficiently confident to take the first step when meeting a new foreign friend.

The second hypothesis stating that there would be a significant difference in the combined variables of intercultural competences based on the participants' GPAs was also refuted, as the one-way MANOVA showed an insignificant influence of GPA on the development of the students' intercultural competences. These results contradict the findings of Bećirović and Brdarević-Čeljo (2018), as well as those of Bećirović, Brdarević-Čeljo and Zavrl (2019), because the impact of GPA on cross-cultural sensitivity and intercultural effectiveness, respectively, was significant in both studies conducted in the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Moreover, the current study's findings were not aligned with Mittelmeier, Rienties, Tempelaar and Whitelock's (2017) findings, as these authors showed that high-performing students desired stronger relationships with members of different cultural groups, whereas mid-performing and low-performing students were more likely to cause cross-cultural tensions. On the other hand, a study that was conducted in Finland revealed different results. It investigated the differences in intercultural sensitivity between academically average and above-average students. The results indicated that the higher achieving group of students had greater intercultural sensitivity (Holm, Nokelainen, & Tirri 2009). As curricula and textbooks, as well as other relevant teaching materials, play a crucial role in the development of interculturality, the current research findings point to the fact that the existing curricula in high schools seem to lack content that could contribute to increasing the students' intercultural competencies. Thus, care should be taken to include such materials and content in the curricula, and to adapt the teaching materials accordingly.

The last hypothesis, which stated that gender would have a significant effect on the combined variables of intercultural competences, was. These results are in line with Banos' (2006), Bećirović, Brdarević-Čeljo and Zavrl's (2019), Demircioğlu and Çakir's (2016) and Holm, Nokelainen and Tirri's (2009) findings, as gender proved to be a significant factor in students' intercultural competences in these studies. For example, Holm, Nokelainen and Tirri (2009) pointed to the fact that females' levels of intercultural sensitivity were significantly higher than were those of males, which was attributed to females being more emphatic than males and having a more positive stance towards culturally different others. The reason for the significant influence of gender on the interactant respect subscale is because women generally pay more attention to the interlocutor's feelings and feedback when communicating. Women care more about pursuing a style of interaction based on mutual support and agreement (Holmes 2013; Rizvić & Bećirović 2017). On the other hand, our research findings are not aligned with the findings presented in Altan (2018), Bećirović and Brdarević-Čeljo (2018), Matveev (2002), Morales (2017), Patricia (2005), and so forth, as gender did not prove to be a significant factor in those studies. The study conducted in North Georgia-SAD showed that gender did not predict students' cultural intelligence and intercultural competences

(Cui 2016). Similarly, Bećirović Brdarević-Čeljo (2018) showed that even though gender did not have a significant impact on cross-cultural sensitivity, female participants had a higher mean score.

Possible factors that contribute to an increase in intercultural competences might be constant contact with foreign cultures via the media, films, documentaries, students' independent work, motivation and curiosity. The ability to interact and communicate within a diverse environment is becoming a necessary skill. Developing intercultural competences is a long and never-ending process; thus, an effective educational policy is a crucial factor in the development of such competencies.

References

Altan, M. Z. (2018) Intercultural sensitivity. A study of pre-service English language teachers. *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, *46*, 1404-1634.

Atay, D. (2005). Reflections on the cultural dimension of language teaching. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, *5*(3&4), 222-237.

Atay, D., Kurt, G., Camlibel, Z., Ersin, P., & Kaslioglu, O. (2009). The role of intercultural competence in foreign language teaching. *Inonu University Journal of the Faculty of Education, 10*(3), 123-135.

Bada, E. (2000). Culture in ELT. *Cukurova University Journal of Social Sciences*, *6*, 100-110.

