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Source / Izvornik: **Ekonomski vjesnik : Review of Contemporary Entrepreneurship, Business, and Economic Issues, 2016, 29, 433 - 451**

Journal article, Published version
Rad u časopisu, Objavljena verzija rada (izdavačev PDF)

Permanent link / Trajna poveznica: https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:145:760057

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Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2024-03-28**

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UDK: 316.7: 37.01
Preliminary communication

Received: May 20, 2016
Accepted for publishing: October 5, 2016

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to explore the influence of education and additional factors influencing students' awareness of intercultural differences. For the purposes of this research assessment was carried out with regard to their role in promoting cultural awareness and facing cross-cultural challenges posed by unfamiliar cross-cultural contexts. Cultural education is presumed to be a key factor for achieving a significant increase of cultural sensitivity and cultural awareness in order to ensure successful cross-cultural communication and increase mobility of students/working professionals. For this study, it was assumed that the cultural awareness of students increases due to the courses they take and their overall study experience. A special questionnaire was developed for the purposes of this research, and the obtained results were statistically analyzed with the help of descriptive statistics, the non-parametric chi-square test, and the Mann-Whitney test. The research has shown that intercultural competence has a statistically significant positive effect on the readiness of students to participate in study and work programs abroad. Thus, it is mandatory that foreign language competence as well as intercultural competence be a priority of the curriculum if we are to increase the number of highly educated experts who will be capable to compete successfully as students or professionals in all fields and all cultural areas. If we recognize that globalization has made the world a global village, we all need the intercultural competence to successfully live in it.

Keywords: Globalization, intercultural competence, cross-cultural communication, intercultural education

1. Introduction

Over the past 50 years, globalization has affected various aspects of business transactions. Today's global and competitive environment requires diverse business skills for survival in the ever-changing marketplace. Borders are being erased and business partners and buyers can be found in almost every corner of the world. The knowledge of a foreign language has never been so important. Not only is it desirable to speak at least one of the widely spoken world languages, but it is also becoming necessary to start learning languages that until recently were not usual in language schools. An example is the Chinese language (or, more precisely Mandarin Chinese), which is spoken by almost 1.1 billion people, 982 million being native speakers[1] (approximately 16% of the world

population, according to the Nations Online Project). With the rapid development of the Chinese economy and growing presence of Chinese economic entities in the global market, the information that an increasing number of business people have started to learn one of the Chinese dialects, mostly Mandarin, does not come as a surprise. This global trend can also be noticed in Croatia. For example, the Confucius Institute at the University of Zagreb was surprised by the overwhelming interest shown for their free Chinese language course. However, more than just knowledge of a foreign language is required for efficient cooperation in the international environment. In addition to learning a foreign language, one should also learn about the culture of the particular community where this language is spoken. Namely, what is considered to be acceptable behavior in one culture is not necessarily acceptable in another, and may even be deemed as offensive and damaging to potential cooperation. When doing business abroad, preparations for potential business cooperation should also include learning about the culture of your potential business partners, and not just the language of communication.

Communicating across cultures can be exciting and rewarding, but it can also create confusion and misunderstanding, as was discovered by Paul Wolfowitz, the President of the World Bank at the time of this mishap. If he had given more thought to the area he was visiting, he would certainly have been wearing a new pair of socks on that particular day. Namely, during his two-day visit to Turkey, which also included a meeting with Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the Prime Minister of Turkey, Wolfowitz visited a mosque in the western part of Turkey. When the moment came for Mr. Wolfowitz to take off his shoes before entering the mosque, which is customary according to Islamic culture, his toes peeked out of his socks, revealing two holes. The news was published by all relevant world media, and Paul Wolfowitz, until then known for his expensive suits, became a legend in the negative sense.

The above mentioned misunderstanding highlights the need for increased cross-cultural awareness to enable successful communication in our private and professional lives. Effective cross-cultural communication is crucial for all those who are journeying across cultures, for the vacationing traveler, the candidate of a work or study program abroad, and especially for the business professionals working abroad or for multinationals at home, for whom communication is an essential tool that could make or break their international business dealings. Thus, the need for cross-cultural competence is obvious, but how and where one can attain it is still elusive.

On the whole, it is evident that cultural knowledge is a prerequisite for complete language proficiency. The question is how to achieve this level of language and cultural competence? A frequent misconception lies in taking for granted that proficiency in English as the lingua franca will open every door towards international academic and business success. However, the frequency of cross-cultural *faux pas* makes it evident that in order to avoid common pitfalls caused by cultural differences we need to raise our cultural awareness and develop cultural competence. First, one should have a good knowledge of one's own culture, in order to learn about people in other cultures. Only by raising our awareness of how our own culture affects us can we begin to understand the similarities and differences of a foreign culture. Ridding ourselves of misinformation and stereotypes about people in different cultures, and becoming aware of that which we have in common can be used as a starting point in meeting the challenges of communicating across cultures.

Because the study programs at the Faculty of Economics in Osijek offer a number of courses whose content could help in developing the students' intercultural competence, for this study, it was assumed that their cultural awareness would increase due to these courses and their overall study experience. The questionnaire, developed for the purposes of this research, was aimed at eliciting information to determine the factors influencing cultural awareness among senior students and whether intercultural competence has a positive effect on the readiness of students to participate in study and work programs abroad. If we aim to increase the number of highly educated people who will be able to compete successfully as students or professionals in all fields and all cultural areas it is mandatory that we ensure our curriculum is meeting the challenges in teaching foreign language competence as well as intercultural competence.

Due to the current economic situation in Croatia, many people, particularly the young, are thinking about going to live and work abroad. Consequently, certain questions are raised. Above all, are they aware of the challenges they might face in a foreign country, even if they speak a foreign language? Furthermore, do they think that knowledge of English or another

major language is all they need and to what extent does the foreign language they speak affect their decision about the country they intend to move to?

