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Methodical Approaches to Intercultural Education in Confessional Religious Education in the Republic of Croatia

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Abstract: After many years of neglecting the religious dimension within intercultural education, today there is a broad consensus in Europe that religious education represents an important dimension in the intercultural education of young people. Awareness of the connection between intercultural and interreligious learning is becoming increasingly stronger and more present. One of the important questions related to intercultural education in general, and especially to the religious dimension of that education, relates to the qualification of the confessional religious education teachers with regard to the achievement of intercultural goals and especially the qualification to develop intercultural competence in students. This paper consists of two parts. The theoretical part elaborates on issues related to the development of intercultural competence in confessional religious education. The second part presents some of the results of the quantitative research (descriptive statistics methods were used), which was carried out in the Republic of Croatia and aimed to examine the attitudes and opinions of religious education teachers regarding the necessary intercultural competence for work in schools. The results have revealed that religious education teachers highly value the development of intercultural competence in students, as well as great motivation and openness of religious education teachers of confessional classes for the development of intercultural education. At the same time, they point to the relative scarcity of methods within religious teaching that promote intercultural and interreligious learning.

Keywords: religious dimension of intercultural education; intercultural education; intercultural competence; religious education teachers

1. Introduction

The emergence of globalization and plural societies strongly affects all areas of human life. As a result of increasingly frequent migrations, virtual mobility, economic globalization and, consequently, the complexity of modern societies that are becoming multi-ethnic and multicultural, there are more and more frequent conflicts related to coexistence, and a crisis of the value system is fairly noticeable. Migration movements have created neighbourhoods with people of different cultural origins, religions and lifestyles. In societies with the increasing pluralism of cultures, religions and life philosophies, the main question is how to deal with differences and how to deal with conflicts that may arise from these differences (Malović and Vujica 2021). This issue particularly affect public schools that students attend, regardless of their cultural or religious affiliation. The challenges of a multicultural society require an educational response. In fact, recognizing the value of education is a key moment for facing the challenges and complexity of the contemporary globalist and pluralistic society.

Education for coexistence represents one of the biggest challenges of modern education. According to the Report of UNESCO's International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, "learning to live together" is one of the fundamental pillars of education in the 21st century. One of the key questions raised in that document refers to the need to establish education that would enable peaceful resolution of conflicts and respect

for others, their culture and their spiritual values (Delors 1998, p. 103). Because migrations have always existed, various models of solving coexistence issues have been considered throughout history, such as elimination, assimilation, segregation, melting pot, coexistence, dichotomy, universalism, multiculturalism and interculturalism (Portera 2011, pp. 25–26; Perotti 1995, pp. 63–64).

The intercultural approach emerged in Europe in the second half of the 20th century, especially at the beginning of the 1970s, and it was developed in a special way under the influence of the guidelines of European institutions, especially the Council of Europe, which to this day remains the most important factor in the design and promotion of intercultural education (Perotti 1995; Hrvatić 2007). The intercultural approach is still the most appropriate pedagogical response to the new situation caused by the globalization and migration dynamics of the modern Western world, which contribute to the increasing diversity of modern society. Concepts such as "identity" and "culture" are less and less seen as static values, and their dynamism, that is, openness to permanent development, is more and more noticed; the state of being different, migrations and life in a complex and multicultural society are no longer seen as risks for coexistence and security, but as opportunities for mutual enrichment and for individual and collective development—meeting a foreigner, an ethnically or a culturally different subject represents a challenge, an opportunity to meet and reflect on the level of values, rules and behaviour (Portera 2011). The intercultural approach emphasizes the possibility of dialogue, confrontation, and interaction. The prefix "inter-" presupposes a relationship, interaction or exchange of two or more elements. Relationship is the core of intercultural education; interaction, not abstraction, is the fundamental pedagogical activity of intercultural education (Perotti 1995). We define societies as multicultural, as they manifest the presence of people with different customs, religions and ways of thinking, while the strategies of educational activities should be of an intercultural type, in the sense of promoting meetings, interaction and the like. According to A. Portera (2011), the intercultural approach, as the most acceptable pedagogical approach, is found between universalism (transcultural pedagogy) and relativism (multicultural pedagogy).