Banos, R. V. (2006). Intercultural sensitivity of teenagers: A study of educational necessities in Catalonia. *Intercultural Communication Studies, 15*(2), 16-22

Bećirović, S. (2012). The role of intercultural education in fostering cross-cultural understanding. *Epiphany, 5*(1), 138-156. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.21533/epiphany.v5i1.49

Bećirović, S., & Brdarević-Čeljo, A. (2018). Exploring and assessing cross-cultural sensitivity in Bosnian tertiary education: Is there a real promise of harmonious coexistence? *European Journal of Contemporary Education, 7*(2)*, 244-256. doi: https://doi.org/10.13187/ejced.2018.2.244

Bećirović, S., Brdarević-Čeljo, A., & Sinanović, J. (2017). The use of metacognitive reading strategies among students at International Burch University: A case study. *European Journal of Contemporary Education, 6*(4) 645-655. doi: https://doi.org/10.13187/ejced.2017.4.645

Bećirović, S., & Podojak, S. (2018). Intercultural development of Bosnian University students through foreign language learning. *European Researcher. Series A*, *9*(2), 68-77. doi: https://doi.org/10.13187/er.2018.2.68

Bećirović, S., Brdarević-Čeljo, A., & Zavrl, I. (2019). Research into intercultural effectiveness in a multicultural educational milieu in Bosnia and Herzegovina. *Economic Research-Ekonomska istraživanja, 32*(1), 1336-1351.

Bennett, M. J. (1986). A developmental approach to training for intercultural sensitivity. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *10*(2), 179-196.

Bennett, M. J. (1993). Towards ethnorelativism: A developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. In M.R. Paige (Ed.), *Education for the Intercultural Experience* (pp. 21–71). Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press.

Bennett, M. J. (1998). Overcoming the golden rule: Sympathy and empathy. In M.J. Bennett (Ed.), *Basic Concepts of Intercultural Communications. Selected Readings* (pp. 191–213). Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press.

Brislin, R. W, Landis, D., & Brandt, M. E. (1983). Conceptualizations of intercultural behaviour and training. In D. Landis, & R. W. Brislin (Eds.), *Handbook of Intercultural Training: Vol. 1 Issues in Theory and Design* (pp. 1-35). Elmsford, NY: Pergamon.

Brown H D (1994). *Principles of language learning and teaching*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall Regents.

Burdette-Williamson, P. (1997). The relationship of intercultural sensitivity to teachers' cross-cultural experiences and other factors. *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences Education, 15*(1), 36–48.

Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence.* London: Multilingual Matters.

Byram, M., & Feng, A. (2005). Teaching and researching intercultural competence. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of Second Language Acquisition Research* (pp. 911-930). Mahwah, N. J.: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Byram, M. (2008). *From foreign language education to education for intercultural citizenship: essays and reflections.* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Chen, G. M., & Starosta, W. J. (1996). Intercultural communication competence: a synthesis. In B. R. Burleson (Ed.), *Communication Yearbook, 19*, 353-384. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/23808985.1996.11678935.

Chen, G. M., & Starosta, W. J. (1998). *Foundation of intercultural communication*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Clark, A., & Trafford, J. (1995). Boys into modern languages: An investigation of the discrepancy in attitudes and performance between boys and girls in modern languages. *Gender and Education, 7*(3), 315-326. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/09540259550039022

Cui, Qi. (2016). A Study of factors influencing students' intercultural competence. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, *7*(3), 433-439. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/jltr.0703.01

Czerwionka, L., Artamonova, T., & Barbosa, M. (2014). Intercultural competence during short-term study abroad: A focus on knowledge. In B. Dupuy & L. Waugh (Eds.), *Selected Proceedings of the Fourth International Conference on the Development and Assessment of Intercultural Competence, 3*, 46-77.

Deardorff, D. K. (2006). Identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 10*(3), 241-266. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1028315306287002

Demircioğlu, S., & Çakir, C. (2016). Intercultural competence of students in international baccalaureate world schools in Turkey and abroad. *International Education Studies*, *9*(9), 1. doi: https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v9n9p1

East, M. (2012). Addressing the intercultural via task-based language teaching: Possibility or problem? *Language and Intercultural Communication*, *12*(1), 56-73. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2011.626861

Fritz, W., Möllenberg, A., & Chen, G. M. (2002). Measuring intercultural sensitivity in different cultural contexts. *Intercultural Communication Studies, 11*, 165-176.

