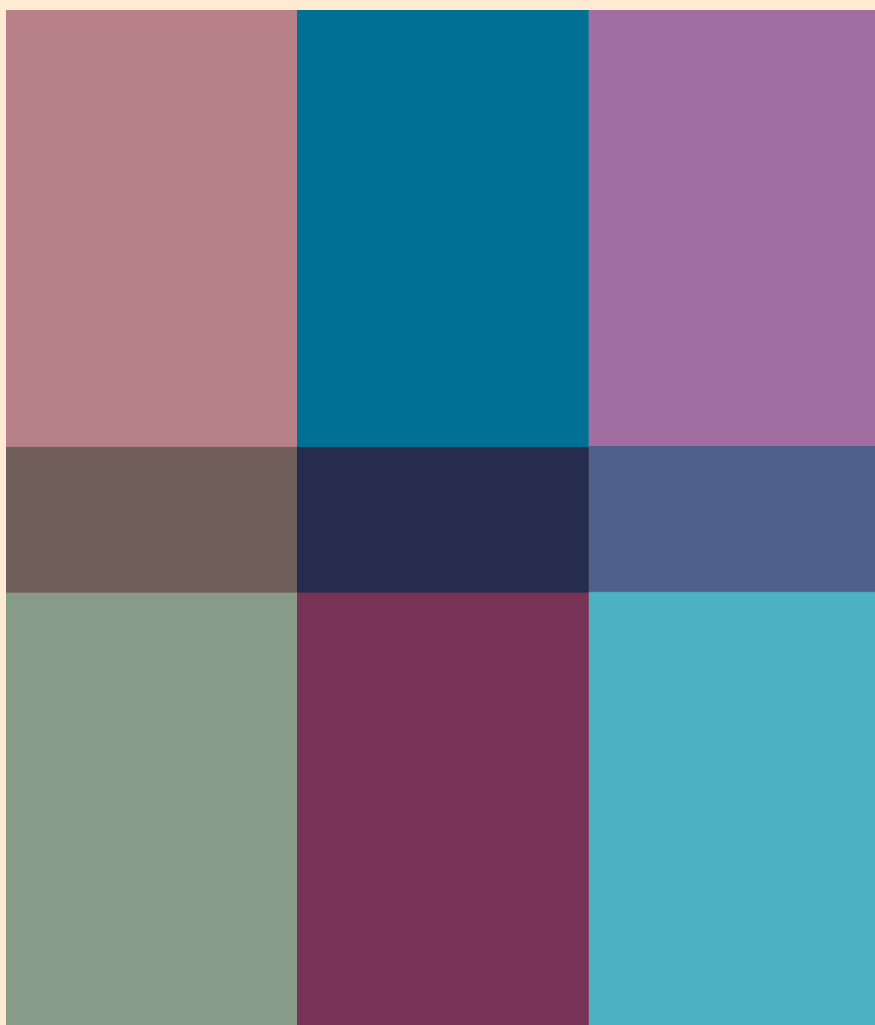


# C ■ E ■ P ■ S *Journal*

Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal  
*Revija centra za študij edukacijskih strategij*

---

Vol.14 | N°4 | Year 2024



**Editor in Chief / Glavni in odgovorni urednik**

IZTOK DEVETAK – Faculty of Education,  
University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia

**Associate Editors / Področni uredniki in urednice**

SLAVKO GABER – Faculty of Education,  
University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia  
JANEZ KREK – Faculty of Education,  
University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia  
KARMEN PIŽORN – Faculty of Education,  
University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia  
VERONIKA TAŠNER – Faculty of Education,  
University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia

**Editorial Board / Uredniški odbor**

BRANKA BARANOVIĆ – Institute for Social Research  
in Zagreb, Zagreb, Croatia  
SANJA BERČNIK – Faculty of Education,  
University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia  
MATEJA DAGARIN FOJKAR – Faculty of Education,  
University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia  
TOMAŽ DEŽELAN – Faculty of Social Sciences, University  
of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia  
VLATKA DOMOVIĆ – Faculty of Teacher Education,  
University of Zagreb, Zagreb, Croatia  
TATJANA HODNIK – Faculty of Education,  
University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia  
GEORGETA ION – University Autònoma Barcelona,  
Barcelona, Spain  
MOJCA JURIŠEVIĆ – Faculty of Education,  
University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia  
VIDA MANFREDA KOLAR – Faculty of Education,  
University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia  
MILENA KOŠAK BABUDER – Faculty of Education,  
University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia  
ANA KOZINA – Educational Research Institute,  
Ljubljana, Slovenia  
IRENA LESAR – Faculty of Education,  
University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia  
JOAKIM LINDGREN – Department of Applied Educational  
Science, Umeå University, Sweden  
BRUNO LOSITO – Department for Educational Sciences,  
University Studi Roma Tre, Rome, Italy  
SUNČICA MACURA – Faculty of Education,  
Institute for Kragujevac, Serbia  
BENJAMIN MANGILA - Josefin H. Cerilles State College,  
Zamboanga del Sur, Mindanao, Philippines  
LJUBICA MARIANOVIĆ UMEK – Faculty of Arts,  
University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia  
SILVIJA MARKIĆ - Ludwigsburg University of Education,  
Institute for Science and Technology, Germany  
MARIANA MOYNOVA – University of Veliko Turnovo,  
Veliko Turnovo, Bulgaria  
IRENA NANČOVSKA ŠERBEC – Faculty of Education,  
University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia  
HANNELE NIEMI – Faculty of Behavioural Sciences,  
University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland

JERNEJA PAVLIN – Faculty of Education,  
University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia  
MOJCA PEČEK ČUK – Faculty of Education,  
University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia  
ANA PEŠKAN – Faculty of Philosophy,  
University of Belgrade, Belgrade, Serbia  
ROMINA PLEŠEC GAŠPARIČ – Faculty of Education,  
University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia  
ROBERT POTOČNIK – Faculty of Education,  
University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia  
ANDREJA RETELJ – Faculty of Arts,  
University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia  
PAST SAHLBERG – The University of Melbourne,  
Faculty of Education, Australia  
BLERIM SAQIPI – University of Priština, Kosovo  
JURIJ SELAN – Faculty of Education,  
University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia  
DARIJA SKUBIC – Faculty of Education,  
University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia  
VASILEIOS SYMEONIDIS – Institute of Education Research  
and Teacher Education, University of Graz, Austria  
KEITH S. TABER – Faculty of Education,  
University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK  
JANEZ VOGRINC – Faculty of Education,  
University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia  
MATEJ VOŠNJAK – Faculty of Education,  
University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia  
KONSTANCA ZALAR – Faculty of Education,  
University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia  
ROBERT WAAGENAR – Faculty of Arts,  
University of Groningen, Groningen, Netherlands

**Vol.14, N°4, Year 2024****Issue Editors / Urednici številke:**

SUNČICA MACURA and MOJCA PEČEK  
Revija Centra za študij edukacijskih strategij  
*Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*  
ISSN 2232-2647 (online edition / spletna verzija)  
ISSN 1855-9719 (printed edition / tiskana verzija)  
*Publication frequency:* 4 issues per year  
*Subject:* Teacher Education, Educational Science  
*Published by / Založila:* University of Ljubljana Press  
*/ Založba Univerze v Ljubljani / For the publisher:* Gregor  
Majdič, The Rector of the University of Ljubljana  
*/ rektor Univerze v Ljubljani / Issued by / izdala:* Faculty  
of Education, University of Ljubljana / Univerza v Ljubljani,  
Pedagoška fakulteta / *For the issuer:* Karmen Pižorn,  
The Dean of the Faculty of Education / dekanja Pedagoške  
fakultete UL  
*Technical editor:* Tina Matić / *English language editor:*  
Terry T. Jackson and Neville J. Hall / *Slovene language*  
*editing:* Tomaž Petek / *Cover and layout design:* Roman  
Ražman / *Typeset:* Igor Cerar / *Print:* Birografika Bori

# C · E · P · S *Journal*

Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal

*Revija Centra za študij edukacijskih strategij*

The CEPS Journal is an open-access, peer-reviewed journal devoted to publishing research papers in different fields of education, including scientific.

## Aims & Scope

The CEPS Journal is an international peer-reviewed journal with an international board. It publishes original empirical and theoretical studies from a wide variety of academic disciplines related to the field of Teacher Education and Educational Sciences; in particular, it will support comparative studies in the field. Regional context is stressed but the journal remains open to researchers and contributors across all European countries and worldwide. There are four issues per year. Issues are focused on specific areas but there is also space for non-focused articles and book reviews.

## About the Publisher

The University of Ljubljana is one of the largest universities in the region (see [www.uni-lj.si](http://www.uni-lj.si)) and its Faculty of Education (see [www.pef.uni-lj.si](http://www.pef.uni-lj.si)), established in 1947, has the leading role in teacher education and education sciences in Slovenia. It is well positioned in regional and European cooperation programmes in teaching and research. A publishing unit oversees the dissemination of research results and informs the interested public about new trends in the broad area of teacher education and education sciences; to date, numerous monographs and publications have been published, not just in Slovenian but also in English.

In 2001, the Centre for Educational Policy Studies (CEPS; see <http://ceps.pef.uni-lj.si>) was established within the Faculty of Education to build upon experience acquired in the broad reform of the

national educational system during the period of social transition in the 1990s, to upgrade expertise and to strengthen international cooperation. CEPS has established a number of fruitful contacts, both in the region – particularly with similar institutions in the countries of the Western Balkans – and with interested partners in EU member states and worldwide.



Revija Centra za študij edukacijskih strategij je mednarodno recenzirana revija z mednarodnim uredniškim odborom in s prostim dostopom. Namenjena je objavljanju člankov s področja izobraževanja učiteljev in edukacijskih ved.

## Cilji in namen

Revija je namenjena obravnavanju naslednjih področij: poučevanje, učenje, vzgoja in izobraževanje, socialna pedagogika, specialna in rehabilitacijska pedagogika, predšolska pedagogika, edukacijske politike, supervizija, poučevanje slovenskega jezika in književnosti, poučevanje matematike, računalništva, naravoslovja in tehnike, poučevanje družboslovja in humanistike, poučevanje na področju umetnosti, visokošolsko izobraževanje in izobraževanje odraslih. Poseben poudarek bo namenjen izobraževanju učiteljev in spodbujanju njihovega profesionalnega razvoja.

V reviji so objavljeni znanstveni prispevki, in sicer teoretični prispevki in prispevki, v katerih so predstavljeni rezultati kvantitativnih in kvalitativnih empiričnih raziskav. Še posebej poudarjen je pomen komparativnih raziskav.

Revija izide štirikrat letno. Številke so tematsko opredeljene, v njih pa je prostor tudi za netematske prispevke in predstavitev ter recenzije novih publikacij.

---

The publication of the CEPS Journal in 2023 and 2024 is co-financed by the Slovenian Research Agency within the framework of the Public Tender for the Co-Financing of the Publication of Domestic Scientific Periodicals.

*Izdajanje revije v letih 2023 in 2024 sofinancira Javna agencija za raziskovalno dejavnost Republike Slovenije v okviru Javnega razpisa za sofinanciranje izdajanja domačih znanstvenih periodičnih publikacij.*

---



## Contents

---

### EDITORIAL

- 7 Discrimination of Children in Vulnerable Situations in Education: The Current State of Affairs and Strategies for Overcoming It

— SUNČICA MACURA AND MOJCA PEČEK

---

---

### FOCUS

- 13 The Approach of Schools to Ethnic Diversity: The Perspective of Majority and Minority Pupils

*Pristop šol k etnični raznolikosti: pogledi učenk in učencev večinske in manjšinskih etničnih skupin*

— KARMEN MLINAR AND MOJCA PEČEK

---

- 33 Young People with Complex Needs as a Particular Challenge for the Education System

*Mladi s kompleksnimi potrebami kot poseben izziv za vzgojno-izobraževalni sistem*

— ŠPELA RAZPOTNIK, MATEJ SANDE, BOJAN DEKLEVA,  
DARJA TADIČ, MIJA MARIJA KLEMENČIČ ROZMAN AND  
JANA RAPUŠ PAVEL

---

- 55 The Uncertainty of School in a Time of Uncertainty: Perspectives of Different Coalitions in the Aftermath of the School Mass Shooting in Serbia

*Negotovost šole v času negotovosti: perspektive različnih koalicij po množičnem streljanju na šoli v Srbiji*

— SANJA STOJILJKOVIĆ AND BARBARA BLAŽANIN

---

- 81 Challenging Divisions Through Teacher Education and History Teaching: The Case of Bosnia and Herzegovina

*Problemiziranje razdeljenosti skozi izobraževanje učiteljev in poučevanje zgodovine: primer Bosne in Hercegovine*

— LARISA KASUMAGIĆ-KAFEDŽIĆ AND LEJLA MULALIĆ

---

- 103 Dropout From the Primary Education System of Roma Children from Substandard Settlements in Serbia: The View of Pedagogical Assistants  
*Osip romskih otrok iz podstandardnih naselij v Srbiji iz sistema osnovnošolskega izobraževanja: pogled pedagoških pomočnikov*  
— STEFAN MILUTINOVIĆ AND VOJIN SIMUNOVIĆ
- 

## VARIA

- 123 The Role and Effect of Profanity in Children's Literature  
*Vloga in učinek preklinjanja v otroški literaturi*  
— SABINA VIŠČEK
- 
- 145 Rural Teacher Competencies: An International Comparative Study on the Territorial Dimension of Rural Schools  
*Kompetence učiteljev na podeželskih šolah: mednarodna primerjalna študija o ozemeljski dimenziji podeželskih šol*  
— JUAN LORENZO LACRUZ, FRANCESC BUSCÀ DONET AND PILAR ABÓS OLIVARES
- 
- 171 What is the Role of Science in Post-Socialist Education and Society? Insights from a Survey of Preschool Teachers from Croatia, Serbia and Slovenia  
*Kakšna je vloga znanosti v postsocialističnem izobraževanju in družbi? Spoznanja iz raziskave med vzgojitelji predšolskih otrok iz Hrvaške, Srbije in iz Slovenije*  
— ŽELJKA IVKOVIĆ HODŽIĆ, LIDIJA VUJIČIĆ AND ŽELJKO BONETA
- 
- 195 Laboratory Use Self-Efficacy of Turkish Pre-Service Science Teachers Trained in Different Teacher Education Programmes  
*Samoučinkovitost uporabe laboratorija pri turških študentih, bodočih učiteljih naravoslovja, ki so se usposabljali v različnih programih izobraževanja učiteljev*  
— OKTAY KIZKAPAN, NAGIHAN TANIK ÖNAL AND ASLI SAYLAN KIRMIZIGÜL
-

---

## REVIEW

- 215 Sara Ahmed, *Complaint!*, Duke University Press,  
2021; 359 pp.: ISBN 978-1-4780-1771-4

— NINA PERGER

---

- 221 List of Referees in Year 2024





DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26529/cepsj.2041>

## **Discrimination of Children in Vulnerable Situations in Education: The Current State of Affairs and Strategies for Overcoming It**

This focus issue of the Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal is dedicated to children and young people living in vulnerable situations, those whose security, wellbeing and development are at risk due to the lack of care and protection from adults and the lack of access to essential services. Various groups of vulnerable children and young people often become victims of prejudice and discrimination, thus exasperating their already burdensome living circumstances. Discrimination is followed by dropout, marginalisation and social exclusion, resulting in the development, education and wellbeing of vulnerable groups being severely jeopardised.

Worldwide efforts of international organisations, national governments and education policies to fight discrimination and ensure equal opportunities for all children are therefore one of the priorities on the political and education agenda. Global commitment to the protection of children's rights, education for all children, and improving education systems by endorsing principles of inclusive education based on antidiscrimination policy has been present since the adoption of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989) and the *Salamanca Statement* (UNESCO, 1994), to name just the two of the most cited international documents that strive to safeguard children. However, although education systems in various countries are engaged in the task of combating discrimination, they are not truly defeating it, shedding doubt on the declared commitment. On the other hand, even when there is a genuine dedication to children's rights and an inclusive approach, reduced understanding of how discrimination against children is manifested is compromising struggles to develop inclusive policies and services (Webb, 2004). Children are still exposed to various forms of discrimination, from individuals, educational institutions and education systems.