For a long time, the religious dimension was neglected in the intercultural education framework, because European societies excluded religion from public life, especially from education, backed by the idea that it belongs to the area of an individual's private life (Perotti 1995, p. 15). The Council of Europe included the topic of religion in the context of intercultural education only in 2002 (Jackson and O'Grady 2019, p. 248; Razum et al. 2021). The "return of religion" occurred as a result of the settlement of immigrants in European countries for which public expression of religiosity is self-explanatory (Perotti 1995, pp. 15–16). The tragic events that took place on 11 September 2001 provided an additional incentive for the inclusion of the religious dimension in the framework of intercultural education. Today there is a broad consensus across Europe that religious education has an important place in the school system and that it represents an important dimension in the intercultural education of young people. Awareness of the connection between intercultural and interreligious learning is increasingly strong and present (Ziebertz and Leimgruber 2009, p. 401). Cultural diversity cannot be studied and promoted without taking religion in consideration (Jackson 2004). Religious education, however, is not an unambiguous term.

Many European documents point out that non-confessional religious education is more compatible with the goals of intercultural education than confessional education, and that it has a stronger potential to contribute to education for knowing, respecting and accepting different religious beliefs and worldviews (Razum et al. 2021). However, despite the tendency to introduce non-confessional religious education, religious education is still confessional in most European countries (Pajer 2010; Rothgangel et al. 2014a, 2014b, 2016, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c). The experience of confessional religious education in recent years in most European countries shows an increasing openness towards religious pluralism and the demands of intercultural education (Razum et al. 2022). Since the Second Vatican Council

(1962–1965) onwards, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue has been an important part of the official teaching of the Catholic Church (Kovač and Božić 2021), so interreligious learning is becoming an increasingly important part in the contents and goals of the curriculum of confessional religious education. Strict mono-denominational teaching, which is thematically limited to one confession or religion, is unable to respond to the demands of religious education in the context of religious pluralism. Confessional religious education is more and more obviously expected to include, in addition to promoting religious learning in which other religious traditions are respected, the promotion of such religious learning in which students can learn together and from each other. Within the context of confessional religious education, the design of various encounters that should lead to a deeper understanding of religions, reflection on the religious experiences of other traditions and deepening the answers for one's own life and faith continuously gain more and more importance. (Ziebertz and Leimgruber 2009, pp. 394–95).

Given that the Republic of Croatia is a member of the Council of Europe and the aforementioned recommendations and documents are included in the guidelines implemented in the educational system, their application is expected in the school subject of religious education and in the initial education of religious education teachers. Until now, however, no research has been conducted on the topic of religious education teachers. After reviewing the literature from the scientific field of Croatian pedagogy and religious pedagogy, we can conclude that previous research focused on classroom teachers and teachers of other subjects, but not religious education teachers (Previšić 1994; Hrvatić 2011; Bedeković 2011; Piršl 2011; Mlinarević et al. 2013; Drandić 2016; Mlinarević and Tokić Zec 2020). No research has been conducted in the Republic of Croatia on the views of religious education teachers on the development of intercultural competence. The only research that was related to intercultural sensitivity examined the attitudes of religious education teachers towards differences in classrooms and teaching. It was conducted in 2015 and did not directly refer to the intercultural competence of religious education teachers (Filipović 2016).

Intercultural competence, which includes a religious dimension, is necessary for coexistence in a society filled with different people. High-quality interculturally trained teachers of either non-confessional or confessional religious education, which is the case in the Republic of Croatia, represent an essential condition for the achievement of goals related to intercultural education. Only an interculturally competent teacher is able to organize the teaching and learning processes aimed at the acquisition of students' intercultural competence, including its religious dimension. The basic premise of this paper stems from the fact that the development of students' intercultural competence is possible in confessional religious teaching, and the work methods used by the teacher are one of its core prerequisites. This thesis will be examined through the theoretical concepts developed by previous researchers in Europe, which will set the epistemological concepts for a discussion on the development of intercultural competence in confessional religious education. The results of the quantitative research will show the attitudes and opinions of the examined religious education teachers in the Republic of Croatia regarding the methods they use in religious education when speaking about intercultural topics, then the development of intercultural competence in religious education, as well as the attitudes regarding the motivation and competence of religious education teachers for implementing the religious dimension of intercultural education aimed at the development of intercultural competence.