2. Literature review

The first definition of culture was provided by Edward Burnett Tylor, the founder of cultural anthropology, in his book *Primitive Culture* (1924: 1) where he defined culture as "a complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as member of society". In addition to defining culture, authors have given numerous classifications as the following selection will illustrate.

Bratanić (1993: 18) suggests that culture in the broadest sense comprises two basic components: a) anthropological or social culture (beliefs, traditions, way of life, values etc.) and b) historically defined culture (consisting of various phenomena from the fields of history, geography, art etc.). Further divisions have been made by authors like Brooks, who differentiates between "culture with a capital C", which includes formal culture (literature, arts, institutions, history) and "culture with a small c" – practical, "way-of-life" culture (as cited in Čačija, 2004: 198).

Frank summarizes culture within a 3P model – perspectives (what members of a culture think, feel and value), practices (how members communicate and interact with one another) and products (technology, music, art, food, literature, etc.; the things members of a group create, share, and transmit to the next generation) (2013: 3).

Edgar Schein defines culture as "a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and integral integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems" (2004: 17). He distinguishes four categories of culture: macrocultures (nations, ethnic and religious groups, occupations that exists globally), organizational cultures (private, public, nonprofit, government organizations), subcultures (occupational groups within organizations), and microcultures (microsystems within or outside organizations) (2010: 2).

All the above definitions and classifications suggest that different groups of people establish different cultures, depending on what people belonging to a group have in common. For example, organizations also have their own culture. According to Fry, Stoner and Hattwick, "the business culture is an unwritten set of beliefs and values about what is proper, right and appropriate in the organization. These beliefs and values are well known and accepted by the members of the business" (2001: 126). Schein enables us to grasp more precisely what organizational culture is with his three levels of culture: artifacts (visible and perceptible organizational structures and processes), espoused beliefs and values (may appear through surveys) and basic underlying assumptions (unconscious taken-for-granted beliefs and values: these are not visible) (2004: 25-37). Failing to understand an organization's culture can lead to unnecessary and unwanted misunderstandings which can only be avoided by increasing our awareness of its existence and making an effort to achieve a greater depth of understanding the culture.

The reality of today's global organizations is that organizational culture must recognize cultural diversity and there must be awareness of the fact that social norms create differences, values and attitudes about similar circumstances that may vary from country to country (Grigoruță, Corodeanu, 2005: 1).

One of the most significant models that have had an impact on the systematic approach in research on the influence of a society's culture and cultural differences on the forming of organizational culture is Hofstede's model of cultural dimensions. Hofstede defines culture as "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others" (2011: 3). According to Hofstede, culture influences an individual's "mental programming" which he explains as the way people think, feel and act while undergoing the process of socialization during which we adopt values, beliefs and norms of behavior which begin in the family and continue during our schooling, our interactions in various social groups, at the workplace and in the wider community in which an individual lives (2001: 428).

Because of the rapidly accelerating globalization, we are constantly being made aware that the world is a global village in which a multitude of diversity is brought together. As the world is getting "smaller", cross-cultural interactions increase in range and intensity. On the one hand we recognize the similarities which bring a diversity of cultures together. Similarly, Camilleri sees communication as an exchange of shared knowledge and she claims that "it

is facilitated by the extent to which we have similar meanings for the terms we use and the behavioural norms we share. This, in turn depends on both knowledge of language and knowledge of culture, or better still cultural awareness"[2] (2002: 9).

On the other hand, there are still major differences that set us apart. Although this diversity does make the world a more interesting place, it also compels us to navigate more carefully the ins and outs of global communication with its challenges and obstacles caused by cross-cultural differences.

Integrating intercultural competence and cultural pluralism as essential parts of the curriculum will ensure intercultural education. Similar views are expressed by Fantini, whose research efforts contribute important insights to the field of intercultural education regarding international and intercultural programs, especially as concerned with the identification, development, assessment, and impact of intercultural competencies on the lives of all those involved (2007: 6).

The emphasis on research is also highlighted by Mark Hungerford Salisbury in his study *The effect of study abroad on intercultural competence among undergraduate college students*, which emphasizes that "study abroad participation improves intercultural competence – an educational outcome critical in a globalized 21st century economy" and "suggests that the relationship between study abroad and intercultural competence is one of selection and accentuation, holding important implications for postsecondary policy makers, higher education institutions, and college impact scholars" (2011: 1-2). Salisbury highlights the impact of globalization on the internationalization of education and concludes:

> College students graduate into an economic, technological, and socio-cultural environment that is globally intertwined and interdependent; As postsecondary education continues to diversify and grow in the face of an increasingly complex and interculturally-dependent postgraduate reality, it is critical for educational researchers to expand on these substantive and methodological findings to broaden understanding of the potentially important educational experiences that will prepare all students to succeed in a twenty-first century globally interconnected world. (2011: 99-100)

According to the above mentioned studies, intercultural education and intercultural exchanges are significant factors in preparing the education and training programs to meet the challenges of living and working in cross-cultural environments. According to Cunningsworth, "a study of language solely as an abstract system would not equip learners to use it in the real world", (1995: 86). For complete language proficiency, language and culture must be treated as a unity, with one being essential to the full understanding of the other (Holme, 2003: 18). According to research published in 2012 by the Economist Intelligence Group, "in over 70% of the time when international business ventures fail, they fail due to cultural misunderstandings".[3] Therefore, in order to communicate successfully across cultures, professionals are expected to be aware that culture impacts on every attempt to send and receive messages. It is imperative that they develop intercultural competence to achieve effective communication across cultures. This cultural awareness connects the learner's culture and the target culture, but this approach has its limitations since it leaves the foreign language learners to "their own devices to integrate that knowledge with assumptions, beliefs, and mindsets already obtaining in their society" (Thanasoulas, 2001: 4). In order to overcome these cultural challenges foreign language learners must acquire knowledge about the target language and then reflect on their own culture in relation to other cultures (Skopinskaja, 2003: 40).