The present focus issue reflects the need to reaffirm, strengthen and align in the centre the (lost) responsibility towards vulnerable and marginalised children. The contributions in the focus issue convey the urgent need for state institutions, governments and experts to assume responsibility in the field of education, social care and other essential services in order to provide additional support and secure the development and education of vulnerable children.

The focus issue consists of five articles that deal with diverse groups of vulnerable children, written by 14 authors from three countries. In the first two contributions, the participants involved in the studies are children and young

people, thus providing readers with a rare opportunity to understand the world of children and young people through their own eyes, rather than from the viewpoint of the adults (Cohen et al., 2007). The third and fourth articles allow readers to gain deep insights into the mechanisms generating entire “vulnerable populations” due to the harmful policies of certain governments, despite their best intentions. Finally, the fifth article deals with the viewpoints of pedagogical assistants, the closest informers about Roma children growing up in the extreme poverty of substandard ghetto settlements.

The focus issue opens with Karmen Mlinar and Mojca Peček's paper *The Approach of Schools to Ethnic Diversity: The Perspective of Majority and Minority Pupils*. This contribution presents the first study in Slovenia to examine minority and majority pupils' perceptions of schools' efforts to embrace distributive equality and foster diversity recognition. The authors explore how Albanian, Bosniak, Hungarian, Serbian and Roma pupils perceive schools' approach to ethnic diversity in comparison to the majority Slovenian pupils. The data were collected with questionnaires completed by 897 pupils from basic schools. The findings reveal statistically significant differences in the perceptions of Bosniak and Slovenian pupils regarding distributive equality, and of Hungarian and Slovenian, and Serbian and Slovenian pupils regarding diversity recognition. Furthermore, the analysis of the differences in the perception of both dimensions for each ethnic group showed statistically significant differences for all ethnic groups except for Hungarians. The authors point out that the pupils' less positive perception of schools' efforts to foster diversity signal underlying issues connected to discriminatory societal norms and systemic inequalities. Schools should therefore adopt a comprehensive strategy that focuses above all on the recognition of diversity at different levels, from the organisational to the pedagogical. Mlinar and Peček conclude that their study reveals shortcomings and weaknesses of the Slovenian school system from the perspective of inclusion and could therefore provide important information for political and structural reforms.

The second article, *Young People with Complex Needs as a Particular Challenge for the Education System* by Špela Razpotnik, Matej Sande, Bojan Dekleva, Darja Tadič, Mija Marija Klemenčič Rozman and Jana Rapuš Pavel, provides valuable insights into perceptions of another particularly vulnerable group: young people with complex needs. The research described in the paper draws on two national Slovenian studies about young people in psychosocial distress and represents the first first-person perspective qualitative research of their experiences and perceptions of formal support services in Slovenia. The authors are interested in how vulnerable young people view the benefits and threats derived from various social systems: family, school, peer networks, the local

community and (formal) support services. Using thematic analyses, the authors investigated these systems in terms of being supportive or threatening, from the perspective of the 32 young people with complex needs who were interviewed within the research. The results suggest the predominance of threatening factors, on the one hand, and a lack of accessible, integrated and continuous support, on the other. The authors emphasise that institutions generate a “revolving door effect”, sending young people with complex needs from one service to another and leaving them excluded. A set of recommendations for improving the existing state of affairs is presented in the conclusions: organisations and support services should network with each other and create interdisciplinary and holistic responses to the complex needs of young people, with school having a central place in this regard; activities between different support services should be more coordinated; professionals need to be trained for cooperation; and mental health specialists need to become facilitators of cooperation and reduce their expert role in diagnosing distress experienced by young people.

The third contribution, entitled *The Uncertainty of School in a Time of Uncertainty: Perspectives of Different Coalitions in the Aftermath of the School Mass Shooting in Serbia*, deals with the tragic event that happened when a seventh grader killed nine pupils and a school guard in the Vladislav Ribnikar Primary School in Belgrade. In their paper, Sanja Stojiljković and Barbara Blažanin analyse the response of the Serbian Ministry of Education to the tragedy, which, in addition to striking the immediate victims, also made the wider population of school pupils vulnerable and in need of further support. In the aftermath of the shooting, the state of shock, confusion, uncertainty and anxiety created a pressing need for clear and immediate policy interventions to restore stability and trust in the school and community. However, policies were changing in response to the main stakeholders (authority representatives, teachers and parents), revealing the great tension that arose due to their different beliefs about schooling after the tragedy. The main purpose of the study was to explore the stakeholders’ perspectives regarding the question of whether schooling should continue, and if so, how? In order to understand the different meanings of the policies and their impact on the roles of pupils within the education system, the authors use narrative policy analysis of 16 official educational documents and 53 newspapers and blog articles that included the reactions of stakeholders. The study highlights the damaging effect of inconsistency in policies on pupils’ wellbeing, and reveals the unfavourable position of teachers in the decision-making process. Above all, it emphasises the potential harmful effects of inconsistency in policies on pupils’ wellbeing and academic life. In conclusion, Stojiljković and Blažanin stress that the main concern should not have been

whether schooling should stop or continue, but how to create a line of consistent and stable recommendations aligned with the policy created.

The fourth article in the focus issue, entitled *Challenging Divisions Through Teacher Education and History Teaching: The Case of Bosnia and Herzegovina*, is written by Larisa Kasumagić-Kafedžić and Lejla Mulalić. The paper offers qualitative insights into the engagement of university teachers who work within the deeply divided education system in the post-war society of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Kasumagić-Kafedžić and Mulalić are in a double role: as authors of the article who are passionately presenting teaching approaches in education for peace; and as self-reflexive teacher educators who are implementing those approaches with their first-year bachelor's students and master's student teachers at the Department of English Language and Literature of the University of Sarajevo. The authors emphasise that when a divided education system is based on ethnocentric views, as is the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina, children and young people become the most vulnerable groups, as they are the victims of the structures from the past, created and maintained by adults. In order to overpower ethnocentric perspectives within education and society, the authors are implementing alternative teaching strategies dealing with the issues of segregation, discrimination and divisiveness. Drawing on the theoretical framework of critical pedagogy, intercultural pedagogy and peace education, Kasumagić-Kafedžić and Mulalić aim to create a safe space for students and student teachers in their university classrooms. These classrooms become niches where future teachers have the opportunity to discuss sensitive topics, such as ethnic and religious prejudice, and to overcome the false division into "us and them". In their conclusion, the authors stress that the role of teacher educators in teaching for peace, and the role of universities in shaping the values for local and global responsibilities, become crucial in countries and education systems affected by painful histories, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In the fifth article, *Dropout From the Primary Education System of Roma Children from Substandard Settlements in Serbia: The View of Pedagogical Assistants*, Stefan Milutinović and Vojin Simunović analyse factors related to the dropout of Roma pupils who grow up in substandard settlements in Serbia. The crucial – and often only – stakeholders who are actively involved in the educational process of these children are pedagogical (Roma) assistants. The goal of the study was to explore the largely overlooked perspective of these assistants on individual, school and family factors affecting the dropout of Roma pupils. The findings of the thematic analyses of semi-structured interviews with 40 pedagogical assistants identify gender as the major individual factor influencing drop out, since socio-cultural norms influence parental decisions to withhold girls from

education. The single-parent family is the major family factor, since it results in weak parental involvement in the education of children, while discrimination in schools is the major school factor, including direct discrimination by school principals and school staff who advise Roma parents to enrol their children in special schools or adult education facilities. In the conclusions, Milutinović and Simunović emphasise that a holistic approach and improvement in collaboration between families, schools and social services, as well as strengthening the role of pedagogical assistants, should enhance the support of at-risk pupils such as Roma living in marginalised communities harshly affected by poverty.

In the varia section, Sabina Višček's article entitled *The Role and Effect of Profanity in Children's Literature* poses interesting questions about the use of inappropriate language in children's literature. The analysis and synthesis of modern literary Slovenian texts suitable for the first six years of Slovenia's nine-year primary school, as well as the comparative method, showed that profanity and expletives are stylistically and semantically diverse, and that their pragmatic nature needs to be taken into consideration. In most cases, profanity and insults are justifiably placed in Slovenian literature for children. Most often, they appear as a motif; less often, they are used as the central theme (or motif) in the text. The author stresses that the reading mentor has a significant role in alerting readers to the function of profanity in the text.

The second article in the varia section, *Rural Teacher Competencies: An International Comparative Study on the Territorial Dimension of Rural Schools* by Juan Lorenzo Lacruz, Francesc Buscà Donet and Pilar Abós Olivares, presents a descriptive study of competences related to the territorial dimension of rural schools among teachers working in rural schools in Spain, France and Portugal. The results point out that the competences with the greatest mastery are those referring to the design and development of programmes, followed by professional competences and school-community relations. The authors conclude, inter alia, that there is a need to reinforce competences that are not included in training plans, but that are nevertheless considered more necessary and important for working in rural schools.

The third contribution in this section, entitled *What is the Role of Science in Post-Socialist Education and Society? Insights from a Survey of Preschool Teachers from Croatia, Serbia and Slovenia*, is written by Željka Ivković Hodžić, Lidija Vujičić and Željko Boneta. The authors present the results of a survey conducted among preschool teachers in Croatia, Serbia and Slovenia that aimed to investigate the attitudes of the participants towards the role of science in education and society. The results of the study show that preschool teachers in all three countries are inclined to a postmaterialist view of science, but that

it is possible to distinguish between two value orientations, which they named “post-materialism” and the “materialist image of the child”. Older teachers accept the “materialist image of the child” more than younger teachers, confirming a certain intergenerational value change, which authors interpreted as a shift from a collectivist to an individualistic approach to education.

The last paper in the varia section, entitled *Laboratory Use Self-Efficacy of Turkish Pre-Service Science Teachers Trained in Different Teacher Education Programmes*, is written by Oktay Kizkapan, Nagihan Tanık Önal and Asli Saylan Kirmizigül. The quantitative research presented in this paper aimed to compare the laboratory self-efficacy of 289 pre-service science teachers who attended two different science teacher education programmes in Turkey. The study results indicate significantly higher total scores of laboratory use self-efficacy of pre-service science teachers trained in the programme where physics, chemistry and biology courses were taught through theoretical and laboratory applications, compared to programmes where these courses were reduced and laboratory hours were abolished. However, there was no significant difference between the two programmes in the sub-dimension applying scientific process skills. The authors discuss the results of the study and their implications in the light of current literature.

This focus issue of the Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal ends with a book review by Nina Perger, who presents the book by Sara Ahmed entitled *Complaint!* (Duke University Press, 2021).

SUNČICA MACURA AND MOJCA PEČEK

## References

- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in education*. Routledge.
- United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (1994). *The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education*. UNESCO.
- United Nations. (1989). Convention on the Rights of the Child. *Treaty Series*, 1577, 3.
- Webb, E. (2006). The impact of discrimination on children. In J. Gunning (Ed.), *Ethics, law and society* (pp. 181–194). Routledge.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26529/cepsj.1887>

## The Approach of Schools to Ethnic Diversity: The Perspective of Majority and Minority Pupils

KARMEN MLINAR<sup>\*1</sup> AND MOJCA PEČEK<sup>2</sup>

≈ The growing multiculturalism in schools in most European countries, including Slovenia, poses new challenges for both teachers and pupils. Although the Slovenian school system relies on numerous strategies and guidelines for the inclusion of minority pupils, discrimination is still an everyday issue, especially when it comes to pupils from former Yugoslav countries and Roma. The aim of the present study was to investigate how pupils ( $N = 897$ ) from minority groups (Albanians, Bosniaks, Hungarians, Roma, Serbs) perceive the approach of schools to ethnic diversity in comparison to the majority group (Slovenians). Exploratory factor analysis was conducted on a self-developed scale, resulting in a two-factor solution: schools' efforts to embrace distributive equality (F1) and to foster diversity recognition (F2). For each factor, the perceptions of minorities were compared with those of the majority. The results show statistically significant differences in the perceptions of Bosniaks and Slovenians within F1, and of Hungarians and Serbs and Slovenians within F2. Furthermore, an analysis of the differences in the perception of F1 and F2 for each ethnic group show statistically significant differences for all ethnic groups except for Hungarians. The results suggest that the Slovenian school system needs to re-evaluate its practices by making more effort to foster the recognition of diversity. By recognising and valuing diversity alongside equality, schools can better address discriminatory practices and promote inclusion, which leads to the uniqueness of each identity being respected, valued and appreciated. Possible strategies to achieve this goal are discussed.

**Keywords:** diversity recognition, distributive equality, basic school, pupils, discrimination

1 <sup>\*</sup>Corresponding Author. Department for Continuing Education Research and Educational Technologies, University for Continuing Education Krems, Krems an der Donau, Austria; [karmen.mlinar@donau-uni.ac.at](mailto:karmen.mlinar@donau-uni.ac.at).

2 Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia.

## Pristop šol k etnični raznolikosti: pogledi učenk in učencev večinske in manjšinskih etničnih skupin

KARMEN MLINAR IN MOJCA PEČEK

~ Naraščajoča večkulturnost šol v večini evropskih držav, vključno s Slovenijo, prinaša nove izzive za učiteljice in učitelje pa tudi za učenke in učence. Čeprav se slovenski šolski sistem opira na številne strategije in smernice za vključevanje učenk in učencev iz manjšinskih etničnih skupin, je diskriminacija še vedno vsakodnevna težava, zlasti ko gre za učenke in učence iz držav nekdanje Jugoslavije in Rome. S to raziskavo smo želeli ugotoviti, kako učenke in učenci ( $N = 897$ ) manjšinskih etnij (albanske, bošnjaške, madžarske, romske, srbske) gledajo na pristop šol k etnični raznolikosti v primerjavi z učenkami in učenci večinske etnije (slovenske). Trditve z lestvice, ki sta jo razvili avtorici prispevka, so bile analizirane z eksploratorno faktorsko analizo, rezultat katere sta bila dva faktorja: prizadevanje šol za doseganje distributivne pravičnosti ( $F_1$ ) in pripoznanje različnosti ( $F_2$ ). Za vsak faktor je bila opravljena primerjava pogledov učenk in učencev manjšinskih etnij s pogledi učenk in učencev večinske etnije. Rezultati kažejo statistično pomembne razlike v pogledih Bošnjakinj in Bošnjakov ter Slovenk in Slovencev v okviru  $F_1$  in v pogledih Madžark in Madžarov ter Srbinj in Srbov v primerjavi s pogledi Slovenk in Slovencev v okviru  $F_2$ . Poleg tega analiza razlik v pogledih znotraj  $F_1$  in  $F_2$  za vsako etnijo kaže statistično pomembne razlike za vse etnije, razen za Madžarke in Madžare. Rezultati nakazujejo, da bi moral slovenski šolski sistem ponovno preučiti svoje prakse in več napora vložiti v spodbujanje pripoznanja različnosti. S pripoznanjem in z vrednotenjem različnosti, ne samo enakosti, lahko šole učinkoviteje naslovijo diskriminatorne prakse in spodbujajo inkluzijo, kar vodi do razvoja spoštovanja, vrednotenja in cenjenja edinstvenosti vseh identitet. V prispevku so predstavljene različne strategije za doseg tega cilja.

**Ključne besede:** pripoznanje različnosti, distributivna pravičnost, osnovna šola, učenci, diskriminacija



## Introduction

The increasing multiculturalism in schools across Europe, including Slovenia, has brought a variety of challenges for teachers and pupils. Many policies and strategies at the national and international level focus on equality in the education system and the promotion of inclusion and respect for all people regardless of their origin, yet cases of discrimination persist (Allan, 2010; Medarić et al., 2021; UNESCO, 2020; Žakelj & Kralj, 2012). The latter mainly affects members of marginalised ethnic groups who have less power and a lower status in the broader society (Kteily & Richeson, 2016). In Slovenia, this applies in particular to the Roma community and ethnic groups from the former Yugoslavia (Medvešek & Vrečer, 2005; UMAR, 2021; Zavrtnik, 2012). Members of these ethnic groups are also frequently confronted with overt and passive forms of discrimination in the school system, both on a formal and informal level (Klun, 2021; Macura-Milovanović et al., 2013; Medarić et al., 2021; Peček & Lesar, 2006; Peček & Macura-Milovanović, 2012; Razpotnik, 2014; Sedmak et al., 2020; Žakelj & Kralj, 2012).