Considering the fact that the development of intercultural competence has not been researched in the context of confessional religious teaching and religious education teachers in the Republic of Croatia, this research provides data on the state of confessional religious teaching, i.e., in the classroom, with regard to questions of methods, motivation and competences for the implementation of the religious dimension of intercultural education. In addition, the presentation of research results contributes to the actualization of the religious dimension of intercultural education as part of confessional religious education in the Republic of Croatia and indicates the ability of confessional religious education to develop intercultural competence in students.

In the following section, we will first consider the theoretical background of the religious dimension of intercultural education, especially intercultural competence, and then present the results of empirical research on the attitudes and opinions of religious education teachers regarding the intercultural competence necessary for realizing the religious dimension of intercultural education, conducted among religious education teachers in the Republic of Croatia.

1.1. The Religious Dimension of Intercultural Learning and Teaching

Students meet children and young people from other nations and other religions in the school environment on a daily basis, which presents a challenge for everyday communication. An encounter with the unknown can cause different reactions: from fear of the foreign and unknown, apathetic distance, callous indifference to acceptance based on curiosity, empathic appropriation and recognition, as well as uncritical assimilation and radical conversion (Garmaz and Mendl 2022, p. 33). Learning to live with differences necessarily includes the need to know, understand and positively value that diversity (Keast 2007, p. 62). The Council of Europe advocates the stance that young people who have adequate knowledge and understanding of religion are more tolerant of differences within society than those who lack this knowledge (Jackson and O'Grady 2019, p. 255). In this sense, REDCo's research (Weisse 2009, p. 10) is also interesting, as it shows that students who have the opportunity to learn about religious diversity at school are more willing to discuss religions and worldviews with students from other backgrounds than those who are not given that opportunity. Likewise, it is emphasized that the main prerequisite for peaceful coexistence between people of different religions and worldviews is knowledge regarding religions and worldviews, as well as common interests and common activities.

Intercultural education is based on principles that promote openness to others, respect for diversity, mutual understanding, tolerance, providing equal opportunities and fighting against discrimination. The question is how to implement these principles, which are generally accepted at the theoretical level, into pedagogical approaches and methods. It is fundamentally important to take into consideration the fact that the intercultural approach in school should not be reduced to a new school subject or to additional inclusion in the existing ones with content related to the immigrant children present in the classroom. An approach that would be reduced to the occasional introduction into the existing programmes of ad hoc content related to students belonging to another culture is not acceptable either. The intercultural approach encompasses the entire strategy of school teaching. It is about the need to include the intercultural perspective in every school subject, as well as every school activity involving either the teaching or non-teaching staff (Portera 2011, p. 30; Perotti 1995, pp. 85–86; Filipović 2021, p. 555). School, as an intercultural educational community, is not only a place for acquiring intercultural knowledge, but also a place where coexistence, cooperation, tolerance and equality are continuously learned (Hrvatić 2007, p. 248). In order for these goals to be realized and lived later on in real life, it is necessary to design and implement classes in which mutual understanding and respect, cooperative learning and dialogue and intercultural sensitivity are taught and learned by directly experiencing it. Quality learning and teaching in the classroom becomes a necessary condition for the effective implementation of the religious dimension of intercultural education (Jackson and O'Grady 2019).

1.2. What Is Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence is a concept that is closely related to the goals of the intercultural approach. Given that each country, and therefore each culture and religion, has its own characteristics that affect a certain level and features of intercultural competence, it cannot be determined in a universal way, but is adapted to the conditions and needs of a particular area, and therefore the authors who implement research on its dimensions take different approaches. The term intercultural competence was first used by Byram and Zarate in 1997 as a label for "the ability to interact with others, accept other perspectives

and think about the world, the ability to mediate between these perspectives as well as the awareness of existing differences" (Belmonte and Agüero 2019, p. 192). The development of Byrame's model of intercultural competence was related to foreign language learning and places it in the knowledge, attitudes and skills categories. Attitudes are related to being (knowing how to be), and knowledge (knowing) refers to active learning about events, identities and social characteristics, while skills are related to action (knowing how to do, understand, learn) in intercultural situations (Byram 2009, pp. 322, 324). Darla Deardorff also developed a model of intercultural competence, according to which she defines intercultural competence as "the ability to interact effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations, based on specific attitudes, intercultural knowledge, skills and reflection". (Deardorff 2004, p. 256) Her model of intercultural competence is shown in the table through the following components of each dimension:

Intercultural competence (Deardorff 2004, p. 198)		
Knowledge	Attitudes	Skills
• Cultural self-awareness • Deep understanding and knowledge of • culture (including contexts, role and • impact of culture and others' world • views) • Culture-specific information • Sociolinguistic awareness	• Respect (valuing other cultures, cultural diversity) • Openness (to intercultural learning and to people from other cultures, withholding judgment) • Curiosity and discovery (tolerating ambiguity and uncertainty)	• To listen, observe and interpret • To analyse, evaluate and relate

The division of intercultural competence into knowledge (cognitive dimension), attitudes (affective dimension) and skills (behavioural dimension), as a premise of this paper, is confirmed by a research study on instruments that measure intercultural competence, aiming to define its key dimensions based on the analysed instruments. The study confirms the thesis regarding the difficulty of reaching a universal definition because scientists differ in their definitions of intercultural competence depending on the context. The review of existing instruments measuring intercultural competence emphasizes "the existence of multiple measuring instruments in different contexts and that the existing instruments focus on different dimensions. The position of the author and the conclusions of the research process is that intercultural competence is a process of cultural learning that includes cognitive, affective and behavioural learning processes" (Matveev and Merz 2014, p. 129). Therefore, the authors Matveev and Merz (2014) talk about the affective, cognitive and behavioural dimensions of intercultural competence.

Given that the main respondents in the research presented within this paper were religious education teachers and considering the fact that we were interested in the development of intercultural competence in religious education classes, the descriptions of intercultural competence should contain its religious dimension. We have previously pointed out the variety of approaches in defining intercultural competence where the authors did not take religious beliefs into account, so when it comes to the theoretical settings of intercultural competence that includes religious dimension, this research relied on the guidelines listed in the Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)12 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the dimension of religions and non-religious convictions within intercultural education (Council of Europe 2008a), a document that opened the topic of the religious dimension of intercultural education. Bearing in mind that the Republic of Croatia is a member state and that the defined guidelines are implemented in the educational policies of the member states, it turned out to be reasonable that the theoretical questions regarding the development of intercultural competence in the teaching of religious education arose from the mentioned document. Also in 2014, the Council issued a manual

aimed at disseminating the Recommendation and its better application in member states (Jackson 2014). The Recommendation defines the components of intercultural competence as well as the ways it should be developed in the classroom:

1.	Developing a tolerant attitude and respect for the right to hold a particular belief, attitudes based on the recognition of the inherent dignity and fundamental freedoms of each human being;
2.	Nurturing a sensitivity to the diversity of religions and non-religious convictions as an element contributing to the richness of Europe;
3.	Promoting communication and dialogue between people from different cultural, religious and non-religious backgrounds;
4.	Promoting knowledge of different aspects (symbols, practices, etc.) of religious diversity;
5.	Developing skills of critical evaluation and reflection with regard to understanding the perspectives and ways of life of different religions and non-religious convictions;
6.	Combating prejudice and stereotypes vis-à-vis differences which are barriers to intercultural dialogue, and educating in respect for equal dignity of all individuals;
7.	Fostering an ability to analyse and interpret impartially the many varied items of information relating to the diversity of religions and non-religious convictions, without prejudice to the need to respect pupils' religious or non-religious convictions and without prejudice to the religious education given outside the public education sphere. (Council of Europe 2008a, #5).

Intercultural competence is considered to be the ultimate outcome of intercultural education. The authors of this paper have divided the descriptions of the development of intercultural competence defined by the Council of Europe into corresponding categories for clearer data analysis: the cognitive dimension (knowledge) represents knowledge regarding one's own religion and knowledge regarding others; the affective dimension (attitudes) refers to tolerance and respect for the other and the different; the behavioural dimension (skills) includes empathy, communication skills, mediation, analysis and integration skills, and critical thinking.

1.3. The Connection between the Work (Competencies) of Religious Education Teachers and the Development of Students' Competencies

Intercultural competence of teachers is a prerequisite for the development of the intercultural competence of students (Piršl et al. 2016). Quality teacher training is a key condition for the successful integration of teaching about religions and worldviews into the goals of public schools (Pépin 2009). Some European research show, however, that many teachers feel ill-prepared to deal with the cultural and religious diversity they encounter in their classrooms (OSCE/ODIHR 2007, p. 55). Related to this, there is a lack of teaching resources that represent multi-religious or interreligious approaches (Pépin 2009, pp. 43–44).