The growing need for intercultural education has been also recognized by the Council of Europe, as can be seen in its White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue: "Living together as equals in dignity" (2008). It identifies several key areas where action is required to improve intercultural dialogue and enhances the three core principles of the Council of Europe - human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Intercultural education was one of these areas. Many authors have explored different aspects of intercultural competence and intercultural education. Barrett et al. suggest that intercultural competence can be developed through different types of education and these are: informal education (what is learnt in one's social environment), non-formal education (any planned programme of education designed to improve a range of skills and competences outside the formal educational setting, and throughout lifelong learning) and formal education (the structured education and training system, from primary school and on to higher education (2014: 27).

Piršl analyses how intercultural competence and cultural intelligence affect efficient intercultural in-

teraction, i.e. intercultural communication and she observes that there is a relatively small number of studies on intercultural competence and cultural intelligence and that the insufficiently systemized approach in this field prevents us from understanding the phenomena why some individuals are more successful than others in culturally different situations (2011: 1). She also points out that "development of intercultural competence and communication is a long lasting and lifelong process in which educational institutions play the most important role" (2011: 57). As part of her research, Piršl conducted a survey to explore the students' degree of familiarity with intercultural education as well as their attitudes about desirable intercultural competencies of teachers who work in culturally diverse classrooms. The conclusion based on the obtained results is similar to that the present study – although students have heard about the term interculturalism (primarily through the media), they do not possess wider knowledge of the subject. This lack of a deeper understanding can be explained by the absence of a more consistent policy that would lead to implementation of courses on interculturalism and similar content at Croatian universities.

Byram, Gribkova and Starkey explored the intercultural dimension in language teaching and found that language instruction with an intercultural dimension helps learners to acquire both linguistic and intercultural competence. The authors also emphasize the role of a language teacher in developing skills, attitudes and awareness of values as well as knowledge of a particular culture or country (2002: 9). In addition to the teacher, another important factor in language learning are textbooks, as can be seen in the investigation conducted by Vidović. Vidović explored how interculturalism is taught in English language textbooks with a particular emphasis on preventing learners to draw premature conclusions about a culture solely based on the perspective of their own culture (2010: 1). Aurer and Grobenski went one step further and explored the extent to which intercultural competences are developed with first-year university students. They used the ISI scale (the Intercultural Sensitivity Index), developed by Olson and Kroeger as a measurement instrument and investigated how intercultural competence of respondents correlates with their willingness to interact with foreign students and willingness to study abroad (2014).

Studying abroad certainly contributes to development of intercultural competences, however, Koskinen and Tossavainen (as cited in Aurer and Grobenski, 2014: 4), stated that students need intercultural tutoring and mentoring during their stay abroad, thus emphasizing the necessary role of education in improving intercultural competence. Peko, Mlinarević and Jindra explored the presence of intercultural content in some of the courses at the Faculty of Teacher Education in Osijek. Their two case studies showed that interculturalism is covered theoretically rather than practically and that more effort should be invested in teaching students how to solve potential intercultural problems when they arise (2013: 151).

Kragulj and Jukić investigated the presence of intercultural content in classes, attitude of respondents toward minority cultures, importance of knowledge and application of foreign languages, willingness of respondents to interact with students from other cultures, presence of stereotypes, etc. (2010: 175). They concluded that the entire percentage of the presence of intercultural content in higher education is still insufficient and requires reconceptualisation and revision of the curriculum content which should encourage intercultural dialogue and development of intercultural competence to a greater extent (2013: 186).

The insufficient presence of intercultural content was also confirmed by Kristina Teskera who explored intercultural competence and intercultural sensitivity of German language teachers and students and found that most of the teachers did not have previous intercultural education and the teaching was oriented toward linguistic competence (2014).

3. Research

The researchers of the present study agree with the above mentioned claims that intercultural competence leads to successful cross-cultural communication. This study takes a closer look at the attitudes of students of the Faculty of Economics in Osijek regarding language and intercultural competence. Moreover, our intention was to call attention to the importance of culture in foreign language acquisition.

The aim of this study was to establish the extent to which education can impact intercultural awareness, skills and competence. In order to determine the significance of education and other factors such as previous stays abroad, gender, prejudices, etc. in the devel-

opment of intercultural competence, assessment was carried out with regard to their role in promoting cultural awareness and facing cross-cultural challenges posed by unfamiliar cross-cultural contexts.

The aim of this study is to establish the extent to which education can impact intercultural awareness, skills and competence. In order to determine the significance of education, assessment was carried out with regard to its role in promoting cultural awareness and facing cross-cultural challenges posed by unfamiliar cross-cultural contexts. It is assumed that cross-cultural education is imperative for international literacy and cross-cultural understanding. The following research hypotheses were set:

H1 Willingness to study abroad strongly depends on the year of study and type of secondary-school education.

H2 During their studies abroad, Croatian students are more willing to socialize with foreign students to whom they feel closer in terms of language and culture.

H3 There are statistically significant differences in the willingness to socialize with foreign students who come from particular parts of the world, in adapting to life outside Croatia, and in attitudes on the necessary competencies of employees in the export sector in terms of year of study, type of secondary-school education and possible previous stay abroad.

We did not hypothesize that student gender would yield statistically significant differences. Still, gender may have an effect on student attitudes, and given that it is a usual demographic parameter, the three hypotheses were also tested in this regard.