Slovenia has implemented various strategies and guidelines for the inclusion of Roma and immigrant children in the education system based on the principle of equality for all (Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Slovenia, 2023; National Education Institute Slovenia, 2012; Republic of Slovenia Gov. si, 2024). However, these documents lack comprehensive support for schools, mainly due to their frequent ambiguity and lack of specificity and the resulting different (even controversial) interpretations (Milharčič Hladnik, 2012; Mlinar, 2021; Solano & Huddleston, 2020). Furthermore, critical analysis shows that, despite the stated intention to promote respect for ethnic diversity, there is an underlying expectation of assimilation, i.e., the abandonment of the original culture and the adoption of the cultural norms of the ethnic majority group (Klun, 2021; Medarić et al., 2021; Mlinar, 2021).

Against this background, the central concern when implementing the inclusion of ethnic minorities in the education system appears to be ensuring equality in the distribution of opportunities and resources, which is also a common strategy in other European countries (Allan, 2010; Geppert et al., 2012; Lesar, 2018; Lynch & Lodge, 2002; Pešikan & Ivić, 2016). In this case, however, differences are veiled rather than recognised, which is the generative cause of inequalities between ethnic groups (Lynch & Lodge, 2002). The lack of recognition of differences can be found at the micro and macro levels of the education system, as shown by studies on teachers' attitudes towards different ethnic groups (Medarić et al., 2021; Milharčič Hladnik, 2012; Peček & Lesar, 2006;

Sedmak et al., 2020). Yet, little is known about how pupils perceive the approach of schools to diversity considering their ethnic background. Understanding the perceptions of pupils is crucial for developing effective strategies to combat discrimination, promote inclusion and ensure that every pupil feels valued and respected in the education system. The present study therefore aims to explore the perceptions of minority pupils in relation to whether schools are more inclined to develop an ethos centred on equality in a distributive sense and/or on the recognition of diversity compared to their Slovenian counterparts.

### *Building an inclusive school through embracing equality and diversity*

Most European countries and education systems are committed to inclusive education that is open to all pupils regardless of their background or characteristics and promotes the participation of all pupils without exclusion or discrimination of any kind (Booth & Ainscow, 2016; Medarić et al., 2021; Sedmak et al., 2020). However, deeper analysis shows that inclusion, both on a declarative and practical level, is far too often understood primarily as the pursuit of equality in terms of the distribution of resources and opportunities (Lynch & Lodge, 2002; Lesar, 2018). More specifically, equality is assumed to be achieved when there is an increase in the enrolment rates of marginalised groups in educational institutions and when resources are distributed according to the principle of need, meaning that instruction is adapted so that every pupil can learn and participate in the learning process and activities.

However, for many groups, including ethnic groups, inequality cannot be solved through (re)distribution alone. Ethnic groups in particular are subject to inequality because they are not recognised in their diversity (Galeotti, 2002; Lynch & Lodge, 2002). Even when policy seems to acknowledge the importance of diversity recognition, it implicitly or explicitly talks about the importance of accepting others *despite* their diversity. This means that diversity is defined as a deviation from the standards set by the majority, i.e., *normality*, and is therefore not recognised as a valuable quality (Galeotti, 2002; Lægaard, 2008). Furthermore, inequalities in recognition result from differences in social status and are primarily an expression of socio-cultural and symbolic injustices. These are based on established patterns of representation, interpretation and communication that manifest themselves as cultural hegemony, symbolic misrepresentation or lack of recognition (Lynch & Lodge, 2002). Additionally, far too often it seems that in society, and even more so in schools, ensuring equality through distribution is understood as difference-blindness, a concept in which differences are ignored and therefore minorities are not recognised in the name of sameness (Galeotti, 2002; Schofield, 2010). Furthermore, teachers often believe that talking about

differences reinforces prejudice, stereotypes and conflict, and they consequently tend not to include diversity in their curricula (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020a). This is particularly true in systems such as the Slovenian one, which is characterised by conflictual ethnic relations (Medvešek & Vrečer, 2005).

Schools must therefore not only focus on issues of distribution, but also actively address diversity and ensure the representation, recognition and participation of pupils from different ethnic groups. In this way, the school conveys an important message about the visibility and recognition of all cultures in the school context that goes beyond a sole focus on the majority (McIlwaine, 2014). This is of particular importance for pupils from marginalised ethnic groups, as it means that they can and should embrace their unique identity without having to conform to the majority culture. On the other hand, pupils from the majority population can also benefit from this, as they can avoid internalising messages of division and superiority, and thus refrain from developing prejudices and discriminatory tendencies towards minorities. The latter usually happens precisely when minority cultures do not receive the same visibility – or even a certain level of visibility – compared to the majority culture (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020b; Zick et al., 2001). This also applies to learning about the historical, cultural and natural heritage of one's own ethnic group. In this way, the school promotes the development and strengthening of pupils' ethnic identity, pride and awareness. Cultivating a positive sense of self, belonging, ethnic pride and a corresponding social or group identity is important for pupils' social, emotional and cognitive development, while also promoting understanding and respect for the differences and identities of others (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020a; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Giving pupils the opportunity to learn their mother tongue is another very important element, not only because it can increase pupils' academic performance, but also because of the positive impact on their self-esteem and their construction of a positive identity while preserving their culture and roots (Budinoska, 2017; Saeed, 2021). Moreover, the incorporation of languages from different ethnic groups in the curriculum can benefit all pupils: as well as acquiring a new language, they can also develop respect for other languages and cultures (Budinoska, 2017). Finally, in a school committed to the recognition of diversity, the curricula and teaching materials, including textbooks, should accurately reflect the diversity of the school/community's population. Indeed, this is a crucial indicator of the school's commitment to recognising diversity. Acquiring knowledge about different cultures can have a positive impact on reducing prejudice among pupils (Vervae et al., 2018). In other words, the necessary changes are about "the silences that need to be broken about demonised and marginalised differences" (Lynch & Lodge, 2002, p. 182).

*The context of the study: The Slovenian school system*

Slovenia is a multicultural country with three constitutionally recognised ethnic groups (Italians, Hungarians and Roma) as well as a large number of other ethnic groups, mainly from former Yugoslav countries (SURS, 2020, 2023). Unfortunately, the last census was carried out more than two decades ago, in 2002. According to this census, Slovenians make up 83.06% of the total population, while the remaining 16.94% are mainly members of former Yugoslav countries (Croats, Serbs, Bosniaks, Albanians, Macedonians, Montenegrins) and members of the three constitutionally recognised ethnic groups (Italians, Hungarians and Roma) (SURS, 2002). However, as immigration to Slovenia is increasing year on year (SURS, 2020), it can be assumed that the number of non-Slovenians is higher than stated in the census.

The ethnic groups in Slovenia are granted different rights, including in the education system. For example, Italians and Hungarians have the right (with some organisational differences) to education in their mother tongue and to the preservation and development of their cultural identity (Regulating Special Rights of Members of the Italian and Hungarian Ethnic Communities in the Field of Education Act, 2001). Various strategies and measures are taken for the Roma community to facilitate their inclusion in the school system (e.g., employment of a “Roma assistant”, additional financial support for schools); at the legislative level, however, they are not granted the same rights as the other two constitutionally recognised ethnic groups (Republic of Slovenia Gov.si, 2024). Despite outnumbering the three aforementioned groups, ethnic groups from the former Yugoslavia have no special rights in terms of preserving or developing their culture and ethnic identity, including learning their mother tongue. In addition, Roma pupils and pupils from the former Yugoslavia often face stigmatisation, marginalisation and discrimination from their teachers and classmates. The main reasons for this are teachers’ lack of knowledge or unwillingness to adapt their teaching to the pupils’ language and cultures, as well as a lack of valorisation and respect for cultural differences (Klun, 2021; Macura-Milovanović et al., 2013; Medarić et al., 2021; Peček & Lesar, 2006; Sedmak et al., 2020; Žakelj & Kralj, 2012).

It is therefore not surprising that the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) 2020 (Solano & Huddleston, 2020) describes Slovenian policy on the integration of immigrants into the education system as slightly unfavourable, defining it as “equality on paper”. As in society, immigrants are not seen as equals, but rather as strangers in the education system, and little more is done than guaranteeing them equal basic rights and support in accessing compulsory education.

In the light of the foregoing discussion, it can be stated that the Slovenian education system is declaratively committed to an ethos based on equality, but it appears that little is being done when it comes to recognising diversity through the dimensions outlined in the previous sections.

### *Research problem and aims of the study*

As mentioned above, research shows that, in most European countries, the predominant approach to inclusion seems to be the pursuit of equality in a distributive sense, but (too) little is done for the recognition of diversity. However, there is a research gap in terms of understanding pupils' perceptions of these two dimensions. The aim of the present study is therefore to fill this research gap by investigating minority pupils' perceptions of schools' efforts to guarantee an equal distribution of opportunities and resources, on the one hand, and the recognition of diversity in schools, on the other, in comparison to the perceptions of the majority group. Furthermore, we seek to determine whether the perceptions of majority and minority pupils regarding the dimension of equality differ significantly from the perception of the dimension of diversity.

The investigation of these perceptions is of great importance for the development of pedagogical strategies and measures aimed at improving the inclusiveness of schools. Furthermore, shedding light on pupils' perceptions can help to identify potential gaps or problematic aspects between policy and pupils' experiences, allowing for more effective implementation of inclusive practices. This in turn supports the overarching goal of creating an educational environment that not only recognises diversity, but actively promotes an understanding and appreciation of it, thus supporting the development of a more inclusive society for future generations.

## **Method**

### *Participants*

The study included 897 pupils (54.6% female; 45.2% male; 2 did not respond) from 59 basic<sup>3</sup> school classes in Slovenia. The average age of the pupils was 11.7 years ( $SD = 1.19$ ) and they were attending grades 5–8.

The majority of the pupils declared their ethnicity to be Slovenian (87.0%), followed by pupils belonging to an ethnic minority: Bosniaks (4.0%), Hungarians (2.7%), Albanians (2.3%), Serbs (2.1%) and Roma (1.9%). Some

---

3 Primary and lower secondary education in Slovenia is organised as a single-structure nine-year basic school, which is compulsory for pupils from 6 to 15 years of age (European Commission, 2023).

pupils stated that they belonged to one or more other ethnic groups, but these were not included in the study due to their small numbers.

### *Instrument*

In accordance with the purpose of the study, the authors developed a scale with 16 items, taking into account the relevant theoretical framework and previous studies in this field (e.g., Booth & Ainscow, 2016; Derman-Sparks et al., 2020a; Gay, 2010; Peček & Lesar, 2006). The items were formulated to assess pupils' perceptions of various aspects of implementing an inclusive school ethos based on a commitment to equality of opportunities and resources, and recognition of diversity. Specifically, the items included aspects related to school and curricular policies, academic and social support for pupils, pupils' participation in the learning process, and measures aimed at recognising different aspects of pupils' identity.

Each item was rated using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The higher the value, the stronger the agreement with the item.

### *Research design*

The questionnaires were distributed to the pupils under the direct supervision of teachers, ensuring compliance with established ethical standards for research with minors (Graham et al., 2013). The standards and instructions were communicated in detail to the teachers by the authors of the study in written documentation. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary and no incentives were offered or provided.

## **Results**

### *Initial factor analysis*

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) with varimax rotation was performed on the 16 items in SPSS 28.0.0 to examine the factor structure of the scale. According to the purpose of the study, the factor analysis was performed with the data of the Slovenian pupils. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure was .92, indicating a "superb" sampling adequacy for the analysis (Field, 2018).

The EFA yielded two factors (F1 and F2) with eigenvalues exceeding 1, explaining 49.71% of the total variance. The internal consistency for the two subscales for the Slovenian pupils was high (F1:  $\alpha = .87$ ; F2:  $\alpha = .80$ ). However, further analysis of the subscales of the Albanian and Hungarian pupils showed that their internal consistency would be improved by the deletion of items.

Specifically, the results suggested the deletion of one item in the F1 subscale for the Albanian pupils and one item in the F2 subscale for the Hungarian pupils.

In line with established practices and recommendations (Field, 2018), both items were deleted and the EFA was repeated to ensure that the deletion of the items had no impact on the factor structure.

### *Revised factor analysis*

After deleting the two items, a revised EFA was conducted with varimax rotation on 14 items in SPSS 28.0.0 to re-evaluate the factor structure. The EFA was conducted for the Slovenian pupils' data for the reasons specified above. The KMO measure was superb ( $= .92$ ).

Two factors had eigenvalues over Kaiser's criterion of 1 and explained 52.34% of the total variance. The items clustering on the same factor indicated that F1 represents the schools' efforts to embrace distributive equality (sample item: *At my school, all people are respected, regardless of their ethnicity*), while F2 represents schools' efforts to foster diversity recognition (sample item: *In the classroom, we learn about the characteristics of different ethnic groups*). The items in both factors had loadings over 0.50, with nine items clustering on the first factor and five items clustering on the second factor.

The "Embracing distributive equality" and "Fostering diversity recognition" subscales for the Slovenian pupils both had high internal consistency (Table 1). In the next step, internal consistency tests were conducted for both subscales for the other ethnic groups. Table 1 shows the results, which demonstrate adequate internal consistency for both subscales for each ethnic group.

**Table 1**

*Internal consistencies for the subscales "Embracing distributive equality" and "Fostering diversity recognition" for each ethnic group*

Pupils' ethnic group	Embracing distributive equality		Fostering diversity recognition	
	$\alpha$	N of items	$\alpha$	N of Items
Slovenians	.86	5	.77	9
Bosniaks	.90	5	.81	9
Hungarians	.94	5	.62	9
Albanians	.68	5	.78	9
Serbs	.83	5	.78	9
Roma	.95	5	.76	9

*Majority and minority pupils' perception of schools' efforts to embrace distributive equality and to foster diversity recognition*

In order to assess how minority pupils perceive the efforts of schools to embrace distributive equality (EDE) and to foster diversity recognition (FDR) compared to the majority group, a One-sample *t*-Test in SPSS 28.0.0 was conducted for each subscale.

Descriptive statistics and results for pupils' perception of schools' efforts to EDE and FDR for different ethnic groups are presented in Table 2.

*Majority and minority pupils' perception of schools' efforts to embrace distributive equality*

The results regarding the pupils' perception of schools' efforts to EDE (Table 2) were statistically significant only for the Bosniak pupils ( $t = -2.67$ ;  $p = .01$ ), which means that the Bosniak pupils perceive the schools' efforts to EDE less favourably than Slovenian pupils do. However, it must be said that all ethnic groups perceive school's efforts to EDE as very strong (above  $M = 4.00$ ).

In order to assess the practical significance of the differences in the perception among ethnic minority pupils compared to majority pupils, effect sizes were calculated for each ethnic group, namely Cohen's *d*. Medium effect sizes ( $d \geq 0.5$ ) were found for Bosniaks, Hungarians, Serbs and Roma, while small effect sizes ( $d \geq 0.2$ ) were found for Albanian pupils.

*Majority and minority pupils' perception of schools' efforts to foster diversity recognition*

The results regarding the pupils' perception of schools' efforts to FDR (Table 2) were statistically significant for the Hungarian ( $t = 3.40$ ;  $p = .00$ ) and Serbian ( $t = -2.45$ ;  $p = .02$ ) pupils. These results indicate that the Hungarian pupils perceive the schools' efforts to FDR more positively compared to the Slovenian pupils. Conversely, the Serbian pupils perceive these efforts less favourably than the Slovenian pupils do.

The effect sizes, which assess the magnitude of difference in the perception of schools' efforts to FDR among ethnic minority pupils compared to majority pupils, show large effect sizes ( $d \geq 0.8$ ) for Serbs, Bosniaks and Albanians, and medium effect sizes ( $d \geq 0.5$ ) for Hungarians and Roma.

*Difference in pupils' perception of schools' efforts to embrace distributive equality and to foster diversity recognition*

In order to determine whether there are differences between perceptions of schools' efforts to EDE and FDR for each ethnic group, we conducted



a Paired-samples *t*-Test in SPSS 28.0.0. As shown in Table 2, all of the ethnic groups, with the exception of Hungarians, perceive the schools' efforts to FDR less favourably than the efforts to EDE.

The practical significance of the differences, computed with Cohen's *d*, shows large effect sizes ( $d \geq 0.8$ ) between the perception of schools' efforts to EDE and FDR for Serbian and Albanian pupils, medium effect sizes ( $d \geq 0.5$ ) for Slovenian, Hungarian and Bosniak pupils, and small effect sizes ( $d \geq 0.2$ ) for Roma pupils.