The acquisition of intercultural knowledge and practical skills should be introduced at the very beginning of teacher training (Council of Europe 2008b). Intercultural competence does not only presuppose teaching about other religions and cultures, but also the development of mutual understanding, intercultural sensitivity, collaborative learning and the creation of relationships that presupposes the discovery and acceptance of similarities and differences (Hrvatić 2007, p. 250). In other words, religious education teachers' qualifications imply that they possess knowledge of religions, but also knowledge of appropriate teaching methods and how to successfully apply them (Pépin 2009, p. 44). According to REDCo experts (Weisse 2009, p. 12), the teacher training curriculum should include the development of skills in the matters of organizing and moderating classroom discussions on controversial religious issues and conflicting worldviews. Even the best curriculum or teaching materials will have little effect on achieving learning outcomes in the classroom if teachers are unable, for any reason, to impart quality knowledge and organize student learning. This particularly applies to the school subject of religious education due to the high demands that such a subject places on the teacher. Therefore, the importance of teacher

qualification and appropriate initial as well as permanent teacher training is highlighted in several European documents (OSCE/ODIHR 2007; Council of Europe 2008b). Bearing in mind that the status of teachers in the classroom gives them the opportunity to have a great influence on students in discussions of personal matters, such as those related to religion and beliefs, it is extremely important that teachers are competent and professional.

The teaching and learning processes differ from country to country, from school to school, from teacher to teacher, from situation to situation. Different types of teaching/lessons can be used effectively when teaching about religions and beliefs. First of all, teacher-centred teaching differs from student-centred teaching. Both of them carry their own risks as well as advantages. In teacher-centred teaching, the focus is on the teacher and his or her knowledge of the teaching content that he or she conveys to the students, and on the quality of the teaching materials being studied. In student-centred teaching, the teacher plays the role of moderator of the learning process. Although the teacher's knowledge of the content remains crucial, in classes conceived like that, students have a much more active role, especially in discussions, debates, research, group work, collaborative learning, project work, role playing, presentations and the like. Because that type of teaching is student-centred, students' opinions, experiences, feelings and reflections are very important when learning about topics related to religions and belief systems. Students are encouraged to reflect on their own beliefs, values and decisions (OSCE/ODIHR 2007).

Learning that encourages the presentation of students' personal views, reflections and experiences is particularly suitable for the model of religious education that we call learning religion or learning from religion. In the model of religious education called learning about religion, or the multi-religious approach, students' experiences and attitudes are not so much at the centre of the teaching and learning process. It relates to learning about the different manifestations of religion without necessarily taking a personal stand. A teaching model that encourages the expression of one's own beliefs, attitudes and values, with all its advantages, carries, however, the danger that certain students may feel uncomfortable publicly sharing something that they consider their personal matter. That is why creating a pleasant and stimulating learning atmosphere in which every student feels comfortable and safe is an important task of every teacher. A teacher's success in creating such a positive atmosphere is closely correlated with his or her competencies. (OSCE/ODIHR 2007, p. 46).

Preferred methodological approaches that promote intercultural learning include cooperative learning, empathic communication, dialogical approach, the method of "distancing and simulation" and learning through differences (Milot 2007; Keast 2007; Hrvatić 2007). Ziebertz and Leimgruber (2009) have proposed a subject-cantered "didactics of world religions". This approach is realized in five steps which are partly connected or partly overlapping in practice: learning to perceive religious testimonies; interpreting religious phenomena; learning through encounters; respecting permanent diversity; engaging in existential confrontation. Interreligious learning also implies meeting members/witnesses of other religions (Filipović 2021). All these ways of teaching and learning aim to promote better self-awareness, better acquaintance with others, discovering similarities and differences and spotting existing prejudices and closed-mindedness, as well as cooperation and togetherness in achieving common goals.

It is obvious that multicultural diversity calls for new models of learning and teaching, i.e., intercultural and interreligious teaching and learning. The emphasis is, therefore, on learning methods that highlight cooperation, exchange and joint activities, all for the purpose of preparing students for coexistence in a democratic society, i.e., for the purpose of achieving the fundamental goal of modern education, which is "learning to live together".