3.1 Research Methodology

A special questionnaire was developed for the purposes of this research, consisting of two main parts. In the first part students could choose between offered answers and in the second part they answered open-ended questions. The study included first-year students of undergraduate and graduate studies at the Faculty of Economics in Osijek. These two groups were chosen in order to establish the differences in attitudes between first year students who had just started their university education and students who were in the fourth year of study. The assumption was that the overall experience of older students, together with intercultural content they were exposed to in foreign language teaching and some other courses would have an impact on their intercultural awareness, thus proving the significance of intercultural education. Respondents were also asked about their secondary education to establish whether there is a connection between their cultural awareness and the type of their secondary education. The results of the survey were statistically analyzed with the help of descriptive statistics, the non-parametric chi-square test, and the Mann-Whitney test. Statistically significant differences were defined as differences determined at the $p<0.05$ level.

3.2 Research Results and Discussion

The replies of the respondents were analyzed according to sex, year of study, secondary school education and length of stay abroad. The questions were aimed at establishing the respondents' attitudes regarding their ability and willingness to adapt to another cultural setting as well as the respondents' assessment of their own language and cultural knowledge.

Table 1 shows the demographic data for the respondents by sex, study year and secondary education. The results are shown in percentages and they show that female respondents outnumber the male respondents by 5.4%, the first-year undergraduate students dominate by 17.6% and the number of vocational school graduates is larger by 4%.

Table 1 Respondents by sex, study year and secondary education

Characteristics	Number of respondents	Percentage
Sex		
Female	78	52.7
Male	70	47.3
Study year		
First-year undergraduate study	87	58.8
First- year graduate study	61	41.2
Secondary education		
Grammar school	71	48.0
Vocational school	77	52.0

Source: Authors' research

The results of Table 2 indicate that 81.8% of the respondents have no prior experience of a longer stay abroad (longer than a month) and that 52.7% have visited five or more foreign countries as tourists.

Table 2 Respondents by the length of their stay abroad (longer than a month) and the number of countries they visited as tourists

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Longer stay abroad		
Yes	27	18.2
No	121	81.8
Number of countries visited		
1	14	9.5
2	12	8.1
3	20	13.5
4	24	16.2
5	23	15.5
More than 5	55	37.2

Source: Authors' research

According to Table 3, 112 students (75.7%) expressed the wish to study abroad for a term or two, whereas 36 (24.3%) showed no such interest.

Table 3 Respondents by sex, level of study (study year, secondary education) and expressed wish to study abroad, with chi-square test results

Characteristics	Interested in studying abroad		Chi-square test
	Yes	No	
Sex			
Female	62 (79.5%)	16 (20.5%)	$\chi^2 = 1.302$
Male	50 (71.4%)	20 (28.6%)	$p = 0.254$
Study year			
First-year undergraduate study	72 (82.8%)	15 (17.2%)	$\chi^2 = 5.753$
First-year graduate study	40 (65.6%)	21 (34.4%)	$p = 0.016$*
Secondary education			
Grammar school	56 (78.9%)	15 (21.1%)	$\chi^2 = 0.758$
Vocational s.	56 (72.7%)	21 (27.3%)	$p = 0.384$

** Statistically significant at the p<0.05 level*
Source: Authors' research

There is a higher percentage of first-year undergraduate students who expressed the wish to study abroad, which is opposite to our expectations, but at this point we cannot provide the reasons for this result, as this would require further research. According to the chi-square test, there is a significant correlation between the study year and the interest to study abroad. Although there is a somewhat higher percentage of female students and grammar school graduates who stated that they would go abroad to study for a term or two, the chi-square test results did not confirm that the dependence between these two characteristics is statistically significant.

Table 4 Descriptive statistics which answer the research question regarding the origin of students with whom respondents would spend most of their time during a short study stay abroad

They would spend most of their time with	Arithmetic mean	Median	Mod	Standard deviation
Students from Croatia	4.75	5.00	5.00	0.56
Students from ex-Yugoslavia	4.41	5.00	5.00	0.71
Students from the Near East	3.14	3.00	3.00	1.04
Students from the Far East	3.26	3.00	4.00	1.11
Students from Western Europe	4.04	4.00	4.00	0.80
Students from Central/Eastern Europe	3.95	4.00	4.00	0.84
Students from North America	4.06	4.00	4.00	0.91
Students from South America	3.86	4.00	4.00	0.95

Source: Authors' research

As shown in Table 4, the students' responses were measured by means of a five-degree scale (1 – probably never, 2 – less likely, 3 – I don't have an opinion, 4 – very likely, 5 – certainly yes). Based on the calculated arithmetic means it can be concluded that during a short study abroad, the respondents selected spending most of their time with other students from Croatia as their first choice, followed by students from ex-Yugoslavia as their second choice. The median and mod for both of these groups was 5, and standard deviations in these cases also had the lowest values. As their third choice, the respondents chose spending most of their time with students from North America and Western Europe. The arithmetic mean for the four mentioned groups exceeds 4. To a somewhat lesser extent the students selected as likely to spend their time with students from Central/Eastern Europe and South America, although their common language would probably be English. The results show that respondents are least likely to spend time with students from the Far East and the Near East.

The above mentioned results suggest that knowledge of a language would certainly influence the choice with whom students from Croatia would spend time. On the one hand, the students expressed a preference for spending time with other Croatian students and students from ex-Yugoslavia, which is expected as these two groups offer the opportunity to communicate in their mother tongue. On the other hand, they chose spending time with students from North America and Western Europe because the English language is usually the preferred choice among foreign languages learned not only in Croatia, but also worldwide, and so the language knowledge is more of a linking factor than a barrier. Furthermore, the fact that the last position is occupied by students from the Far and Near East points to the Croatian students' awareness of not only the language differences but also the cultural differences which might make communication more difficult.