**Table 2**

*Descriptives and results of One-sample t-Test and Cohen's d for the subscales "Embracing distributive equality" and "Fostering diversity recognition" for each ethnic group, and of Paired-samples t-Test comparing the subscales "Embracing distributive equality" and "Fostering diversity recognition" for each ethnic group*

Pupils' ethnic group	Embracing distributive equality					Fostering diversity recognition					Embracing distributive equality VS Fostering diversity recognition			
	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
Slovenians	4.43 (0.57)					3.78 (0.79)					25.87	779	<b>&lt;.001</b>	0.70
Hungarians	4.41 (0.67)	-0.17	23	.86	0.67	4.20 (0.60)	3.40	23	<b>.00</b>	0.60	1.76	23	.09	0.57
Roma	4.53 (0.77)	0.54	16	.60	0.77	4.05 (0.76)	1.45	16	.17	0.76	5.14	16	<b>&lt;.001</b>	0.39
Albanians	4.38 (0.44)	-0.51	20	.62	0.44	3.50 (0.82)	-1.56	20	.14	0.82	4.28	20	<b>&lt;.001</b>	0.94
Bosniaks	4.09 (0.77)	-2.67	35	<b>.01</b>	0.77	3.52 (0.89)	-1.74	35	.09	0.89	4.86	35	<b>&lt;.001</b>	0.70
Serbs	4.39 (0.60)	-0.28	18	.78	0.60	3.21 (1.02)	-2.45	18	<b>.02</b>	1.02	5.67	18	<b>&lt;.001</b>	0.91
Total	4.41 (0.59)					3.77 (0.80)								

Note. Statistically significant differences are reported in bold.

## Discussion

The results of the present study show that minority pupils perceive schools' efforts to embrace equality and to foster diversity recognition differently from majority pupils.

Regarding the perception of schools' efforts to EDE, the results show significant differences between Slovenian and Bosniak pupils, with the latter rating the situation worse than the former. However, the practical significance resulting from the effect sizes shows that the difference between the perceptions of all minority pupils, except for Albanians (the difference is small), and Slovenian pupils is medium. Apart from that, all of the surveyed pupils perceive the schools' efforts to EDE very positively, which means that, from their point of

view, schools are quite successful in their efforts to ensure equal opportunities and resources for all ethnic groups.

The results regarding the perception of the schools' efforts to FDR show significant differences between Hungarians and Slovenians, as well as between Serbs and Slovenians. It is interesting to note that Hungarian pupils perceive the schools' efforts to FDR more positively and Serbian pupils less positively than Slovenian pupils. Furthermore, Serbian pupils seem to be more likely to think that schools are not doing enough to foster diversity recognition. Even more revealing are the results of the effect sizes, which show large differences between Slovenians and pupils from former Yugoslav countries (Serbs, Bosniaks, Albanians), and medium differences between Slovenians and the two constitutionally recognised ethnic groups (Hungarians, Roma). Unfortunately, these results are not surprising. As already mentioned, despite the different rights of Hungarians and Roma, both ethnic groups are granted special (and thus more) rights in education compared to the ethnic groups from the former Yugoslavia. Since Roma pupils in Slovenian schools are often victims of stigmatisation and discrimination, even when it comes to their formal integration into the school system (Klun, 2021; Milharčič Hladnik, 2012; Peček & Macura-Milovanović, 2012; UMAR, 2021), different results would have been expected. However, it must be added that the majority of Roma pupils in the present study come from the same region as the Hungarian pupils (Prekmurje), which is characterised by an inclusive and bilingual social, political and education system (Šuklje & Banutai, 2012), and the results probably reflect this.

The findings also show that all of the surveyed pupils, with the exception of the Hungarians, perceive the schools' efforts to EDE more favourably than the schools' efforts to FDR, which again is not surprising given the special rights granted to the Hungarian minority in education. These rights legally oblige schools to guarantee pupils not only equal access to education and resources, but also teaching in their mother tongue (bilingual education) and the right to preserve and develop their ethnic identity (Act Regulating Special Rights of Members of the Italian and Hungarian Ethnic Communities in the Field of Education, 2001). The majority of Roma pupils in our study come from Prekmurje, which means that their schooling is also influenced by a high level of social, political and educational inclusion. This may explain the small difference between the Roma pupils' perception of the schools' efforts to EDE and FDR. The greatest difference between the perception of schools' efforts to EDE and FDR is found among Serbian and Albanian pupils, which perhaps shows their greater sensitivity to issues related to visibility, respect and recognition of diversity, as both ethnic groups face these kinds of problems in society at large

as well as in the school system (Medvešek & Vrečer, 2005; Peček & Lesar, 2006; Slovenian Press Agency, 2024).

While the majority of pupils perceive schools to be focused on distributive equality, their less positive perception of schools' efforts to foster diversity recognition points to underlying issues related to discriminatory societal norms and systemic inequalities. It can be concluded that pupils' perceptions mirror the MIPEX 2020 findings discussed in the introduction (Solano & Huddleston, 2020).

Furthermore, the findings show that pupils are quite aware of the different status and treatment of different ethnic groups when it comes to giving them a voice and recognition. Indeed, for Hungarian pupils, the school system takes into account both equality of distribution and recognition of diversity, thus ensuring the development of their identity. Pupils from former Yugoslavian countries, on the other hand, are more critical when it comes to the recognition of diversity at school. The main tendency in the Slovenian education system when it comes to pupils from unrecognised minorities seems to be assimilation, with their diversity being seen as an obstacle rather than a value (Mlinar, 2021), and the findings show that pupils are well aware of this tendency. One finding that may be surprising at first glance is the perception of Roma in terms of distributive equality and diversity recognition; although they, too, are granted some special rights, assimilationist and discriminatory tendencies are still very present at formal and informal levels (Klun, 2021; Mlinar, 2021; UMAR, 2021). However, the results can be explained by the fact that most of the pupils in our study come from Prekmurje, where the status of the Roma community is much better than in other parts of Slovenia.

#### *Implications for pathways to inclusion: Promoting distributive equality and diversity recognition in schools*

In order to effectively address the inequalities identified in the present study, schools should adopt a comprehensive strategy that focuses not only on measures aimed at the distribution of opportunities and resources, but above all on the recognition of diversity at different levels, from the organisational to the pedagogical level (e.g., curricula, syllabuses, assessment systems). Appropriate teaching practices aimed at recognising diversity as a value must be implemented, whereby teachers must not understand equality in a difference-blind way, as such an understanding can have many negative effects on minority pupils' identity and their social and academic success (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020b; Lynch & Lodge, 2002; Schofield, 2010). The school should promote caring interactions between pupils of different ethnic backgrounds so that they feel comfortable and happy in diversity (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020a).

Schools could use various strategies to achieve this goal; for example, they should place more emphasis on different perspectives and narratives in the curriculum to promote an understanding and appreciation of diversity. Ideas related to the development of multicultural curricula are not new (see, for instance, Vižintin, 2014), but the development of such curricula – let alone their implementation – is not yet a reality in Slovenian schools, although teachers do have the autonomy to include teaching about other cultures as part of various subjects and topics in the current curriculum. In doing so, it is crucial that they use an inclusive approach that enables the recognition and appreciation of all ethnicities by pointing out, *inter alia*, the achievements and role of different ethnicities in, for instance, the progress of civilisation (Branch, 2020; Derman-Sparks et al., 2020a, 2020b). Furthermore, a very common but problematic “tourist approach” should be avoided, where teachers only talk about diversity as something exotic and emphasise stereotypical characteristics of different ethnic groups (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020a). The choice of school materials (e.g., textbooks) used by teachers is therefore important. All too often, these materials are monocultural and ethnocentric (Skubic Ermenc, 2007), with content that portrays ethnic minority groups in a stereotypical and/or discriminatory or even racist way (Šabec, 2016). Such materials do not necessarily have to be avoided, but they need to be used with a critical approach aimed at developing critical thinking in pupils and helping them to reflect on representations of diversity (see also Murray, 2017). Furthermore, books (but also cartoons, etc.) that are “mirrors, windows and sliding doors” can greatly contribute to pupils developing their own positive identities, as well as enhancing their understanding of other identities (Sims Bishop, 1990; Style, 1996). However, a school committed to diversity should focus not only on diversifying teaching materials and curricula, but also on opening up critical discourses on privilege, power dynamics, discrimination and social justice issues in order to develop in pupils the need and will to challenge these issues actively and in the spirit of activism (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020a; Mlinar, 2021).

As already mentioned, Slovenian legislation seems to be inclusive when it comes to the education of Hungarian and Italian pupils, but assimilationist when it comes to pupils with a migrant background and partly also in the case of Roma pupils (Mlinar, 2021). Consequently, there is a need for policy changes, as they form the structural and legal framework for inclusion. In this context, such changes must explicitly address the importance of measures that aim not only to ensure equality, especially in access to goods, but also to implement the recognition of diversity. The lack of legislative support in this regard, particularly for the social inclusion of migrant pupils, has also been highlighted by

MIPEX in recent years (Huddleston et al., 2015; Solano & Huddleston, 2020). Furthermore, it is crucial that policy reforms are evidence- or research-based (Lindsay, 2007) and include the perspectives of those who are most affected by them, i.e., pupils from different ethnic groups. However, the current debate on the education of immigrant children in Slovenia shows that there is overwhelming resistance at both the state and societal level to regulations that would give immigrant children the opportunity to learn their mother tongue and culture at school (Komisija za slovenski jezik v javnosti pri SAZU, 2024; National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia, 2024; Slovenian Press Agency, 2024). The presence of such resistance signifies that the road to understanding and implementing the recognition of diversity for the development of all facets of pupils' identity remains arduous and uphill.

All of this shows that teachers in Slovenia do not have adequate legal support to create an inclusive school where respect and recognition of diversity for all is promoted. Yet, many schools and teachers are confronting this obstacle (Jelen Madruša, 2015) by recognising diversity as a strength and actively working against unfair and discriminatory practices. Such schools can serve as catalysts for social change and building a future society in which diversity is seen as a desirable value. That being said, it is important that teachers and schools are not left to fend for themselves in this process. Teacher education programmes as well as continuing professional development programmes should equip teachers with the necessary knowledge, competences and sensitivity to enable them to implement all of the above and contribute to the development of schools as places where the recognition of diversity is an integral part of everyday school life.

## Conclusions

The results of the present study show that both factors resulting from our scale exhibit strong internal consistency, indicating robust constructs. Adequate internal consistency was observed across all ethnic groups, suggesting that the measures maintain their reliability across different cultural contexts. In this respect, the scale can be used as a tool for further studies on the implementation of measures to promote equality and diversity in different educational settings.

Apart from this, the study has some limitations. Like other self-report scales, the scale may be subject to socially desirable responses, especially considering the fact that pupils completed the questionnaires in the presence of teachers. Therefore, future studies should consider the inclusion of social desirability scales.

In the present study, pupils had to indicate their belonging to one or more ethnic groups. Additional dimensions could be added for future studies; for example, the ethnic group of parents (and grandparents) could be included in order to differentiate between pupils who are descendants of immigrants and pupils who are immigrants themselves.

Future studies could also include aspects addressing other sources of inequality (Lynch & Lodge, 2002) in order to give a more nuanced perspective on pupils' perceptions of schools' efforts to implement inclusion on different levels.

Despite these limitations, the present study is the first in Slovenia to examine minority and majority pupils' perceptions of schools' efforts to embrace distributive equality and foster diversity recognition. It thus provides a valuable insight into the shortcomings and weaknesses of the Slovenian school system from the perspective of inclusion. The results could therefore serve as important information for political and structural reforms.

## References

- Allan, J. (2010). Questions of inclusion in Scotland and Europe. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 25(2), 199–208. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08856251003658710>
- Booth, T., & Ainscow, M. (2016). *The index for inclusion: A guide to school development led by inclusive values*. Index for Inclusion Network.
- Branch, A. J. (2020). Promoting ethnic identity development while teaching subject matter content: A model of ethnic identity exploration in education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 87, 1–11. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2019.102918>
- Budinoska, I. (2017). Učitelji o jezikovnih vprašanjih pri vključevanju učencev priseljencev v slovenski vzgojno-izobraževalni sistem [Teachers' positions on language issues related to the inclusion of immigrant children in the Slovenian education system]. *Jezik in Slovtstvo*, 62(1), 45–54.
- Derman-Sparks, L., Olsen Edwards, J., & Goins, C. M. (2020a). *Anti-bias education for young children and ourselves*. NAEYC.
- Derman-Sparks, L., Olsen Edwards, J., & Goins, C. M. (2020b). Teaching about identity, racism, and fairness: Engaging young children in anti-bias education. *American Educator*, 44(4), 35–40.
- European Commission. (2023). *Eurydice. National Education Systems. Slovenia*. <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/slovenia/overview>
- Field, A. (2018). *Discovering statistics using IBM SPSS statistics*. SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Galeotti, A. E. (2002). *Toleration as recognition*. Cambridge University Press.
- Gay, G. (2010). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice*. Teachers College Press.
- Geppert, C., Bauer-Hofmann, S., & Hopmann, S. T. (2012). Policy reform efforts and equal opportunity – An evidence-based link?. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, 2(2), 9–29. <https://doi.org/10.26529/cepsj.382>

Graham, A., Powell, M., Taylor, N., Anderson, D., & Fitzgerald, R. (2013). *Ethical research involving children*. UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti.

Huddleston, T., Bilgili, Ö., Joki, A. L., & Vankova, Z. (2015). *Migrant Integration Policy Index 2015*.

CIDOB and MPG. <http://2015.mipex.eu/>

Jelen Madruša, M. (Ed.). (2015). *Priročnik za izvajanje programa Uspešno vključevanje otrok priseljencev* [Implementation guide for the programme The Successful Integration of Immigrant Children]. ISA institut.

Klun, L. (2021). Do vključevanja z izključevanjem [To exclude by including]. *Socialno Delo*, 60(1), 3–17. <https://doi.org/10.51741/sd.2021.60.1.3-17>

Komisija za slovenski jezik v javnosti pri SAZU. (2024). 10. izjava Komisije: Poučevanje maternih jezikov otrok priseljencev v slovenskih osnovnih in srednjih šolah [Commission Declaration No.10: Teaching the mother tongues of immigrant children in Slovenian primary and secondary schools]. <https://www.sazu.si/events/65e82d8d3baec8e215fa928>

Kteily, N. S., & Richeson, J. A. (2016). Perceiving the world through hierarchy-shaped glasses: On the need to embed social identity effects on perception within the broader context of intergroup hierarchy. *Psychological Inquiry*, 27(4), 327–334. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1047840X.2016.1215212>

Lægaard, S. (2008). Galeotti on recognition as inclusion. *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 11(3), 291–314. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13698230802276363>

Lesar, I. (2018). Celovitejšje razumevanje pravičnosti kot podlaga vpeljevanja inkluzivnosti [A more comprehensive understanding of equity as a basis for the implementation of inclusiveness]. In D. Rutar (Ed.), *Egalitarne simbolizacije življenja s posebnimi potrebami* (pp. 117–139). Cirius.

Lindsay, G. (2007). Educational psychology and the effectiveness of inclusive education/mainstreaming. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 77, 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1348/000709906X156881>

Lynch, K., & Lodge, A. (2002). *Equality and power in schools. Redistribution, recognition and representation*. Routledge.

Macura-Milovanović, S., Munda, M., & Peček, M. (2013). Roma pupils' identification with school in Slovenia and Serbia: Case studies. *Educational Studies*, 39(5), 483–502. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2013.801768>

McIlwaine, P. (2014). *ABC: Promoting an anti-bias approach to education in Northern Ireland*. Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education.

Medarić, Z., Sedmak, M., Dežan, L., & Gornik, B. (2021). Integration of migrant children in Slovenian schools. *Culture and Education*, 33(4), 758–785. <https://doi.org/10.1080/11356405.2021.1973222>

Medvešek, M., & Vrečer, N. (2005). Percepcije sociokulturne integracije in nestrpnosti: nove manjšine v Sloveniji [Perceptions of sociocultural integration and intolerance: The new minorities in Slovenia]. In M. Komac, & M. Medvešek (Eds.), *Percepcije slovenske integracijske politike* (pp. 271–378). Inštitut za narodnostna vprašanja/Institute for Ethnic Studies.

Milharčič Hladnik, M. (2012). Medkulturni odnosi in socialne participacije v kontekstu migracij

[Intercultural relations and social participation in the migration context]. *Two Homelands: Migration Studies*, 36, 7–18.

Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Slovenia. (2023). *Strategija vključevanja tujcev, ki niso državljani Evropske unije, v kulturno, gospodarsko in družbeno življenje Republike Slovenije* [Strategy for the integration of non-EU nationals into the cultural, economic and social life of the Republic of Slovenia].

[https://www.gov.si/assets/ministrstva/MNZ/SOJ/Novice/2023/11-November/Strategija-vkljucovanja-tujcev-ki-niso-drzavljanj-Evropske-unije-v-kulturno-gospodarsko-in-druzbeno-zivljenje-Republike-Slovenije\\_09112023.pdf](https://www.gov.si/assets/ministrstva/MNZ/SOJ/Novice/2023/11-November/Strategija-vkljucovanja-tujcev-ki-niso-drzavljanj-Evropske-unije-v-kulturno-gospodarsko-in-druzbeno-zivljenje-Republike-Slovenije_09112023.pdf)

Mlinar, K. (2021). Pomen deklaracije o spoštovanju različnosti pri razvoju medkulturnega in protipristranskega etosa osnovne šole [The role of a declaration of respect of diversity in the development of an intercultural and anti-bias school ethos]. In I. Lesar, & M. Peček (Eds.), *Priseljenci v Sloveniji skozi raziskovalno prizmo študentov Pedagoške fakultete* (pp. 235–254). Pedagoška fakulteta Univerze v Ljubljani/Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana.

Murray, C. (2017). Conscious noticing : Anti-bias from policy to practice. *International Critical Childhood Policy Studies*, 6(1), 22–37.

National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia. (2024). *Predlog zakona o uresničevanju kulturnih pravic pripadnikov narodnih skupnosti narodov nekdanje Socialistične federativne republike Jugoslavije v Republiki Sloveniji (ZUKPPNS)* [Draft act on the exercising of cultural rights of members of the national communities of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the Republic of Slovenia (ZUKPPNS)]. <https://www.dz-rs.si>

National Education Institute Slovenia. (2012). *Smernice za vključevanje otrok priseljencev v vrte in šole* [Guidelines for the integration of migrant children into kindergartens and schools].

[https://www.gov.si/assets/ministrstva/MVI/Dokumenti/Osnovna-sola/Ucni-nacrti/Drugi-konceptualni-dokumenti/Smernice\\_za\\_vkljucovanje\\_otrok\\_priseljencev\\_v\\_vrte\\_in\\_sole.pdf](https://www.gov.si/assets/ministrstva/MVI/Dokumenti/Osnovna-sola/Ucni-nacrti/Drugi-konceptualni-dokumenti/Smernice_za_vkljucovanje_otrok_priseljencev_v_vrte_in_sole.pdf)

Peček, M., & Lesar, I. (2006). *Pravičnost slovenske šole: mit ali realnost* [Justice of Slovenian schools: Myth or reality]. Založba Sophia.

Peček, M., & Macura-Milovanović, S. (2012). Who is responsible for vulnerable pupils? The attitudes of teacher candidates in Serbia and Slovenia. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 35(3), 327–346. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2012.686105>

Pešikan, A., & Ivić, I. (2016). The sources of inequity in the education system of Serbia and how to combat them. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, 6(2), 101–124. <https://doi.org/10.26529/cepsj.90>

Razpotnik, Š. (2014). Izobraževanje skozi prizmo evropskega rasizma [Education in the perspective of the European racism]. In T. Devjak (Ed.), *Sodobni pedagoški izzivi v teoriji in praksi* (pp. 325–335). Pedagoška fakulteta Univerze v Ljubljani/Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana. *Regulating Special Rights of Members of the Italian and Hungarian Ethnic Communities in the Field of Education (35/01, 102/07-ZOsn-F and 11/18) Act 2001.*

<http://pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO2611>



Republic of Slovenia Gov.si. (2024). *Vključevanje Romov v vzgojno-izobraževalni proces* [Roma inclusion in the education process].

<https://www.gov.si/teme/vkljucivanje-romov-v-vzgojno-izobrazevalni-proces/>

Saeed, H. H. (2021). The role of mother tongue in early childhood education. *International Journal of Pedagogy, Innovation and New Technologies*, 8(2), 36–43. <https://doi.org/10.5604/01.3001.0015.8295>

Schofield, J. W. (2010). The colorblind perspective in school: Causes and consequences. In J. A.

Banks, & C. A. McGee Banks (Eds.), *Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives* (pp. 259–284).

John Wiley & Sons.

Sedmak, M., Gornik, B., Medarić, Z., Zadel, M., & Dežan, L. (2020). *Educational community and school systems: Slovenia. Migrant children and communities in a transforming Europe*. Znanstveno-raziskovalno središče.

[http://www.micreate.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/D4.1-National-Report-on-Educational-Community\\_Final\\_ZRS111.pdf](http://www.micreate.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/D4.1-National-Report-on-Educational-Community_Final_ZRS111.pdf)

Sims Bishop, R. (1990). Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. *Perspectives: A Review Journal of the Cooperative Services for Children's Literature*, 6(3), 9–11.

Skubic Ermenc, K. (2007). Interkulturnost v učnih načrtih slovenske osnovne šole [Interculturality in the Slovenian primary school curriculum]. *Pedagoška Obzorja = Didactica Slovenica: Časopis Za Didaktiko in Metodiko*, 22(1/2), 128–135.

Slovenian Press Agency. (2024, March 24). *Koalicija umika predlog učenja materinščine za otroke priseljencev iz bivše SFRJ* [The coalition withdraws the proposal to teach the mother tongue for the children of immigrants from the former SFRY]. N1.

[https://n1info.si/novice/slovenija/koalicija-umika-predlog-ucenja-materinscine-za-otroke-priseljencev-iz-bivse-sfrj/?fbclid=IwAR3qaIoOCOLNmSuzZWAqRcfTDriLY3KTUMp5GSePfOt8\\_WxdmXEvKzyPUSc](https://n1info.si/novice/slovenija/koalicija-umika-predlog-ucenja-materinscine-za-otroke-priseljencev-iz-bivse-sfrj/?fbclid=IwAR3qaIoOCOLNmSuzZWAqRcfTDriLY3KTUMp5GSePfOt8_WxdmXEvKzyPUSc)

Solano, G., & Huddleston, T. (2020). *Migrant Integration Policy Index 2020*. CIDOB and MPG.

<https://www.mipex.eu>

Style, E. (1996). Curriculum as window and mirror. *Social Science Record*, 33(2), 21–28.

Šabec, K. (2016). Slovenski učbeniki kot akter etnocentrične in rasistične socializacije: primer osnovnošolskih učbenikov za geografijo [Slovene textbooks as an agent of ethnocentric and racist socialization: The case of elementary school geography textbooks]. *Two Homelands: Migration Studies*, 2016(44), 139–152. <https://doi.org/10.3986/dd.2016.2.11>

Šuklje, T., & Banutai, E. (2012). Izzivi romske problematike v Sloveniji [Challenges of the Roma issue in Slovenia]. In T. Pavšič Mrevlje (Ed.), *13. slovenski dnevi varstvoslovja*. Fakulteta za varnostne vede/ Faculty of Criminal Justice and Security.

[https://www.fvv.um.si/DV2012/zbornik/policijska\\_dejavnost/Suklje\\_Banutai.pdf](https://www.fvv.um.si/DV2012/zbornik/policijska_dejavnost/Suklje_Banutai.pdf)

SURS. (2002). *Population Census results*. <https://www.stat.si/popis2002/si/default.htm>

SURS. (2020). *The main reason for first residence permits in Slovenia was employment*. <https://www.stat.si/StatWeb/en/News/Index/9272>

SURS. (2023). *Population*. <https://www.stat.si/StatWeb/en/Field/Index/17>

- Umaña-Taylor, A. J., Quintana, S. M., Lee, R. M., Cross, W. E., Rivas-Drake, D., Schwartz, S. J., Syed, M., Yip, T., & Seaton, E. (2014). Ethnic and racial identity during adolescence and into young adulthood: An integrated conceptualization. *Child Development*, 85(1), 21–39.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12196>
- UMAR. (2021). *European pillar of social rights, Slovenia 2000–2020*. UMAR.  
<https://www.umar.gov.si/en/publications/european-pillar-of-social-rights>
- UNESCO. (2020). *Global Education Monitoring Report 2020: Inclusion and education: All means all*. UNESCO. <https://doi.org/10.54676/JJNK6989>
- Vervaeet, R., Van Houtte, M., & Stevens, P. A. J. (2018). Multicultural school leadership, multicultural teacher culture and the ethnic prejudice of Flemish pupils. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 76, 68–77. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2018.08.009>
- Vižintin, M. A. (2014). Model medkulturne vzgoje in izobraževanja: Za uspešnejše vključevanje otrok priseljencev [The intercultural education model: For more successful inclusion of immigrant children]. *Two Homelands: Migration Studies*, 40, 71–89.
- Zavratnik, S. (2012). Images of immigrants in Slovenia: Insights from public opinion research. *Etniškum Studijos = Ethnicity Studies*, 1/2, 204–223.
- Zick, A., Wagner, U., Van Dick, R., & Petzel, T. (2001). Acculturation and prejudice in Germany: Majority and minority perspectives. *Journal of Social Issues*, 57(3), 541–557.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/0022-4537.00228>
- Žakelj, T., & Kralj, A. (2012). “It doesn’t happen in our school”: Ethnicity as a structural factor of peer violence in Slovenian schools. In Z. Medarić, & M. Sedmak (Eds.), *Children’s voices: Interethnic violence in the school environment* (pp. 27–84). University of Primorska, Science and Research Centre, Annales University Press.

## Biographical note

**KARMEN MLINAR**, PhD, is an assistant professor for intersectional continuing education research at the Department for Continuing Education Research and Educational Technologies, University for Continuing Education Krems, Austria. Her research interests include intersectionality, critical race theory, responses to diversity in society and education, teacher education and continuing education.

**MOJCA PEČEK**, PhD, is a professor of theory of education at the Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. Her research interests include teacher education, justice in educational systems, regulation policy of school systems, and inclusive and multicultural education.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26529/cepsj.1895>

## Young People with Complex Needs as a Particular Challenge for the Education System

ŠPELA RAZPOTNIK<sup>\*1</sup>, MATEJ SANDE<sup>2</sup>, BOJAN DEKLEVA<sup>2</sup>, DARJA TADIČ<sup>3</sup>,  
MIJA MARIJA KLEMENČIČ ROZMAN<sup>2</sup> AND JANA RAPUŠ PAVEL<sup>2</sup>

One of the phenomena that predicts poorer educational outcomes for young people, as well as poorer outcomes in other areas, is certainly the phenomenon of complex needs, i.e., challenges that cut across different domains, often combining psychosocial wellbeing, physical and mental health, socio-economic background, the burden of different challenges on the young persons' family, a non-dominant ethnic background, learning difficulties and other aspects. A key challenge with complex needs is the inability of systems (educational and others) to respond appropriately to them, resulting in young people being sent from door to door and being excluded, as well as other adverse responses for both parties (young people and services, educational and others). In order to understand the emergence of complex needs or multiple vulnerabilities, we need to analyse them using an intersectional perspective. In this paper, data from a national Slovenian study entitled Support Networks for Young People in Psychosocial Distress are analysed using a subsample of 32 young people from the overall sample of 203 interviewees. The subsample represents young people whose interviews show the greatest clustering of distress in various contexts of life. The interviews with the selected participants are qualitatively analysed using content analysis based on a scheme of key social systems: school/education, family, peer networks, local community and other (formal) support services. All of these systems are analysed in terms of being supportive or threatening according to the perception of the young person. In all of the systems, more threatening than supportive aspects were reported by young people with complex needs. An analysis of both kinds of factors can help us to think about the changes needed in educational and other systems in order to make them more responsive to the needs of particularly vulnerable young people.

**Keywords:** young people, psychosocial distress, complex needs, intersectionality, integrating services

1 \*Corresponding Author. Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia; [spela.razpotnik@pef.uni-lj.si](mailto:spela.razpotnik@pef.uni-lj.si).

2 Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia.

3 Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia; and Institute of Criminology at the Faculty of Law, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia.

## Mladi s kompleksnimi potrebami kot poseben izziv za vzgojno-izobraževalni sistem

ŠPELA RAZPOTNIK, MATEJ SANDE, BOJAN DEKLEVA, DARJA TADIČ,  
MIJA MARIJA KLEMENČIČ ROZMAN IN JANA RAPUŠ PAVEL

Eden izmed pojavov, ki napoveduje slabše rezultate mladih na področju izobraževanja pa tudi na drugih področjih, je gotovo pojav kompleksnih potreb, tj. izzivov, ki segajo na različna področja, pogosto pa združujejo psihosocialno počutje, telesno in duševno zdravje, socialno-ekonomsko ozadje, različna družinska bremena, nedominantno etnično ozadje, učne težave in morebitne druge vidike. Ključni izziv pri kompleksnih potrebah je nezmožnost sistemov (vzgojno-izobraževalnega in drugih), da bi se nanje ustrezno odzvali, zaradi česar se mlade pošilja od vrat do vrat, ter se jih na škodo obeh strani (mladih in tudi služb v podporo mladim) izključuje. Da bi razumeli nastanek kompleksnih potreb oz. večplastnih ranljivosti, jih moramo analizirati z medpresečne perspektive. V prispevku so analizirani podatki slovenske nacionalne raziskave z naslovom Podporne mreže mladih v psihosocialnih stiskah, ki je bila izvedena na podvzorcu 32 mladih iz skupnega vzorca 203 anketirancev. Podvzorec predstavlja mlade, pri katerih je v intervjujih razvidno največje kopičenje izzivov v različnih življenjskih kontekstih. Intervjuji z izbranimi udeleženci so kvalitativno analizirani z uporabo vsebinske analize na podlagi sheme ključnih družbenih sistemov: šola/izobraževanje, družina, vrstniške mreže, lokalna skupnost in druge (formalne) podporne službe. Vsi ti sistemi so analizirani glede na to, ali so po mladostnikovem dojemanju zanj odigrali podporno ali ogrožajočo vlogo. V vseh sistemih so mladi s kompleksnimi potrebami poročali o več ogrožajočih kot podpornih vidikih. Analiza obeh vrst dejavnikov nam lahko pomaga pri razmišljanju o potrebnih spremembah v vzgojno-izobraževalnih in drugih sistemih, da bi se ti bolj odzivali na potrebe posebej ranljivih mladih.

**Ključne besede:** mladi, psihosocialne stiske, kompleksne potrebe, medpresečnost, integriranje storitev

## Introduction

In the last decade, particularly after the Covid-19 pandemic, issues related to mental health, especially of young people, have become a strongly salient topic in Slovenia, both in the public media and in professional discourse. The critical points highlighted are the poor availability of help for young people in psychosocial distress, the lack of appropriate professional staff, and partly also the adequacy of existing models of help (Klemenčič Mirazchiyski, 2017; Mikuš Kos, 2017; Dekleva et al., 2018). In this regard, several studies have been carried out and published recently, but they are almost all limited to analyses of official statistical data (Jeriček Klanšček et al., 2018; Rupnik Vec & Silvar, 2019; Lavrič & Deželan, 2021). However, there have been no systematic attempts to investigate how young users experience the process and availability of formal help services, or how they deal with threatening and supporting factors in their life. This gap is filled by the present study, which, due to the relative novelty of the approach and the qualitative methodology, can be understood to be of an exploratory nature.

## Conceptualisation of vulnerability

The heterogenised or complex picture of the multiple dimensions of exclusion is reflected in different areas of the daily lives of individuals, at the intersection of different disciplines or domains: educational, social welfare, health and others. We can speak of vulnerability as a concept to describe a population with accumulated distress. Even if vulnerability manifests itself in different ways, vulnerable families or individuals share certain characteristics, with the common denominator being the accumulation of challenges in different areas of life. The following factors are typically clustered in their stories: lack of material security and stable housing, the presence of somatic problems, psychosocial distress, social isolation, relationship problems within the family or community, and difficulties in engaging with different organisations, including counselling or support services (Turnšek, et al., 2016, p. 33). The problems faced by vulnerable families and individuals are often multidimensional and intertwined. De Vries and Bouwkamp (2002) describe this interconnectedness in terms of the concept of 'radiation', which refers to the process of problems in particular areas of life interacting in a mutually reinforcing and negative way. Mešl and Kodele (2016) use the term 'multi-challenged families' to emphasise a resource and power perspective, rather than a deficit view of these families or individuals. Shannon and Rogue (2009, p. 2) eloquently describe the

intersectionality of multiple challenges by describing it as “living at the dangerous intersections of white supremacy, capitalism, and oppressive institutional structures”, drawing our attention to the contingency of the complexity and accumulation of problems in broader societal factors and trends. It is impossible to understand individual difficulties outside the contexts of their emergence, which are broadly socially conditioned.