2. Results and Discussion

2.1. Methods and Forms of Work in Religious Education

We wanted to find out from the respondents which form and method of work they most often use when dealing with content regarding other religions and confessions in religious education classes. Given that the implementation of the goals of intercultural

education is most often associated with the realization of interaction when learning about others, and bearing in mind that students taking confessional religious education classes are most often homogeneous in terms of religious/denominational affiliation and they need forms of work that include visits to other religious institutions so that interaction could take place, we were interested in the extent to which such forms of learning are used in religious education.

Based on the presented results, it can be concluded that according to the opinions of the religious education teachers who participated in the survey, the most frequently used form of work is collaborative learning (37.8%), followed by debate methods, discussions regarding the doctrines of other religions (35.2%) and finally by the methods of studying the texts and documents of other confessions and religions (33.9%). Although cooperative learning came first, it is more likely that it meant learning in groups, rather than interdenominational or interreligious learning, which involves a religious education teacher of another denomination/religion teaching a class. This is indicated by the high percentages of negative responses regarding hosting members of other confessions and religions. The least used form of learning is precisely the one that should be promoted the most in order to achieve the goals of the religious dimension of intercultural education, and that is learning through interaction and action, meeting the other and the different, without which it is difficult to truly know the other. As many as 87.4% of religious education teachers do not host members of other confessions and religions as a form of learning, and 76.5% of religious education teachers do not visit religious institutions of other confessions and religions.

2.2. Development of Intercultural Competence in Religious Education

We wanted to examine the views of religious education teachers on the level of development of certain components of intercultural competence among students in religious education classes. Intercultural competence is seen as the result of a general approach to the entire content of religious education, not only the parts dealing with other religions/confessions/non-religious beliefs. Considering that this research sought to examine the religious dimension of intercultural education, the development of intercultural competence was examined in that context, in a necessary connection with the processing of content concerning other religions and non-religious beliefs, as mentioned in the 2008 Council of Europe's Recommendation. Claims regarding the development of intercultural competence can be categorized into cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions.

According to the views of religious education teachers, intercultural competence in religious education is developed to a high degree almost equally in all components. Religious education teachers attributed the highest value to the affective dimension, the development of attitudes of tolerance (88.3%) and sensitivity to diversity (82.8%), and to the behavioural dimension, the fight against stereotypes and prejudices (89.1%). The lowest percentage of responses was connected to the development of analytical skills (61.3%) and critical thinking (66.1%). A high percentage of responses was focused on the development of knowledge and communication skills (76.7%). The results indicate that the cognitive and behavioural dimensions do not develop to the same extent, though they should be complementary. Learning about others cannot remain only at the informational level; it is necessary to have evaluative and analytical abilities while communicating as that will lead to the integration of acquired knowledge. The results point to the conclusion that the attitude of religious education teachers regarding the development of intercultural competence among students in religious education classes is extremely positive, and that they consider almost all components of intercultural competence to be equally important, developing them in students to the same extent. A slightly lower percentage of responses was recorded for the development of communication skills and critical thinking skills, which can also be linked to the lack of certain work methods important for the development of communication skills. Given that the previous results showed that religious education teachers rarely visit other religious communities and that they do not invite representatives

of other communities to their classes, this result is not surprising. It confirms the necessity of a method complementarity for the development of certain competences.

2.3. Motivation of Religious Education Teachers for Implementing Intercultural Education

We wanted to find out from the respondents to what extent they feel motivated to implement intercultural education in religious education classes. Although external conditions can represent a satisfactory foundation and a prerequisite for achieving the goals of intercultural education, a kind of internal motivation of religious education teachers is also needed, not only external motivation that comes from institutions and the curriculum or religious content that they are obliged to implement.

The results show a high degree of motivation among religious education teachers. As many as 376 religious education teachers (81.7%) are motivated to implement intercultural education in religious education. A very small percentage (18.7%), which is of course a certain indicator of heterogeneity in opinions, indicates a lack of motivation among a certain part of religious education teachers, more precisely 84 of them.

2.4. Competence of Religious Education Teachers for Conducting Intercultural Education

We wanted to obtain some insight on how the respondents self-assess their own ability to implement intercultural education. This result does not point to a generally applicable conclusion about the qualification of religious education teachers for the implementation of intercultural education in confessional religious education classes, but rather represents their personal opinions in the form of self-assessment, which is also a certain indicator considering the lifelong learning process of religious education teachers.