Table 5 Results of testing the significance of differences in attitude between male and female students (the Mann-Whitney test)

They would spend most of their time with	Mean rank		*Z*	*p*
	Female	Male		
Students from Croatia	72.97	76.20	-0.646	0.518
Students from ex-Yugoslavia	71.04	78.36	-1.158	0.247
Students from the Near East	78.80	69.71	-1.339	0.180
Students from the Far East	75.97	72.86	-0.457	0.648
Students from Western Europe	79.28	69.17	-1.558	0.119
Students from Central/Eastern Europe	76.50	72.27	-0.648	0.517
Students from North America	80.03	68.34	-1.790	0.074
Students from South America	79.48	68.95	-1.579	0.114

Source: Authors' research

Higher mean ranks for male students were obtained in the expressed preference for spending time with students from Croatia and ex-Yugoslavia. In other expressed choices, higher mean scores were found for female students. However, according to the Mann-Whitney test, none of the differences in attitudes of male and female students were statistically significant.

Table 6 Results of testing the significance of differences in attitude between the first-year undergraduate students and the first-year graduate students (the Mann-Whitney test)

They would spend most of their time with	Mean rank		*Z*	*p*
	1st year of undergraduate study	1st year of graduate study		
Students from Croatia	74.76	74.13	-0.124	0.901
Students from ex-Yugoslavia	69.95	80.98	-1.721	0.085
Students from the Near East	69.25	81.98	-1.849	0.065
Students from the Far East	70.32	80.47	-1.467	0.142
Students from Western Europe	75.20	73.51	-0.256	0.798
Students from Central/Eastern Europe	71.45	78.85	-1.118	0.263
Students from North America	73.29	76.23	-0.444	0.657
Students from South America	72.87	76.82	-0.583	0.560

Source: Authors' research

According to the results of the Mann-Whitney test, there are no significant differences in attitude between the first-year undergraduate students and the first-year graduate students.

Table 7 Results of testing the significance of differences in attitude between grammar and vocational school students (the Mann-Whitney test)

They would spend most of their time with	Mean rank		*Z*	*p*
	High school	Vocational s.		
Students from Croatia	73.56	75.36	-0.361	0.718
Students from ex-Yugoslavia	75.72	73.38	-0.371	0.711
Students from the Near East	78.21	71.08	-1.051	0.293
Students from the Far East	78.44	70.86	-1.112	0.266
Students from Western Europe	76.56	72.60	-0.610	0.542
Students from Central/Eastern Europe	74.11	74.86	-0.116	0.908
Students from North America	75.92	73.19	-0.417	0.677
Students from South America	76.35	72.80	-0.532	0.595

Source: Authors' research

According to the results of the Mann-Whitney test, there are no significant differences in the attitude of students who graduated from grammar schools as opposed to those who graduated from vocational schools.

Table 8 Results of testing the significance of differences in attitude in view of the length of their stay abroad (the Mann-Whitney test)

They would spend most of their time with	Mean rank		*Z*	*p*
	Stayed a longer period abroad	Did not stay a longer period abroad		
Students from Croatia	78.15	73.69	-0.692	0.489
Students from ex-Yugoslavia	82.02	72.82	-1.126	0.260
Students from the Near East	78.56	73.60	-0.565	0.572
Students from the Far East	74.87	74.42	-0.051	0.959
Students from Western Europe	80.11	73.25	-0.818	0.413
Students from Central/Eastern Europe	80.00	73.27	-0.797	0.425
Students from North America	75.19	74.35	-0.099	0.921
Students from South America	78.35	73.64	-0.547	0.585

Source: Authors' research

According to the results of the Mann-Whitney test, there are no significant differences in attitude of students due to the length of their stay abroad.

Table 9 Descriptive statistics referring to the question about the possibility of adjusting to the way of life abroad

Attitude	Arithmetic mean	Median	Mod	Standard deviation
I would easily adapt to living anywhere	3.66	4.00	4.00	1.08
I would not put much effort into fitting in, that would only be a temporary stay	2.03	2.00	1.00	1.08
Adjustment would be unnecessary, all people are the same	2.38	2.00	3.00	1.21

Source: Authors' research

The students' responses were measured by means of a five-degree scale (1 – I fully disagree, 2 – I partially disagree, 3 – I neither agree nor disagree, 4 – I mostly agree, 5 – I fully agree). Based on the calculated arithmetic means, it can be concluded that the respondents range from those who are undecided to those who mostly agree that they would easily adapt to living anywhere. On the other hand, they mostly disagreed with the statement that they would not invest much effort into fitting in because their stay would be temporary. This suggests that they are aware of the importance of cultural understanding for effective cross-cultural communication, even if it refers to temporary circumstances. In addition, they partially disagreed with the statement that adjustment would not be necessary as all people are the same. Thus, they have sufficient cultural awareness to be able to recognize that although people around the world have much in common, it is realistic to expect that some adjustment would be necessary even in circumstances that resemble one's domestic environment, not to mention situations and settings decidedly different from what is familiar. Age may have influenced the results, as young people generally tend to adapt more easily. However, additional research would be required to confirm or eliminate the age factor.