### **An intersectional approach to vulnerability**

The concept of exclusion can, at this point, be linked to that of complex inequalities (Mladenović, 2016), complex needs (Grebenc & Kvaternik, 2008), intersections of exclusion (Razpotnik, 2004) and intersectionality (Kuhar, 2009). Inequalities are increasingly perceived in contemporary times as complex and disparate.

An important aspect of vulnerability is the involvement of individuals or families in diverse possible sources of support, which has led some authors to coin the term ‘multi-agency families’ (Sternad, 2012) or ‘families using multiple services’ (Demšar, 2021). Some authors also point out that unrealistic and misaligned expectations from the perspective of different institutions or services can result in withdrawal and avoidance of forms of assistance, rather than strengthening the process of finding solutions. Similarly, the bureaucratic and formalistic approach of institutions can lead to alienation from the very sources of help, precisely for those users who need the services the most. A common characteristic of vulnerable families or individuals is often the long history of failed attempts to establish support processes, where failure is frequently interpreted by different professions as an inability or unwillingness on the part of vulnerable individuals or families to seek and receive support (De Vries & Bouwkamp, 2002). The latter is particularly crucial for our research (Dekleva et al., 2021), which is one of the few studies in our field that is explicitly interested in the user aspect, and thus the potential failure to gain support is also highlighted from a different perspective than usual: on the side of the inadequately functioning support network rather than of the unsuccessful support seekers. The use of an intersectional approach could, according to Mladenović (2016), therefore be crucial for addressing complex inequalities, as it represents an attempt to go beyond understanding and consequently treating individual problems or vulnerabilities as individualised and particularised disabilities of individuals, and provides a framework for understanding inequalities as structurally contingent.

## From individual towards shared responsibility

The relationship between users and the various services needs to be analysed and discussed in the context of the changing relationship between the individual and the state. Since the 1970s, theorists such as Rosanvallon (1995) have been analysing how the traditional welfare state is no longer able to cope with new social issues, such as the emergence of poverty and the increase in unemployment. In the European context, the last decades have witnessed the transformation of the welfare state into a 'social investment state' (Giddens, 1998; Vandebroek et al., 2009; Vandebroek & Bouverne-De Bie, 2006). This means that the state no longer compensates for the individual's failures, but merely invests in the future success of its citizens, thus instrumentalising them more than before in terms of their profitability. The latter is also relevant to the educational sphere, which seems to have succumbed unreflectively to this trend. The tendency is to base social inclusion solely and primarily on employability and, consequently, on profitability and competitiveness. The changing construction of the welfare state implies the emergence of concepts such as individual responsibility and the discourse that there are no rights without duties (Beck, 2003; Giddens, 1998), which also implies that social rights are no longer taken for granted and guaranteed. Vandebroek et al. (2009) point out that this trend has not bypassed the relationship between vulnerable families, or parents within these families, and the state, whereby parents are increasingly seen as solely responsible for the future success of their children (Featherstone, 2006; Parton, 2006; Razpotnik, 2011).

Processes of intervention within education, social care and healthcare therefore take place in complex and heterogeneous social contexts. All of these processes involving support cannot be conceived as reciprocal, where individuals and communities mutually shape each other. In this respect, Vandebroek et al. (2009) suggest that we can draw on the concept of the 'rich child', the 'rich adolescent' and the 'rich parent'. This concept carries the assumption that children, adolescents and their parents are resourceful and potentially powerful social actors from the perspective of practitioners. All action, whether embedded in educational contexts, social welfare or informal networks, is enacted through lived interaction with others. The neoliberal concept of individual responsibility (which implies that the individual is responsible for his/her own choices and, consequently, for success or failure, independently of, for example, different starting points, complex needs, intergenerational transmissions of disadvantage and intersections of deprivation) is also too narrow, in the sense that it leaves insufficient room for interconnectedness and interdependence, and obscures the assumption

that human development is fundamentally embedded in relationships with others (Razpotnik, 2011). Accordingly, Vandenbroeck et al. (2009) offer the concept of shared responsibility instead of the increasingly popular discourse of individual responsibility. Within the concept of shared responsibility, accountability is understood as something that emerges in a dialogical interaction between the actors involved. The knowledge and solutions that emerge in this interspace are necessarily contextual, provisional and micro-political (Mozère, 2007). In contrast to the neoliberal conception of citizenship, relational citizenship should not be seen as the property of individuals, but rather as an apparatus of reflection and a starting point for the design of new educational and other relational practices. Furthermore, it is not a static category, something that can be achieved once and for all, but rather a nomadic process of becoming and in-betweenness (Razpotnik, 2011). Vandenbroeck et al. (2009) inevitably associate respect for diversity with relational citizenship. However, not diversity as a demand for tolerance towards those who deviate from the dominant norms, but reflection on the dominant norms that create deviation and exclusion. In the fields of social welfare, education and health, the concept of relational citizenship does not lead us to create programmes, interventions or forms of work that increase autonomy and add power, but rather to develop programmes where people can simply try out and live reciprocity, interdependence and adding power (Ramaekers, 2010). In terms of policymaking, the concept of relational citizenship does not necessarily require building entirely new spaces and models of working in the field of vulnerability, but rather establishing reflection and the already raised open questions of intentions of action in existing approaches of work and support. The concept of relationality is seen as aligned with the prism of intersectionality, as it involves a broader interplay of relationships in which both challenges and solutions emerge.

### **Research problem**

In 2017, the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Slovenia responded to the recognised problem of increasing psychosocial distress among young people by commissioning a preliminary study entitled *Evaluating Accessibility of Services for Young People with Psychosocial and Mental Health Problems* (Dekleva et al., 2018), and later, in 2021, by further deepening this research with its continuation under the title *Support Networks for Young People in Psychosocial Distress* (Dekleva et al., 2021). This was a complex and multifaceted study that attempted to address the issue from different perspectives. The most extensive part of the empirical research covered information obtained from young people who had experienced different types of psychosocial distress.



Researching the first-person perspective of users of mental health services is very rare on a global scale, and it has never previously been undertaken in Slovenia. However, without this perspective, we cannot understand the problem of children and young people with complex difficulties, nor can we propose appropriate solutions. The present paper is devoted to getting to know the experiences of young service users through an analysis of their perception of what supported them in times of distress and what additionally burdened them.

### **Research questions**

The research questions of the present paper are:

1. How do young people experiencing psychosocial distress evaluate support mechanisms in relation to family, school, peers, the local community and other organisations and services?
2. How do young people perceive threatening factors in relation to family, school, peers, the local community and other organisations and services?

### **Method**

In this paper, we draw on a small part of a previously unpublished qualitative analysis of data from the two studies mentioned in the paragraph Research problem. Qualitative research is characterised by a focus on identifying processes and understanding the contexts of people's experiences (Silverman, 2001). The chosen approach, using thematic analysis, allowed us to identify different dilemmas, highlighting relevant themes and topics identified as such by the young people involved in the research.

#### ***Participants***

The qualitative part of the research involved 203 young people, recruited based on previously having sought contacts with support systems, services and institutions offering help in cases of psychosocial distress (e.g., social work centres, counsellors, health workers, social welfare institutions). Recruitment was done opportunistically, utilising a snowball approach. The interviewees were from different parts of Slovenia. The interviews were conducted with the youngsters alone if they were over 18 or, in a very small number of cases, in the presence of their parents if they were between 16 and 18 years old. In both cases, the interviewees were informed of the research goals and procedures and signed a letter of consent. They were also offered the option of consultation with the senior researchers and had an opportunity to obtain further information on

accessing providers of psychosocial help. In all stages of the research, the ethical standards of sociopedagogical research and the University of Ljubljana's Code of Ethics for Researchers were observed. In accordance with the Code, each participant had the possibility of withdrawing at any time.

The average age of the interviewees at the time of the interview was 20.7 years, and 77.6 % of the sample were female. From the broader pool of 203 young people, interviews with 32 of the participants were selected for the purpose of the present paper, based on the criterion of the clustering of distress in multiple domains of the young people's lives, i.e., the selected participants reported difficulties linked to the family context, the educational context, the peer context, contexts of other organisations and services, and community contexts. The interviewees were selected on the basis of the consent of three independent evaluators/senior researchers.

### *Data collection and analysis*

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants, thus allowing interviewers to focus on the topic of interest while still giving them the autonomy to explore relevant ideas that may come up during the interview. The semi-structured interview covered topics such as the nature or type of psychosocial and other problems, coping and first help-seeking, informal sources of support, formal forms of support, the response of formal organisations to help-seeking, etc. The interviews were conducted either by trained upper-year students of social pedagogy or by the researchers who are the authors of this paper. The young people interviewed took a retrospective view of their difficulties and their search for support in psychosocial distress while they were growing up. The data therefore focus on the user's perspective, based on the assumption that a person who has experienced distress and support-seeking themselves can best assess the adequacy, quality and accessibility of such support (Bjønness et al., 2020).

Verbatim transcripts of the 32 selected interviews were qualitatively analysed using a mixed deductive-inductive coding approach. The scheme of five codes/categories was chosen deductively, naming the five main contexts of the possible existence of threatening or supportive factors: school/education, family, peer networks, local community, and other (formal) support services. The interviews were then analysed thematically, using an inductive coding approach, looking for specific kinds of either supportive or threatening factors/situations as perceived by the young people. After a process of free coding, the selected parts of the interviews that indicate the presence of the listed factors were, grouped into what we call 'content categories'. The coding of separate parts (e.g., statements) of the interviews was done also taking into account the context of the selected sentences and the whole interview.

Results

Table 1 shows the classification of supportive and threatening factors, found by inductive coding within the framework of five deductively chosen contexts. The factors are classified as supportive or threatening according to the perceptions of the young people and taking into account the whole context of the interviews. The table also rates each factor according to how often it appears in the 32 conversations, whereby ‘very frequent’ means that it appears in more than 23 interviews, ‘frequent’ means that it appears in 16–22 cases, ‘less frequent’ means that the factor appears in 6–15 interviews, and ‘rarely’ means that it appears in 1–5 cases. Some statements from the interviews could not be classified unequivocally as protective or threatening because they were ambivalent, which is also marked in the table (by an asterisk next to name of the content category).

**Table 1**  
*Classification of supportive and threatening factors reported by the young people*

Context	Supportive/ threatening factors	Content categories identified from the young people's responses	Frequency of occurrence
School	Supportive	Strong personal involvement of a teacher or counsellor	Frequent
		Adaptability of the school to individual needs	Rarely
	Threatening	Feeling of being judged, blamed for the young person's distress	Frequent
		Mistrust, disbelief and denial of the young person's distress	Frequent
		Disinterest of school staff in the young person's distress	Frequent
		School focus on achievement alone	Frequent
		Peer bullying and the school's inadequate response to it	Frequent
		Distrust of school services	Frequent
		Exclusion from school programmes or threat of exclusion	Less frequent
		Indiscretion and abuse of trust by the teacher in relation to problems entrusted to him/her	Rarely
		Insulting and belittling attitudes of some teachers	Rarely

Context	Supportive/ threatening factors	Content categories identified from the young people's responses	Frequency of occurrence
Family	Supportive	Support from one or both grandparents	Frequent
		Mutual support, alliance or care for sibling,	Frequent
		Intervention by a relative*	Rarely
	Threatening	Domestic violence (by one parent towards the other parent and/or the child)	Very frequent
		Longstanding quarrels between parents	Very frequent
		Conflicts between parents over custody after divorce	Frequent
		Reorganisation of the family after parental separation	Frequent
		Financial support or denial of support by parents after divorce	Frequent
		Poverty and deprivation	Frequent
		Child neglect	Frequent
		Alcohol and/or psychoactive substance abuse by a family member	Frequent
		Feeling of guilt because of parental conflicts	Less frequent
		Psychiatric diagnosis or hospitalisation of a parent	Less frequent
Peers and partnerships	Supportive	Partners*	Frequent
		Peer network, friend, confidant	Frequent
	Threatening	Involvement in a group where everyone has complex needs*	Rarely
Local community, neighbourhood	Threatening	Defamation	Frequent
		Resistance to the local environment because of its judgmental attitude	Rarely
Other forms of support (social work centres, NGO sector, psychiatry, justice, paid forms of support such as therapy, etc.)	Supportive	Counselling based on relational work, respect, dialogue, being heard	Frequent
		Attempt to coordinate and/or integrate different forms of support	Less frequent
		Non-governmental, less formal or self-help forms of support	Rarely
		Advocacy by an adult in the case of inadequate treatment	Rarely
		Placement in extra-familial or residential care*	Rarely
	Threatening	Inconsistency of information and timeliness of support	Frequent
		Psychiatric treatment, hierarchical, no dialogue, no sense of being heard	Frequent
		Judgemental rather than supportive	Frequent
		Control over support	Frequent
		Locally inaccessible support	Frequent

Context	Supportive/ threatening factors	Content categories identified from the young people's responses	Frequency of occurrence
		Fear of controlling role of some services (e.g., social work centre)	Frequent
		Fear that trying to seek support will bring negative changes	Frequent
		Minimising distress, lack of interest, and/or abusive attitudes of staff when reporting violence	Frequent
		Mismatch between different sources of support	Frequent
		Failure to protect by competent institutions in the case of threat, violence or abuse	Less frequent
		Narrowly targeted support	Rarely

\* The factor appeared in the young people's statements as both protective and threatening (the interviewees were ambivalent about the nature of the factor).

The table shows that the most important of the highlighted aspects, especially the threatening factors, are related to the family. The perception of domestic violence, which was highlighted as a very frequent threatening factor in the young people's statements, is described by one adolescent in the following words: "The constant quarrels and conflicts were not clear to me as a six-year-old child, I didn't know why my father had to start a quarrel with my mother every day after work, and he often beat her up" (Interviewee 1). Another adolescent, who was often exposed to neglect, describes it in the following way: "I wanted to live with my father just because he was not at home, he was passive and he didn't care about anything, even when he knew about my cutting, he never said anything, just a couple of times he said something" (Interviewee 2).

Different and frequently exposed risk factors also stand out in the school context. Among the supportive factors in school, the personal involvement of teachers and counsellors is often highlighted, which one interviewee described by saying: "My Slovenian teacher used to be my mother. When I was absent, I said I would bring an excuse; she said, just leave it because I know how it is. I don't know in what ways she defended me in front of all the teachers. I think she put half her soul into it. Now when I meet her, we hug like that, she always asks how I'm doing" (Interviewee 3). On the other hand, teachers' mistrust towards young people in need appears among the common threatening factors, as indicated by the following interviewee statement: "My parents had to come to school and say that they were getting divorced, and that what I was saying was true, so that they would believe me" (Interviewee 4).

Other areas combine different contexts and sources. There are more negative than positive evaluations attached to the healthcare aspect, and the

same applies to the social welfare field. The following statements illustrate this observation. One interviewee describes the experience of going to the psychiatrist by saying: "It's like once a month you go there for half an hour and she keeps looking at her watch, so it's obvious how fucking redundant you are to her. And it's just pills, pills, pills" (Interviewee 5). Another interviewee had the following experience when she visited the social care centre: "We asked the social worker, because we lived in the same house, how to actually live normally if it's not working. This social worker told my dad very rudely that yes, if you can't take care of your children yourselves, we'll put them in a crisis centre. When we heard those words, it was terrible. We were scared of what a crisis centre even is. We thought that only some helpless kids were going there" (Interviewee 6).

There are exceptions in all of these areas. Based on our interviews, the adults referred to are mostly individual professionals from very different fields (most often class teachers, frequently social workers, in a few cases also judges or psychologists), who did more than was strictly necessary in a given situation, who took on additional professional (and often personal) involvement, and who probably went beyond what they should have done in their official capacity or what they were competent to do in a given case. This extra commitment was observed and described in different ways, often as a warm and enthusiastic attitude, sometimes even as a motherly attitude, and in some cases also mentioning how a particular professional opened a door for the young person that was previously closed, or made something possible that would otherwise have seemed impossible. Professional work based on respect, dialogue and being heard is one of the supporting factors frequently highlighted by the interviewees. One of them described her experience of the relationship with the therapist as follows: "[The psychotherapist] was the only person who didn't judge me for drinking too much, who didn't judge me for rolling a joint, who didn't judge me if I took drugs. He always tried to help me in some alternative way. I told him things that I didn't tell anybody" (Interviewee 7).