Gudykunst, W. B., & Kim, Y. Y. (1984). *Methods for intercultural communication research. International and intercultural communication annual, Volume 7.* Sage Publications. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1177/017084068500600319

Hammer, M. R., Bennett, M. J., & Wiseman, R. (2003). Measuring intercultural sensitivity: The intercultural development inventory. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *27*(4), 421-443. doi: https://doi.org/10.1016/s0147-1767(03)00032-4

Hismanoglu, M. (2011). An investigation of ELT students' intercultural communicative competence in relation to linguistic proficiency, overseas experience and formal instruction. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *35*(6), 805-817.

Holliday, A. (1994). *Appropriate methodology and social context.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Holm, K., Nokelainen, P., & Tirri, K. (2009). Relationship of gender and academic achievement to Finnish students' intercultural sensitivity. *High Ability Studies, 20*(2), 187–200.

Holmes, J. (2013). *An introduction to sociolinguistics*. Harlow: Pearson Education.

Husremović, Dž., Powell, S., Šišić, A., Dolić, A. (2007). *Obrazovanje u Bosni i Hercegovini: Čemu učimo djecu?* (*Analysis of the Content of Course Books of the National Group of Subjects*). Sarajevo: Open Society Fund Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Jones, A.M., Neubrander, J., & Huff, M. (2012). A cultural immersion experience for nursing students. *Global Partners in Education Journal*, *2*(1), 1-11.

Jung, J. Y. (2002). Issues in acquisitional pragmatics. *Working Papers in TESOL & Applied Linguistics, 2*(3), 1-34.

Kahraman, A. (2016). Teachers' and learners' attitudes towards culture and culture learning in a Turkish context. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, *12*(2), 01-12.

Kasumagić, L. (2008). Engaging youth in community development: Post-war healing and recovery in Bosnia and Herzegovina. *International Review of Education*, *54* (3-4), 375–392.

Kim, R., & Goldstein, S. B. (2005). Intercultural attitudes predict favorable study abroad expectations of U.S. college students. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 9*(3), 265-278. doi: https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315305277684

Kobayashi, Y. (2007). Japanese working women and English study abroad. *World Englishes*, *26*(1), 62-71. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-971X.2007.00488.x

Kouritzin, S. (2000). Immigrant mothers redefine Access to ESL classes: Contradiction and ambivalence. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, *21*(1), 14-32. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01434630008666391

Kramsch, C. (2003). Teaching along the cultural faultline. In D. L. Lange & R. M. Paige (Eds.), *Culture as the Core: Perspectives on Culture in Second Language* (pp. 19-36). Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.

Krasner, I. (1999). The role of culture in language teaching. *Dialog on Language Instruction, 13*(1-2), 79-88.

Li, D. (1998). It's always more difficult than you plan and imagine: Teachers' perceived difficulties in introducing the communicative approach in South Korea. *TESOL Quarterly 32*(4), 677–703. doi: https://doi.org/10.2307/3588000

Matveev, A. V. (2002). *The Perception of intercultural communication competence by American and Russian managers with experience on multicultural teams* (Unpublished Ph. D. thesis Ohio University), Athens, Ohio. Retrieved April 6, 2019, from http://rave.ohiolink.edu/etdc/view?acc_num=ohiou1014904559

Mellizo, J. M. (2017). Exploring intercultural sensitivity in early adolescence: A mixed methods study. *Intercultural Education, 28*(6), 571-590. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/14675986.2017.1392488

Mittelmeier, J., Rienties B., Tempelaar, D., & Whitelock, D. (2017). Overcoming cross-cultural group work tensions: mixed student perspectives on the role of social relationships. *Higher Education, 75*(1)*,* 1-18. doi: https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-017-0131-3

Morales, A. (2017). Intercultural sensitivity, gender, and nationality of third culture kids attending an international high school. *Journal of International Education Research, 13*(1), 35-44.