Table 10 Results of testing the significance of differences in attitudes between male and female students (the Mann-Whitney test)

Attitude	Mean rank		*Z*	*p*
	Female	Male		
I would easily adapt to living anywhere	78.26	70.31	-1.179	0.238
I would not put much effort into fitting in, that would only be a temporary stay	66.66	83.24	-2.475	0.013*
Adjustment would be unnecessary, all people are the same	69.63	79.93	-1.517	0.129

** Statistically significant at the p<0.05 level*
Source: Authors' research

Higher average rankings lead to the conclusion that female students more often express the opinion that they would easily adapt to living abroad than male students, whereas male students more often than female students think that they would not invest much effort in fitting in and that adjustment is not necessary for them. According to the Mann-Whitney test, there are significant differences between female and male students in the attitude that they would not invest much effort in fitting in. Judging by their attitude towards the need for adjustment to a foreign culture, female students seem to have a higher level of intercultural sensitivity than their male counterparts.

Table 11 Results of testing the significance of differences in attitude between the first-year undergraduate students and the first-year graduate students (the Mann-Whitney test)

Attitude	Mean rank		*Z*	*p*
	first-year undergraduate study	first-year graduate study		
I would easily adapt to living anywhere	74.41	74.62	-0.031	0.976
I would not put much effort into fitting in, that would only be a temporary stay	70.30	80.49	-1.501	0.133
Adjustment would be unnecessary, all people are the same	78.47	68.84	-1.399	0.162

Source: Authors' research

According to the results of the Mann-Whitney test, there are no significant differences in attitude between the first-year undergraduate students and the first-year graduate students regarding the need to adjust to new surroundings. Still, the results for the last statement show that graduate students are slightly more aware that people living in a foreign country cannot avoid a certain degree of adjustment.

Table 12 Results of testing the significance of differences in students' attitude in view of their secondary education (the Mann-Whitney test)

Attitude	Mean rank		*Z*	*p*
	High school	Vocational school		
I would easily adapt to living anywhere	83.28	66.40	-2.504	0.012*
I would not put much effort into fitting in, that would only be a temporary stay	70.91	77.81	-1.032	0.302
Adjustment would be unnecessary, all people are the same	75.19	73.86	-0.195	0.845

** Statistically significant at the p<0.05 level*
Source: Authors' research

According to the results, the number of grammar school graduates who claim to be able to adapt easily to living anywhere is greater than that of the vocational school graduates. According to the Mann-Whitney test, this is the only statistically significant difference between the grammar school graduates and the vocational school graduates.

The discrepancy in the attitude towards the easiness of adapting is to be expected due to the fact that grammar school students in general attain a higher level of foreign language competence, which includes a better cultural understanding as well. It is important to note that the grammar school curriculum includes a greater number of hours of foreign languages than the vocational school curriculum. In addition, grammar school students often learn two or more foreign languages, particularly in the grammar schools focused on a foreign language program.

According to the results for the research question regarding the respondents' views as to their ability to adapt to living anywhere, two possible conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, the difference between grammar school students and vocational school students in this case can be simply explained with the fact that the former have a higher level of language knowledge and are therefore more confident in their ability to adapt to living in a foreign country. Secondly, a possible explanation of this difference is that the increased number of hours of foreign languages also includes more information about the culture of English-speaking countries as well as about countries of other cultural areas, thus making students more aware of the potential cultural differences between their country and other countries and making it easier for them to adapt to living in a foreign country. Furthermore, grammar schools tend to take a more general approach to language learning, whereas vocational schools probably put more emphasis on the topics/vocabulary related to the future profession. A more elaborate research would be needed to explore the potential explanations for this difference.

Table 13 Results of testing the significance of differences in attitude in view of the length of stay abroad (the Mann-Whitney test)

Attitude	Mean rank		*Z*	*p*
	Stayed a longer period abroad	Did not stay a longer period abroad		
I would easily adjust to living anywhere	94.31	70.08	-2.779	0.005*
I would not put much effort into fitting in, that would only be a temporary stay	63.78	76.89	-1.515	0.130
Adjustment would be unnecessary, all people are the same	82.67	72.68	-1.138	0.255

** Statistically significant at the p<0.05 level*
Source: Authors' research

Students who have stayed abroad for a longer period of time are more inclined to think that they could easily adapt to living anywhere than those students with shorter stays abroad. According to the results of the Mann-Whitney test, this is the only statistically significant difference in attitude between these two groups.

Table 14 Descriptive statistics referring to the question regarding the competences of people who want to work in the export sector in Croatia

Attitude	Arithmetic mean	Median	Mod	Standard deviation
It is important to speak English and another foreign language	4.71	5.00	5.00	0.48
It is important to be a skillful negotiator	4.43	5.00	5.00	0.65
One should know how to sell sand to Bedouins	3.56	4.00	5.00	1.31
One should have a good alcohol tolerance	2.32	2.00	1.00	1.26

Source: Authors' research

The students' responses were measured by means of a five-degree scale (1 – unimportant, 2 – mostly unimportant, 3 – neither important nor unimportant, 4 – quite important, 5 – very important). Based on the calculated arithmetic means, a conclusion can be made that respondents mostly agree with the statement that it is very important for people who want to work in the export sector in Croatia to speak the English language, which is widely used as a lingua franca, as well as another foreign language. They agree to a slightly lesser extent with the statement that one should be a skillful negotiator. The median in both cases was 5. There is least agreement among the students regarding the statement that for people who want to work in the export sector in Croatia it is very important to have a good alcohol tolerance, which was a hint at socializing and alleged customs in some foreign countries.

Table 15 Results of testing the significance of differences in attitude between female and male students (the Mann-Whitney test)

Attitude	Mean rank		*Z*	*p*
	Female	Male		
It is important to speak English and another foreign language	74.15	74.89	-0.136	0.892
It is important to be a skillful negotiator	75.66	73.21	-0.389	0.697
One should know how to sell sand to Bedouins	71.03	78.37	-1.074	0.283
One should have a good alcohol tolerance	68.45	81.24	-1.884	0.060

Source: Authors' research

According to the results of the Mann-Whitney test, there are no statistically significant differences in attitude between female and male students.