The results of the analysis of the interviews with the young people show that threatening factors and their intersections are clearly predominant over protective or supportive factors. However, more detailed analysis provides very interesting insights and opens further reflections, relevant not only to the cases identified as 'particularly vulnerable', but to the whole system of support, from informal, family, kinship and neighbourhood support, through school, to social care, healthcare and the non-governmental sector of different professional fields.

## Discussion

In the interviews with adolescents, the research focused mainly on the aspect of accessibility to different sources of support. Judging from the interviews, the set of problems that could be described by the phrase 'burdensome family situation' is largely unaddressed by the various institutions or services.

Our results also show that adolescents are more likely to report a lack of support from schools and social work centres. As a result, they often take the burden of the problem upon themselves and deal with it as best they can. In some cases, they share the burden with siblings or another family member, e.g., grandparents, who sometimes, but not always, serve a buffer. Even if grandparents are a supportive and protective link, the illness or death of one or both grandparents often occurs in the course of the young person's life, resulting in the loss of a rare but important support.

In cases where there was no adequate support person within the extended family, interviewees reported an early start to running away from home and, in connection with this, an early turn to psychoactive substances as a means of escape. Sometimes it is a combination of both, running away from home and returning to an at least partly supportive person in the (extended) family. Family support remains crucial in most cases, even if it is very partial and inadequate, and even if the family is also a source of abuse, neglect and violence.

The analysis shows that, in most cases, our interlocutors are dealing with a sequence of difficult family circumstances and burdens (often present in the family even before the birth of the child) and various threatening behaviours, which in this context can be understood as a consequence of continuously experienced distress.

The fact of such frequent distress related to the school context can be interpreted as an issue of the maladjustment of the system to people with cumulative difficulties. In several narratives, it was this circumstance (maladjustment of the school system, which is reframed as maladjustment of the young person to the system), in conjunction with other difficulties, that led to premature exclusion from school.

The combination of various learning difficulties is an increasing challenge for educational environments, as can be seen from the frequent experience of young people who, when they encounter difficulties, often experience exclusion or the threat of exclusion as early as in primary school. Exclusion often continues to deepen distress, to make problems chronic, and to diminish visions of how complex problems could be resolved.

The set of interviews of young people with complex vulnerability provides a final picture that is a confluence of multiple and diverse threatening factors, on the one hand, and a lack of accessible, integrated and continuous support, on the other. While individuals have in fact sought and received support, it has largely been unconnected, fragmented and not centred on the individuals themselves or tailored in dialogue with them, as suggested by contemporary professional visions (in the broadest sense, we can mention here UNESCO's new vision for the education system (UNESCO, 2021)), which prioritise dialogue, cooperation and networking, and see educators as agents of building caring and trusting relationships within educational environments.

The involvement of relatives is often mentioned in the interviews, but the involvement of other members of the neighbourhood, such as neighbours or family friends, is very rarely mentioned. The general impression is that the families of our interviewees are relatively isolated in their often generations-long challenges, which the present environment (including school) does not help to solve, instead stigmatising and further marginalising the families. The stigma attached to the family environment is often passed on to the children. The local environment cannot, unfortunately, be assessed as a source of support based on our cases, with a few exceptions.

Another important aspect of family non-support is the refusal of parents to provide financial support to their children, which very often becomes a problem after the parents' divorce (as reflected in the content category 'financial support or denial of support by parents after divorce' in Table 1). This makes it difficult for young people to become independent, with high financial burdens and no support services available to support them in becoming independent in housing, which is a crucial step, especially in the case of burdensome and intergenerational circumstances, unless temporary independence is offered by living in a boarding home or student residence. However, even in these cases, the question is legitimately raised (in some interviews) of what to do when their formal status (regarding their age or school status) no longer allows this supported and affordable form of living. This raises the threat of homelessness or, the more common alternative, a return to the burdensome environment of the primary family. There is hardly any research on the growing phenomenon of homelessness among young people in Slovenia, with a few exceptions such as Kreft Toman (2017) and Razpotnik (2007), who links young people's risk of homelessness to their institutionalisation.

Regarding school, the young people in our study were more likely to say that the school environment is insensitive to their difficulties, and their perception of school is that it is an environment primarily concerned with achieving



good results (where results mean grades that open the door to future stages of schooling), rather than a broader supportive environment where they can experience safety, supportive coexistence and cooperation. As Rupnik Vec and Slivar (2019) note, there is a high level of stress associated with school, which does not go hand in hand with the idea of a safe and supportive school environment. According to the testimonies of our interviewees, school staff often even express disbelief that the individual is really in distress; there is frequently a minimisation of problems and a tendency to overlook them or push them away. Our interviewees were often also victims of school violence, which in most cases was not addressed, perceived or resolved in any way. Thus, even with this additional burden, they were often left alone. In some cases, the school, or individual school staff members, have been positively and supportively involved. More often than the coordinated systemic responses of the school, we encounter the strong engagement of an individual school staff member.

There are also individual examples of coordinated school, healthcare and social care support tailored to the young person (classified in the content category 'Attempt to coordinate and or integrate different forms of support' in Table 1), but these are unfortunately rarely mentioned, even if we would like this to be a regular practice. The professions are confronted with the increasingly complex difficulties experienced by young people. The latter consequently report disjointed, uncoordinated and sporadic support, the untimeliness of some procedures where they expected support mainly from social work centres (classified in the content category 'Inconsistency of information and timeliness of support' in Table 1), or the unavailability of support when they needed it. They positively valued the personalised support they received in the form of an approachable and available relationship (either from a single professional or a specific group), where their problems were not demonised, and where they felt included, accepted and appropriate, despite their specific needs or the complexity of their challenges. It is precisely this complexity that makes it so difficult to respond to these challenges within the range of options given, which may explain the frequent reports of young people about individual practitioners who engage further, even beyond their formal duties. However, a future support system cannot be based on the additional engagement of individuals. It is therefore important to pave the way for the integration of disciplines, which could go beyond the currently partial reaches of each discipline. This can be called integrating services (Richardson et al., 2015), which can take place in a wide variety of ways. Without the integration of disciplines, it seems that more sustainable professional responses to the complex needs of young people will not be possible.

The young people interviewed sometimes mention a change of environment and attempts to become independent as more positive ways to escape long-lasting threatening situations. This is in line with the prevailing ideology, which places the full weight of responsibility for life choices, successes and failures on the shoulders of individuals. This can be a huge burden, especially in the case of failure or when things do not go according to plan. It can be assumed that the prevailing public rhetoric of individualism, which asserts that individuals are responsible for their own problems, is adopted by young people experiencing distress, representing a great burden for them. However much the development of a sense of dependence on oneself may sound like a winning solution (that does not presuppose systemic considerations and coordinated solutions), it is nonetheless fragile and worrying if it is not accompanied by a strong safety net of social and community support factors. The latter is in line with the recommendation made by Muijen (2015) for Slovenia, which suggests that, in the area of the psychosocial distress of young people, more emphasis should be placed on community-based support networks and strengthening networks of organisations, rather than simply increasing clinical capacity, measured in terms of the number of 'beds' needed for hospitalisation.

The safety net is one of the key themes of our research, as we see that it is fragile, weakening and transforming in the face of societal change. Comprehensive reflection is required to develop, nurture, nourish and compensate for this safety net. The full spectrum of behaviours should be understood as the best possible responses to adverse life circumstances in a given situation (Herwig-Lempp, 2022). This is the understanding that many of the interviewees desire, as they often express a need to be heard, seen and accepted. The latter is precluded by pathologising, shifting responsibility to individuals, focusing on symptoms, or any kind of decontextualised treatment.

## **Conclusion**

We already know that more accumulated problems starting earlier in childhood mean poorer prospects for adequate support and coping in the future. Institutions, with their rather narrow focus, create a revolving door effect (Gomes et al., 2021), sending the young person from door to door with the message that the service they offer is not suitable for them or that they do not fit into the institution's framework. However, it is precisely the cases of complex needs that we need to take most seriously, as they point to the weaknesses of support networks, the gaps in the system, and the pressing areas that are not currently well addressed and that need to be prioritised in the future. According to many

recommendations and research findings (e.g., Collishaw, 2015; Cefai & Cavioni, 2015; Fjermestad et al., 2020), school is an appropriate and suitable context for the conceptualisation of ideas on the prevention of psychosocial distress, and as a centre of the community (Gregorčič Mrvar et al., 2016). It is also a catalyst in terms of initiating networking with other institutions in order to build stronger support networks.

The present research, although of an exploratory nature and focusing on the first-person perspective, confirms many findings of other studies on vulnerable individuals and groups, 'multi-agency families', 'multi-challenged families' and the like (De Vries & Bouwkamp, 2002; Gomes et al., 2021; Parton, 2006). The results show that the most vulnerable group of young people in distress evaluate their experiences with the provision of help more negatively than positively, often mentioning that they are overlooked with their difficulties and sent from door to door.

Given that we are dealing with complex adversities, the responses we design must also be complex and interdisciplinary. Organisations need to network with each other and think about more holistic responses. School, as a privileged space that encompasses all children almost without exception (Mikuš Kos, 2017), has a key role to play in this regard. However, it also needs to be clearly given this mandate. Moreover, the perceptions of young users must be considered in a more dialogical way than is characteristic of support services today. It is necessary to develop techniques and systems of more coordinated activity of different support services, whether specialised or generic, including the education sector. This should also include more training of professionals for cooperation and changing the role of mental health professionals, who could become more facilitators of cooperation at the expense of reducing their expert role in making individualistic diagnoses of the distress experienced by young people.

The limitations of the present research stem from its exploratory nature. One of them is the first-person perspective of young people, which needs to be supplemented with the perspective of parents as well as experts. Furthermore, there is a need to expand the opportunistic sampling with more systematic sampling, which would enable the analysis of the experiences of young people in specific environments, or groups of young people who are users of specific institutions or models of support.

Further research is needed to overcome the aforementioned limitations. We consider research of existing models of good practice and the conditions for their transfer to other contexts to be particularly promising. It is also important to research political and economic frameworks that enable the transfer and development of such models.

## References

- Beck, U. (2003). *Kaj je globalizacija?* [What is globalisation?]. Krtina.
- Bjønness, S., Viksveen, P., Johannessen, J. O., & Storm, M. (2020). User participation and shared decision-making in adolescent mental healthcare: A qualitative study of healthcare professionals' perspectives. *Child Adolescence Psychiatry Mental Health*, 14(2), 2–9.
- Cefai, C., & Cavioni, V. (2015). Beyond PISA: Schools as contexts for the promotion of children's mental health and well-being. *Contemporary School Psychology*, 19, 4(2), 233–242.
- Collishaw S. (2015). Annual research review: Secular trends in child and adolescent mental health. *Journal Child Psychol Psychiatry*, 56(3), 370–393.
- Dekleva, B., Grbec, H., Klemenčič Rozman, M. M., Lah, A., Leskošek, V., Mikuš Kos, A., Polajžer, P., Rapuš-Pavel, J., Razpotnik, Š., Sande, M., Simić, S., & Tadič, D. (2021). *Podporne mreže mladih v psihosocialnih stiskah* (zaključno poročilo ciljnega raziskovalnega projekta) [Support networks of young people in psychosocial distress (final report of a target research project)]. University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Work; University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education. <http://pefprints.pef.uni-lj.si/7047>
- Dekleva, B., Klemenčič Rozman, M. M., Razpotnik, Š., Sande, M., Škraban, J., & Tadič, D. (2018). *Dostopnost organiziranih oblik podpore mladim v psihosocialnih in duševnih težavah in konteksti teh težav: preliminarne študije: Raziskovalno poročilo*. [Accessibility of organised forms of support for young people in psychosocial distress and the contexts of those difficulties: Research Report]. University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education.
- Demšar, M. (2021). *Socialnopedagoška podpora družinam – med podporo in nadzorom* [Social-pedagogical support for families: Between support and supervision] [Master's thesis]. University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education.
- De Vries, S., & Bouwkamp, R. (2002). *Psihosocialna družinska terapija* [Psychosocial family therapy]. Firis.
- Featherstone, B. (2006). Rethinking family support in the current policy context. *British Journal of Social Work*, 36(1), 5–19.
- Fjermestad, K. W., Wergeland, G. J., Rogde, A., Bjaastad, J. F., Heiervang, E., & Haugland, B. S. (2020). School-based targeted prevention compared to specialist mental health treatment for youth anxiety. *Child and adolescent mental health*, 25(2), 102–109.
- Giddens, A. (1998). *The third way: The renewal of social democracy*. Polity Press.
- Gomes, J. C., Silva, A. P. S. D., & Corradi-Webster, C. M. (2021). Revolving door in the care for children and adolescents drug users: Challenges and management. *Psicologia & Sociedade*, 33, Article e227932.
- Grebenc, V., & Kvaternik, I. (2008). Vrzeli med medicino in socialnim delom: Primer “dvojnih diagnoz” [Gaps between medicine and social work: The case of “dual diagnoses”]. *Teorija in praksa*, 45(1/2), 129–143.
- Gregorčič Mrvar, P., Kalin, J., Mažgon, J., Muršak, J., & Šteh, B. (2016). *Skupnost in šola: vrata se*

- odpirajo v obe smeri* [Community and school: The doors open both ways.]. Znanstvena založba Filozofske fakultete Univerze v Ljubljani.
- Herwig-Lempp, J. (2022). *Systemische Sozialarbeit. Haltungen und Handeln in der Praxis*. [Systemic social work. Attitudes and actions in practice]. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Jeriček Klanšček, H., Roškar, S., Vinko, M., Konec Juričič, N., Hočevar Grom, A., Bajt, M., Čuš, A., Furman, L., Zager Kocjan, G., Hafner, A., Medved, T., Floyd Bračič M., & Poldrugovac, M. (2018). *Duševno zdravje otrok in mladostnikov v Sloveniji* [Mental health of young people in Slovenia]. National Institute of Public Health of the Republic of Slovenia.
- Klemenčič Mirazchijski, E. (2017). *Razvoj modela nacionalne mreže služb za duševno zdravje otrok in mladostnikov* [Development of a model of a national network of child and adolescent mental health services]. CENTERKONTURA. URN:NBN:SI:DOC-DW22VOLY from <http://www.dlib.si>
- Kreft Toman, I. (2017). Tveganja ob prehodu iz izvenzdržinske vzgoje v samostojnost [Risks during the transition from non-family education to independence]. *Socialna pedagogika*, 21(1/2), 55–72.
- Kuhar, R. (2009). *Na križiščih diskriminacije (večplastna in interseksijska diskriminacija)* [At the crossroads of discrimination (multifaceted and intersectional discrimination)]. Mirovni inštitut.
- Lavrič, M., & Deželan, T. (2021). *Mladina 2020: položaj mladih v Sloveniji* [Youth 2020: The situation of young people in Slovenia]. Univerzitetna založba Univerze v Mariboru; Založba Univerze v Ljubljani.
- Mešl, N., & Kodele, T. (2016). Co-creating desired outcomes and strengthening the resilience of multi-challenged families. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, 6(4), 51–72.
- Mikuš Kos, A. (2017). *Duševno zdravje otrok današnjega časa* [Mental health of children today]. Didakta.
- Mladenović, A. (2016). Pomen interseksionalnega pristopa pri obravnavi kompleksnih neenakosti [The importance of an intersectional approach in dealing with complex inequalities]. *Šolsko Polje*, 27(5/6), 219–220.
- Mozère, L. (2007). What's the trouble with identity? *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 7(2), 109–118.
- Muijen, M. (2015). *Mental Health Mission Slovenia, 19–21 April 2015*. [Unpublished report]. WHO Regional Office for Europe, Slovenia.
- Parton, N. (2006). Every child matters: The shift to prevention whilst strengthening protection in children's services in England. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 28(8), 796–992.
- Ramaekers, S. (2010). *Pedagogy of the encounter? Philosophical notes on the idea of 'meeting places' as forms of parent support*. Centre for Philosophy of Education.
- Razpotnik, Š. (2004). *Preseki odvečnosti: nevidne identitete mladih priseljenc v družbi tranzicijskih vic* [Intersections of redundancy: The invisible identities of young immigrant women in a society of transition strife]. University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education.
- Razpotnik, Š. (2007). Delovno mesto – ulica: brezdomci mlajše generacije, izključeni iz sfere dela [Workplace – The street: Homeless people of the younger generation, excluded from the sphere of work]. In B. Dekleva, J. Rapuš Pavel, & D. Zorc Maver (Eds.), *Prehodi v svet dela – izbira ali nuja?*

[Transitions to the world of work – Choice or necessity?] (pp. 124–157). University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education.