Morita, L. (2013). Japanese university students' attitudes towards globalisation, intercultural contexts and English. *World Journal of English Language, 3*(4), 31-41. doi: https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v3n4p31

Patricia, M. Y. (2005). *Asian American adolescents and the stress of acculturation: Differences in gender and generational levels* (Unpublished Ph. D. thesis, Northern Arizona University). Flagstaff, Arizona. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/17475759.2013.816867

Penbek, D., Yurdakul, D., & Cerit, A. G. (2009). *Intercultural communication competence: A study about the intercultural sensitivity of university students based on their education and international experiences*. Paper presented at the European and Mediterranean Conference on Information Systems, in Izmir, Turkey, July 13 to 14, 2009.

Portalla, T., & Chen, G.M. (2010). The development and validation of the intercultural effectiveness scale. *Intercultural Communication Studies*, *19*(3), 21-37.

Rizvić, E., & Bećirović, S. (2017). Willingness to communicate in English as a foreign language in Bosnian-Herzegovinian EFL context. *European Researcher. Series A*, *8*(3), 224-235. doi: https://doi.org/10.13187/er.2017.3.224

Sarıçoban, A., & Çalışkan, G. (2011). The influence of target culture on language learners. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, 7*(1), 7-17.

Sen Gupta, A. (2002). Changing the focus: A discussion of the dynamics of the intercultural experience. In G. Alred, M. Byram, & M. Fleming (Eds.), *Intercultural Experience and Education* (pp. 155-178). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Sercu, L. (2002). Implementing intercultural foreign language education: Belgian, Danish and British teachers' professional self-concepts and teaching practices compared. *Evaluation & Research in Education, 16*(3) 150-165. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09500790208667015

Sercu, L., Bandura, E., Castro, P., Davcheva, L., Laskaridou, C., Lundgren, U., & Ryan, P. (2005). *Foreign language teachers and intercultural competence: An international investigation.* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Spinthourakis, J. A., Karatzia-Stavlioti, E., & Roussakis, Y. (2009). Pre-service teacher intercultural sensitivity assessment as a basis for addressing multiculturalism. *Intercultural Education*, *20*(3), 267-276. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14675980903138624

Straffon, D. A. (2003). Assessing the intercultural sensitivity of high school students attending an international school. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 27*(4) 487–501.

Sung, H., & Padilla, A. (1998). Student motivation, parental attitudes, and involvement in the learning of Asian languages in elementary and secondary schools. *The Modern Language Journal, 82*(2), 205-216. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1998.tb01193.x

Tannen, D. (1994). *Gender and discourse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Warriner, D. (2007). It's just the nature of the beast: Reimagining the literacies of schooling in adult ESL education. *Linguistics and Education, 18*(3-4), 279-295. doi: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2007.07.004

Whaley, A. L., & Davis, K. E. (2007). Cultural competence and evidence-based practice in mental health services: A complementary perspective. *American Psychologist*, *62*(6), 563-574.

Williams, T. R. (2005). Exploring the impact of study abroad on students' intercultural communication skills: Adaptability and sensitivity. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, *9*(4), 356–371. doi: https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315305277681

Yamaguchi, Y., & Wiseman, R. L. (2003). Locus of control, self-construals, intercultural communication effectiveness, and the psychological health of international students in the United States. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research, 32*(3/4), 227-245.

Zhang, Y. (2017). A Study on ESL teachers' intercultural communication competence. *English Language Teaching, 10*(11), 229-235.

Zheng, J. (2014). Assessing intercultural communicative competence in college English teaching. *International Journal of English Language Teaching, 1*(2), 73-77. doi: https://doi.org/10.5430/ijelt.v1n2p73