Table 16 Results of testing the significance of differences in attitude between the first-year undergraduate students and the first-year graduate students (the Mann-Whitney test)

Attitude	Mean rank		Z	p
	first-year undergraduate students	first-year graduate students		
It is important to speak English and another foreign language	72.71	77.05	-0.780	0.436
It is important to be a skillful negotiator	73.01	76.63	-0.567	0.571
One should know how to sell sand to Bedouins	68.64	82.85	-2.048	0.041*
One should have a good alcohol tolerance	71.90	78.20	-0.915	0.360

** Statistically significant at the p<0.05 level*
Source: Authors' research

According to the results of the Mann-Whitney test, the only statistically significant difference in attitude between the first-year undergraduate students and the first-year graduate students is found in the statement that people who want to work in the export sector in Croatia should know how to sell sand to Bedouins, i.e. be gifted and skillful salespeople, with a higher mean rank for the first-year graduate students. This result could be attributed to the experiences gathered in the course of their studies, i.e. learning about the sales process.

Table 17 Results of testing the significance of differences in students' attitude in view of their secondary education (the Mann-Whitney test)

Attitude	Mean rank		Z	p
	High school	Vocational school		
It is important to speak English and another foreign language	71.80	76.99	-0.946	0.344
It is important to be a skillful negotiator	78.48	70.83	-1.214	0.225
One should know how to sell sand to Bedouins	75.07	73.97	-0.160	0.873
One should have a good alcohol tolerance	75.40	73.67	-0.255	0.798

Source: Authors' research

According to the results of the Mann-Whitney test, there are no statistically significant differences in attitude between the students who graduated from grammar schools and those who graduated from vocational schools.

Table 18 Results of testing the significance of differences in attitude in attitude in view of the length of stay abroad (the Mann-Whitney test)

Attitude	Mean rank		Z	p
	Stayed a longer period abroad	Did not stay a longer period abroad		
It is important to speak English and another foreign language	78.78	73.55	-0.738	0.461
It is important to be a skillful negotiator	86.06	71.92	-1.734	0.083
One should know how to sell sand to Bedouins	85.56	72.03	-1.529	0.126
One should have a good alcohol tolerance	67.83	75.99	-0.929	0.353

Source: Authors' research

According to the results of the Mann-Whitney test, there are no statistically significant differences in attitude between students, whether they stayed abroad for a longer period or not.

In addition to the above mentioned research questions, the questionnaire also covered the respondents' preference for particular stay destinations and their thoughts on the necessary steps needed to be taken for a longer stay. When asked to rank the destinations according to their preference (starting with number 1 for their first choice), the choice of their destination was closely linked to their knowledge of the language spoken in that particular country. For the most part, English was the language behind the selection, but also the German, Czech and Hungarian languages are mentioned. In most cases, these less represented languages and countries are chosen because students' parents or grandparents came from that country or because students have some relatives there. Students would also choose a particular country because they believed the country would offer better economic opportunities for them than Croatia. Another reason for choosing a particular country is the students' wish to learn the language and culture of that country (mostly France/French and Spain/Spanish were chosen).

When asked how they would prepare before going abroad for a longer period of time, individual student responses included: "I would learn a particular set of words on a daily basis"; "I would prepare for living on my own (learning how to cook, do laundry, etc.)"; "I would learn about the country's geography"; "I would learn about their values, their rules and behavior (for example, what is acceptable and what is not acceptable)", etc. Cultural differences were mentioned only in a few cases, mostly by the first-year graduate students who turned to the Croatian expressions such as: "*interkulturalne razlike* / intercultural differences," "*međukulturalne razlike* / cross-cultural differences," "*kulturološke razlike* / culturological differences," "*kulturalne razlike* / cultural differences." Again, we believe this is the result of the courses taken over their past three years at university. Since the above mentioned issues belong to a relatively new area of study in Croatia, there is still no consensus on the precise use of the terms in the Croatian language.

In the concluding part of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked whether knowledge of a foreign language and professional skills are sufficient for living and working in a foreign country. In addition, they were asked if any difficulties were to be expected for longer stays in a foreign country. The results show that, for the most part, the students are aware that it would be difficult to adapt to the way of life in a foreign country. In addition to the language and cultural fears, the respondents also expressed their fear of being far from home and the fact that they would be homesick for family and friends. According to their comments, students tend to view their potential stay for work reasons as temporary until they have achieved financial security to be able to return to Croatia. In their answers students frequently expressed fear that as "outsiders" they would be discriminated, paid less, exploited, etc. It is not clear whether this fear is based on assumptions or prejudices, or rather on the experiences others. These experiences are currently a popular topic on social networks and Internet portals.

4. Limitations and Further Research

Despite its potential contributions, this research has some limitations. Generally speaking, future research should include a larger number of variables and examine other dimensions of cross-cultural competence. Firstly, future studies should include other socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (e.g. the number of foreign languages they had in school, family background, political leanings, etc.) and investigate how these affect their attitudes on cross-cultural issues. This would require a larger sample across a wider age range. The respondents of the present study were mostly in their early twenties so the obtained opinions belong to the younger generation only. This might be the reason for very few statistically significant differences in opinions between undergraduate and graduate students. In order to determine whether the age of the respondents impacted their answers, it would be necessary to explore the views of respondents belonging to different age groups. Secondly, in order to elicit further information on mobility, it would be of interest to determine whether respondents would feel the same about going to work/live away from home but within the Croatian borders. Thirdly, since our student respondents come from both urban and rural areas, it would be interesting to investigate to what extent would the fear of feeling lost in not only unfamiliar but also significantly larger foreign cities influence their choice of destination.