The results show a high degree of affirmative responses (62%), but also a significant percentage of negative responses (38%). According to religious education teachers, 175 of them do not consider themselves competent, while 285 of them think that they are sufficiently qualified. This is an important indicator for the further work of responsible institutions for the initial and lifelong education of religious education teachers. Plans and programmes, curricula and religious textbooks represent only one of the levels at which intercultural content needs to be implemented. The previously mentioned results indicated a high degree of motivation among religious education teachers. However, motivation is not a sufficient factor. Without knowledge and competence, religious education teachers cannot convey the necessary content to students or create the necessary stimulating atmosphere for intercultural learning nor develop the expected intercultural competence in students.

3. Materials and Methods

This research was conducted within the scientific research project RELIGOBRAZ—The Contribution of Religious Education to Coexistence in a Multicultural Society. The aim of the project is to explore the contribution of religious education in the Republic of Croatia to education for coexistence in a multicultural society. This contribution is explored on two levels: on the level of the curricula of subjects that mediate religious knowledge in primary and secondary schools and on the level of intercultural competence of the teachers themselves. This paper presents partial results of the research "Intercultural competence: attitudes, opinions and specific behaviours of religious education teachers".

The general goal of the research was to examine the knowledge of the basic features of interculturalism and the religious dimension of intercultural education, to examine the attitudes and opinions of religious education teachers regarding intercultural competences and the specific behaviours of religious education teachers related to intercultural competence necessary for the implementation of the religious dimension of intercultural education. This paper presents the results related to only one of the five specific research objectives: the attitudes and opinions of religious education teachers regarding the necessary intercultural competences for holding classes in schools. The survey method was used to carry out the quantitative research, for the purpose of which the survey questionnaire "Intercultural

competence: attitudes, opinions and specific behaviours of religious education teachers" was created by Jurišić and Razum (2021). The questionnaire was approved on 10 November 2021 by the Ethics Committee of the Catholic Faculty of Theology of the University of Zagreb. Some of the questions were taken, with written approval, from two questionnaires developed by Prof. Elvi Piršl, Ph.D. The questionnaire consists of 30 questions, 2 of which are open-ended and 28 are closed-ended, and the most frequently used form of response is the Likert scale. At the end of the data collection, the collected data was verified and prepared for processing, after which they were processed and analysed in the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 28.0). The processing of the results included the application of a quantitative analysis, and descriptive statistics was used to show absolute and relative frequencies, mean values and measures of dispersion. The quantitative research was conducted in the period from November 2021 to January 2022. Four hundred and sixty respondents participated in the research, of which 103 (22.4%) were men and 357 (77.6%) were women. At the national level, in the public schools of the Republic of Croatia, the subject Religious Education is taught in several confessional and religious versions by representatives of individual religious communities. For this purpose, religious education teachers affiliated with the Catholic Church, the Islamic Community, the Orthodox Church and the Heritage Reformed Congregations were asked to participate. A representative sample was not created; therefore, the results cannot be applied to the general population of religious education teachers. Three hundred and seventy-five Catholic religious education teachers (81.5%), 65 religious education teachers affiliated with the Heritage Reformed Congregations (14.1%), 18 Orthodox religious education teachers (3.9%) and 2 Islamic religious education teachers (0.4%) participated in the research.

We examined the opinions of religious education teachers regarding the methods and forms of work in religious education and the attitudes regarding the development of intercultural competence using a scale of 7 statements, and they marked each statement on a rating scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much). The obtained evaluation values of each particle are presented in 2 categories: 'YES' and 'NO'. The 'NO' category includes assessments from 1 (not at all) to 3 (moderate), and the 'YES' category from 4 (a lot) to 5 (very much). The obtained results are shown in Tables 1 and 2. We examined the opinions of religious education teachers regarding their own motivation using a rating scale from 1 (not motivated at all) to 5 (very motivated). The obtained evaluation values of each particle are presented in 2 categories: 'YES' and 'NO'. The 'NO' category includes assessments from 1 (I am not motivated at all) to 3 (I don't know/cannot answer), and the 'YES' category from 4 (motivated) to 5 (very motivated). The obtained results are shown in Table 3. We examined the opinions of religious education teachers regarding the competence to promote intercultural education in religious education using a rating scale from 1 (not competent at all) to 5 (very competent). The obtained evaluation values of each particle are presented in 2 categories: 'YES' and 'NO'. The 'NO' category includes assessments from 1 (I am not competent at all) to 3 (I do not know/cannot answer), and the 'YES' category from 4 (competent) to 5 (very competent). The obtained results are shown in Table 4.