In terms of methodology, it would be useful to apply factor analysis to determine variables at the latent

level. Also, the internal consistency of constructs, i.e. the questionnaire's reliability should be investigated.

Finally, it is important to note that although new habits and adapting to a different environment and way of life are often mentioned, these are not defined in sufficient detail, so the question remains as to how much the respondents really know about cultural differences or is this just a common phrase that they have heard, but cannot fully understand. This potential lack of knowledge is evident in the answers which express a need for knowledge of both the language and the culture but in the end actually focus solely on language. This leads to the conclusion that culture is mentioned just as a phrase they have heard, without really understanding the full meaning of the term and everything it implies.

5. Conclusion

The increasingly compelling argument for internationalization in higher education and for study abroad in particular is rooted in the undeniable realities of globalization. Since the Republic of Croatia has joined in the efforts to increase student and labor mobility throughout the EU, all types of education, particularly teaching foreign languages, should include intercultural education. Although the Internet is brimming with information, students need guidance in order to increase their cultural awareness and overcome the fear and misunderstandings that come from the lack of knowledge, stereotypes and biases. In addition to language courses, the students of the Faculty of Economics have the opportunity to take courses which touch upon cross-cultural content or deal with it as the main topic. All of this can be useful in attaining the cultural awareness and cultural knowledge to successfully communicate across cultures.

Contrary to our expectations, a higher percentage of first-year undergraduate students expressed the wish to study abroad in comparison to graduate students. This difference was statistically significant, but our research did not provide sufficient data to explain it. A slightly higher percentage of grammar school graduates than vocational school graduates wanted to study abroad, but the difference between the two groups is not statistically significant. Hence, the first hypothesis, according to which the willingness to study abroad strongly depends on the year of study and type of secondary-school education, was not confirmed.

The second hypothesis that during their studies abroad Croatian students are more willing to socialize with foreign students to whom they feel closer in terms of language and culture, was confirmed as their preferred choice for socializing were students with whom they can communicate in their mother tongue, followed by those from Western countries.

The third hypothesis was partially confirmed since there are statistically significant differences in the willingness to socialize with foreign students who come from particular parts of the world, in adapting to life outside Croatia, and in attitudes on the necessary competencies of employees in the export sector in terms of year of study, type of secondary-school education and possible previous stay abroad. In our research items, there were only a few statistically significant differences among various parameters. One of those is respondents' confidence that they could adapt easily to living anywhere. In this item, significant factors were previous experience with a longer stay abroad and one aspect of education, namely grammar school graduates (who had had more language classes and were thus exposed to more cross-cultural content) were more confident in this respect than vocational school graduates. However, there were no differences in this respect between first-year undergraduate students and first-year graduate students.

Although our respondents have the opportunity to learn about cross-cultural issues, this does not necessarily mean that they are taking the opportunity that is offered. The course dealing with intercultural issues more systematically is an elective one, and other courses are scattered among various study programs. Our study can be viewed as a first step, whereas a more in-depth research would be necessary to answer all the questions raised in this paper.

The background idea of this research was that cultural education is a key factor for achieving a significant increase of cultural sensitivity and cultural awareness. Regardless of the results presented here, it is our firm belief that foreign language competence as well as intercultural competence should be a priority of the curriculum if we are to educate experts who will be capable to compete successfully as students or professionals in all fields and all cultural areas. It can be expected that learning a foreign language will motivate learners to acquire some knowledge of the culture of a country in which the language is spoken, but this relationship also works in the opposite direction where intercultural awareness can also provide strong motivation for learning a foreign language. If we recognize that globalization has made the world a global village, we all need the intercultural competence to successfully live in it.

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UDK: 316.7: 37.01 / **Preliminary communication**

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VAŽNOST MEĐUKULTURNE KOMPETENCIJE U MEĐUKULTURNOJ KOMUNIKACIJI

Sažetak

Svrha je ovoga rada utvrđivanje opsega u kojemu obrazovanje može utjecati na međukulturnu svijest, vještine i kompetenciju. Kako bi se ustanovila važnost obrazovanja, provedena je analiza s ciljem utvrđivanja njegove uloge u promicanju kulturološke svijesti i suočavanju s međukulturnim izazovima koji nastaju u nepoznatim međukulturnim i multikulturnim kontekstima. Ovo istraživanje postavlja sljedeću hipotezu: međukulturno obrazovanje ključni je čimbenik za postizanje značajnoga povećanja međukulturne osjetljivosti i kulturološke svijesti kako bi se osigurala uspješna međukulturna komunikacija te povećala mobilnost studenata i stručnjaka. Za potrebe ovoga rada pretpostavljeno je da kulturološka svijest studenata raste zahvaljujući sadržaju kolegija koje slušaju i ukupnoga iskustva tijekom studiranja. Za potrebe ovoga istraživanja izrađen je poseban upitnik, a dobiveni rezultati statistički su analizirani uz pomoć deskriptivne statistike, neparametarskog hi-kvadrat testa te Mann-Whitney testa. Istraživanje je pokazalo da međukulturna kompetencija ima statistički značajan utjecaj na spremnost studenata na odlazak na studijske programe i rad u inozemstvo. Kako bi se povećao broj visoko obrazovanih stručnjaka koji će uspješno konkurirati u svojstvu studenata ili stručnjaka na svim poljima i svim kulturnim područjima, neophodno je jezičnu, ali i međukulturnu kompetenciju odrediti kao prioritet u kurikulumu. Prihvatimo li činjenicu da je svijet uslijed globalizacije postao globalno selo, uspješan život u takvom okruženju zahtijeva međukulturnu kompetenciju.

Ključne riječi: globalizacija, kultura, međukulturna kompetencija, međukulturna komunikacija, međukulturno obrazovanje