Table 1. Methods and forms of work in religious education.

	Methods and Forms of Work in Religious Education	NO (%)	YES (%)
1.	Hosting members of other confessions and religions.	87.4	12.6
2.	Visiting religious institutions of other denominations and religions.	76.5	23.5
3.	Studying texts and documents of other confessions and religions.	66.1	33.9
4.	Debates, discussions regarding the doctrines of other religions.	64.8	35.2
5.	Collaborative learning.	62.2	37.8
6.	Role playing.	70.4	29.6
7.	Dialogue with members of other religions.	68.00	32.00

Table 2. Views of religious education teachers on the development of intercultural competence in religious education classes.

	Intercultural Competence in Religious Education Classes:	NO (%)	YES (%)
1.	The development of tolerance and respect.	11.7	88.3
2.	Cultivating sensitivity towards the diversity of religious and non-religious beliefs.	17.2	82.8
3.	Promoting communication and dialogue.	23.3	76.7
4.	Promoting knowledge regarding different aspects of religious diversity.	23.3	76.7
5.	Development of critical assessment and reflection skills.	33.9	66.1
6.	The fight against prejudices and stereotypes.	20.9	79.1
7.	Development of the ability to analyse without bias and interpret numerous different data.	38.7	61.3

Table 3. The level of motivation for implementing intercultural education in religious education classes.

Motivation to Implement Intercultural Education	NO (%)	YES (%)
	18.3	81.7

Table 4. Competence for promoting intercultural education in religious education classes.

Competence for Promoting Intercultural Education in Religious Education Classes	NO (%)	YES (%)
	38.00	62.00

4. Conclusions

The religious dimension of intercultural education, at the level of European documents, but also of numerous works by different authors, is gaining more and more importance. It is increasingly being recognized and acknowledged that there is no complete intercultural education without a religious dimension. European documents clearly emphasize the importance of teacher training so they would be qualified to teach the religious dimension of intercultural education.

The existing form of confessional religious education, which is still the predominant form of religious education in most European countries, is increasingly opening up to intercultural education. Teachers, as such, play a key role in promoting the said education. The theoretical concept of European research on religious education in Europe revealed that confessional religious education classes (learning religion) encourage the presentation

of one's own beliefs, attitudes and values, which is a key prerequisite for the development of intercultural competence. Adequate selection of methodological approaches is extremely important for intercultural learning. Research conducted among teachers of confessional religious education in the Republic of Croatia shows that among teachers there is an increasing awareness and openness towards the promotion of knowledge, attitudes and skills that can be closely linked to intercultural education. Religious education teachers are open to the application of work methods that encourage intercultural learning among students, but there is still a low percentage of those religious education teachers who apply the learning methods that enable real encounters, existential confrontation and actual communication with members of other confessions/religions as part of religious education classes. The development of the behavioural dimension of intercultural competence is at a lower percentage compared to the others. However, it is precisely this dimension that is related to work methods that require interaction and critical thinking, although they are poorly represented in confessional religious education. The results confirm the thesis of the paper according to which the methodical approach in confessional religious education classes affects the development of students' intercultural competence. Confessional education classes possess theoretical assumptions for their development, but it seems that an appropriate methodical approach is still lacking.

It is clear from these results that religious education teachers are aware of the importance of intercultural education and that they have a positive attitude towards it. However, it should be noted that the situation in the Republic of Croatia regarding the student population is still quite homogeneous. Current migrations, however, change the situation in modern society on a daily basis. Previously an extremely homogeneous ethnic and religious situation, Croatian society will probably soon become more plural considering the pluralism of cultures, religions and life attitudes. This situation will be felt even more strongly in classrooms. Multicultural diversity calls for new models of learning and teaching, i.e., intercultural and interreligious teaching and learning. The necessary development of students' intercultural competence will require additional efforts by the responsible institutions for initial and lifelong education in order to enable religious education teachers to acquire additional knowledge, improve their skills and build the appropriate attitudes necessary for working in pluralistic classes. For more adequate solutions and appropriate programmes of the mentioned institutions, there needs to be further research and new data. Given that this research did not have a sufficient number of respondents for a representative sample, which prevented the application of the obtained results to the general population, future research could focus on a larger number of members of other religious communities in the Republic of Croatia in order to obtain more comprehensive and representative results.

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