Razpotnik, Š. (2011). It is all up to me: Access to education and the discourse of individual responsibility. *Teorija in praksa: revija za družbena vprašanja*, 48(5), 1446–1465.

Richardson, D., Patana, P., Pleace, N., Frey, V., & Ferraro, V. (2015). *Integrating social services for vulnerable groups: Bridging sectors for better service delivery*. OECD.

Rosanvallon, P. (1995). *La nouvelle question sociale: repenser l'état-providence* [The new social question: Rethinking the welfare state]. Seuil.

Rupnik Vec, T., & Slivar, B. (2019). *Vpliv različnih dejavnikov na doživljanje in znake stresa pri učencih v 6. in 8. razredu osnovne šole: Raziskovalno poročilo* [The influence of various factors on the experience and signs of stress among students in the sixth and eighth grades of primary school: Research Report]. Zavod Republike Slovenije za šolstvo.

Shannon, D., & Rogue, J. (2009). *Refusing to wait: Anarchism & intersectionality*. Zabalaza Books.

Silverman, D. (2001). *Interpreting qualitative data: Methods for analysing talk, text and interaction*. Sage.

Sternad, M. (2012). Socialnopedagoško sodelovanje z družinami z več problem [Social-pedagogical cooperation with families with multiple problems]. *Socialna pedagogika*, 16(4), 437–468.

Turnšek, N., Poljšak-Škraban, O., Razpotnik, Š., & Rapuš-Pavel, J. (2016). Challenges and responses to the vulnerability of families in a preschool context. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, 6(4), 29–49.

UNESCO. (2021). *Reimagining our futures together: A new social contract for education* International Commission on the Futures of Education, UNESCO.

Vandenbroeck, M., Boonaert T., & Van Der Mespel, S. (2009). Dialogical spaces to reconceptualize parent support in the social investment state. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 10(1), 66–77.

Vandenbroeck, M. & Bouverne-De Bie, M. (2006). Children's agency and educational norms (A tensed negotiation). *Childhood*, 13(1), 127–143.

## Biographical note

**ŠPELA RAZPOTNIK**, PhD, is an assistant professor in the Department of social pedagogy, Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. Her main research interests are youth, inclusion, marginalisation, homelessness, cultural animation and alternative practices in the field of socially deprived groups.

**MATEJ SANDE**, PhD, is Associate Professor of Social Policy and Non-Profit Management at the University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education, Department of Social Pedagogy. His research focuses on social policy, harm reduction in relation to drugs and alcohol and, more recently, drug checking and social innovations.

**BOJAN DEKLEVA**, PhD, is a retired full professor in the field of criminology and study of deviance. His research interests have been drug use, deinstitutionalization, homelessness, and mental health.

**DARJA TADIČ**, PhD, is an assistant professor in the field of social pedagogy at Faculty of Education at University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, and a research fellow in the field of criminology at the Institute of Criminology at the Faculty of Law, Slovenia. Her research interests include support nets of youth in psychosocial distress and various topics in the field of penology.

**MIJA M. KLEMENČIČ ROZMAN**, PhD, is an assistant professor in the Department of social pedagogy, Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. Her main research interests include trauma, mental health, mutual-aid groups, professional development in helping professions, school-family partnership.

**JANA PAPUŠ PAVEL**, PhD, is an Assistant Professor on Department of Social Pedagogy, Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana. She has participated in several action and qualitative research projects, which involved different approaches and vulnerable groups (mentoring, unemployed youth, children with emotional and behavioural difficulties, vulnerable families).





DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26529/cepsj.1888>

## The Uncertainty of School in a Time of Uncertainty: Perspectives of Different Coalitions in the Aftermath of the School Mass Shooting in Serbia

---

SANJA STOJILJKOVIĆ\*<sup>1</sup> AND BARBARA BLAŽANIN<sup>2</sup>

☞ On 3 May 2023, the first mass school shooting occurred in Serbia, positioning children as a particularly vulnerable group in need of further support. Subsequently, the government needed to create policies to help restore a sense of security, stability and trust in the community. The main dilemma was regarding the questions: Should we continue schooling? If so, how? Employing narrative policy analysis, we examine the interplay between education policies, policymakers, parents and teachers to discern the varied interpretations of policies and their impact on students' roles within the education system. The aim is to understand the different meanings policymakers and institutional stakeholders find in the same policy and the implications of the policy's meaning for students in the education system. The analysed documents include 16 official educational documents and 53 newspapers and blog articles featuring stakeholders' responses. The main findings indicate how different understandings of the same policy, as well as changes in the power dynamics between stakeholders, influenced subsequent decision-making of the government regarding school life. Most importantly, the study demonstrates the potential harmful effects of inconsistency in policies on student wellbeing and academic life. We conclude that the main question should not be whether schooling should stop or continue, but how to create a line of consistent and stable recommendations aligned with the created policy.

**Keywords:** narrative policy analysis, students, parents, teachers, school shooting

---

1 \*Corresponding Author. Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Belgrade, Belgrade, Serbia; [sanja.stojiljkovic@f.bg.ac.rs](mailto:sanja.stojiljkovic@f.bg.ac.rs).

2 Faculty of Special Education and Rehabilitation at the University of Belgrade, Belgrade, Serbia.

## Negotovost šole v času negotovosti: perspektive različnih koalicij po množičnem streljanju na šoli v Srbiji

SANJA STOJILJKOVIĆ IN BARBARA BLAŽANIN

3. maja 2023 se je v Srbiji zgodilo prvo množično streljanje na šoli, ki je otroke postavilo v položaj posebej ranljive skupine, ki potrebuje dodatno podporo. Posledično je morala vlada oblikovati politike, ki bi pomagale v skupnosti obnoviti občutek varnosti, stabilnosti in zaupanja. Glavna dilema je bila povezana z vprašanji: Ali naj nadaljujemo šolanje? Če da, kako? Z uporabo narativne analize politik preučujemo medsebojno vplivanje med vzgojno-izobraževalnimi politikami, oblikovalci politik, starši in učitelji, da bi razbrali različne razlage politik in njihov vpliv na vloge učencev znotraj vzgojno-izobraževalnega sistema. Cilj je razumeti različne pomene, ki jih oblikovalci politik in institucionalni deležniki najdejo znotraj določene politike, in posledice pomena politike za učence v vzgojno-izobraževalnem sistemu. Analizirani dokumenti vključujejo 16 uradnih dokumentov ter 53 člankov, vzetih iz časopisov in blogov, z odzivi deležnikov. Glavne ugotovitve kažejo, kako so različna razumevanja posamezne politike in spremembe v dinamiki moči med deležniki vplivali na nadaljnje odločanje vlade v povezavi z življenjem na šoli. Najpomembnejše je, da študija kaže na morebitne škodljive učinke nedoslednosti politik na počutje učencev in akademsko življenje. Sklepamo, da glavno vprašanje ne bi smelo biti, ali naj se šolanje ustavi ali nadaljuje, ampak kako ustvariti linijo doslednih in stabilnih priporočil, usklajenih z ustvarjeno politiko.

**Ključne besede:** narativna analiza politik, učenci, starši, učitelji, streljanje v šoli

## Introduction

The first mass school shooting in Serbia occurred on 3 May 2023 at the Vladislav Ribnikar Primary School. The incident took place during the first morning class, when a seventh-grade student opened fire on students and the school staff. In total, the shooter killed ten people.

This unprecedented incident left the nation in shock, confusion and disbelief. It was especially painful that the event happened in a school, an institution that should provide students with structure, familiarity, continuity and security (Dyregrov et al., 2020; Hobfoll et al., 2007). Since manmade disasters are usually unexpected, they often create an atmosphere of uncertainty, fear, acute helplessness and anxiety (Jorgensen, et al., 2015; Norris et al., 2002; Schultz et al., 2014). Such incidents foster a climate of uncertainty and anxiety, extending trauma beyond the immediate victims to the broader student community (Jorgensen et al., 2015; Norris et al., 2002; Schultz et al., 2014). It is possible to find multiple guidelines about trauma recovery from tragedies for school personnel, parents and the government (e.g., Currie & Hayes, 2021; Dyregrov, 2006; Dyregrov et al., 2020; Đerić & Gutvajn, 2023; Turunen & Punamaki, 2014) and thus mitigate the psychological vulnerability of children in the aftermath of a tragedy.

The shooting's aftermath highlighted the pressing need for clear, immediate and transparent policy interventions to rebuild the disrupted stability of school life. However, the impression was that this need was not met in the first 40 days post-shooting. The resulting set of policies changed in response to different stakeholders (policymakers, practitioners, parents), revealing a great deal of tension that, at least partially, arose from different beliefs about the role of school and schooling after the tragedy. This situation, which was characterised by the Rashomon effect – when different observers of an event have conflicting yet plausible perceptions of what occurred and its resolution (Muschert, 2007) – complicated consensus on the future role of schooling. One of the most representative examples is the decision on whether to continue schooling and, if so, in what way. Over time, the policies and the stakeholders' reactions became so intertwined that it was difficult to determine whether a given policy was adopted independently of the stakeholders' reactions or due to their reactions. The present analysis seeks to clarify the relationship between influential stakeholders and policy development. In addition, it aims to infer students' roles within the education system during crises and to offer strategies for protecting children's wellbeing after a shooting.

### Vulnerability of students in a time of crisis

School shootings are often seen as arbitrary or inexplicable outbreaks of violence, with mass media coverage potentially magnifying their perceived frequency and risk, fostering fear in communities and suggesting that such incidents are widespread (Madfis, 2016; Jorgensen et al., 2015; Böhmer, 2023; Mosqueda et al., 2021; Muschert, 2007). As a result, children and students can be exposed to various interpretations of the event, which can be damaging to their mental health, hence raising their vulnerability in an already stressful situation (Madfis, 2016). In Serbia, the mass shooting received significant and detailed media attention from the outset. Despite calls for responsible journalism (e.g., Filozofski fakultet, 2023; Lankford & Madfis, 2018; UNICEF, 2023), reports often featured misinformation and lacked professionalism (Kosanović & Zemunović, 2023).

Research has extensively examined the psychological effects of trauma, both direct and indirect, highlighting the fact that first-hand victims often face a higher risk of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), symptoms of post-traumatic stress, depression, anxiety, fear and substance abuse (Böhmer, 2023; Butkus, 2020; Eifert, 2022). Eifert (2022) found sufficient support for potentially long-lasting traumatising effects of witnessing a school shooting (both directly and indirectly) if witnesses are not provided with much-needed interventions and psychological support shortly after the tragedy. Interventions that have proven to have the most positive effect are providing psychosocial support focused on connectedness with the community (Hobfoll et al., 2007), constant monitoring of students' socio-emotional states, and equipping school staff with the required psycho-social support and guidelines (Dyregrov et al., 2015; Jorgensen et al., 2015; Turunen et al., 2014). In the aftermath of a shooting, it is essential to help students formulate a coherent story of what happened. Otherwise, they tend to form narratives mostly driven by media stories, which can fuel an even greater sense of fear and anxiety (Jorgensen et al., 2015).

Children are generally more vulnerable to disasters than adults, partly because their cognitive and emotional development is not yet equipped to handle trauma effectively (Norris et al., 2002). In combination with a lack of life experience, trauma can force an increase in helplessness, depression and anxiety, even among students not directly impacted by the tragedy (Jorgensen et al., 2015; Schultz et al., 2014; Stene et al., 2019). Trauma impacts both emotional and cognitive functioning, manifesting in educational settings as difficulties in concentration and memory, which can hinder academic performance and increase absenteeism (Dyregrov et al., 2020; Stene et al., 2019; Strom et

al., 2016). Essentially, greater exposure to trauma correlates with a higher risk of cognitive, academic and socio-emotional-behavioural challenges (Perfect et al., 2016). One way to protect children in tragic events is to provide them with organised and planned support, customised to encourage their wellbeing and recovery. Ideally, official policies can serve as methods to provide children with the needed support.

### **Examining the policies through the lens of narrative policy analysis**

The focus of the present study is not only an objective description of the implemented education policies, but also an examination of the meaning that arises from the adopted policies and the reaction to them. Our position relies on the postulates of narrative policy analysis (NPA), which posits that policies and argumentation of policy never focus solely on the stated problem: they reflect the role of power (by whom policies are created, for whom and who is left behind), motivation, values and assumptions about the problem, the solution and the different stakeholders (Martinez, 2019). Like many stories in human life, policies can also be perceived as a form of story, a narrative, with a beginning (explaining the problem), a middle (the proposed solution to the problem) and an end (what will the outcome of the proposed solution be?) (Fischer, 2004). Accordingly, detected narratives from education policies “reflect policy actors’ and coalitions’ understanding of problems, solutions, as filtered through their experiences and positionality” (Martinez, 2019).

NPA consists of several elements: coalitions, situated meanings, cultural models and policy storylines. Coalitions refer to groups aligned in their perspectives on a policy’s problem and solution, essentially sharing identical narratives (Martinez, 2019). Situated meanings are contextual understandings that occur inside a particular conversation. Cultural models are the underlying, often implicit, ontological assumptions that inform our interpretation and articulation of policy issues (Martinez, 2019). The last element, the policy storyline, represents the motives and message the coalition is trying to send by using a specific narrative. We could ask ourselves: “What is the government trying to tell the community when it points out that the policy was adopted in consultation with the most eminent experts?” Policy storylines support people in organising their thinking, response and practices regarding specific issues, and are usually derived from cultural models and situated meanings related to narrative (Martinez, 2019). All of these elements together provide us with deeper insights into the processes behind policy change.

## Purpose of the study

As Martinez (2019) points out, NPA is a useful approach in times of uncertainty, complexity and polarised opinions of community members on certain problems, such as the tragedy that happened in the Vladislav Ribnikar Primary School. By using NPA analysis, we would like to explore the perspectives of different institutional stakeholders on the questions: *Should we continue schooling? If so, how?* Specifically, we are interested in mapping situational meanings and implicit perspectives of the role of school and schooling, as well as the policy storylines created by authority representatives, parents and teachers. Furthermore, we aim to understand the potential implications for students in the education system arising from such created meanings. The following research questions were posed:

1. How do different coalitions find meanings in the same policy?
2. What are the implications of the policy's meaning for the position of students in the education system?

## Method

### Background

In the past couple of decades, the education system in Serbia has shifted towards centralisation in education, whereby the greatest responsibility lies with the ministry. Legislation and education policies are directed towards decreasing the autonomy and professional status of teachers (Pešikan & Ivić, 2021). Moreover, in the last few decades, the authority and reputation of teachers and schools have declined continuously, as reflected, inter alia, in the historically low levels of public expenditure on education (3.3% of GDP in 2021) (World Bank Group, n.d.). The education system is characterised by traditional schooling based on frontal teaching and assessments, as well as non-participative practices for students. As a result, students are mostly disengaged and unmotivated in the classroom, sometimes perceiving school as irrelevant (Čaprić & Videnović, 2024). In addition, a highly competitive climate oriented towards achievement and grades rather than learning is further diminishing the relationship between teachers, students and parents (Majska platforma, 2024).

In the last two decades, the problem of school violence has been recognised and validated in the form of several normative frameworks that define various forms of violence and different mechanisms of response to and prevention of violent acts (Majska platforma, 2024). However, recent findings

show that these policies have not led to a significant decrease in school violence (Čaprić & Videnović, 2024; Majska platforma, 2024).

### **Chronology of events and policies**

Immediately following the shooting, the Ministry of Education initiated safety measures and offered crisis support resources and emotional aid to educators nationwide, focusing particularly on staff from the affected school. Safety regulations will not be discussed in detail in this paper, since our main concern is education policies. After the shooting, a great deal of attention was devoted to the Minister of Internal Affairs, as he shared sensitive information related to the victims and potential targets, but the only functionary to be held accountable was the Minister of Education, who resigned from his position four days post-shooting. Following the initial school shooting, another mass shooting occurred one day later, on 4 May, in Malo Orašje and Dubona, resulting in 9 fatalities and 12 injuries. Although the present paper will not focus on the further development of this tragedy, it is important to note an atmosphere of sadness, hurt, anger and uncertainty that was created in the light of these two successive mass shootings.

The first official education interventional plan for the school in question was provided on 6 May (three days post-shooting). It stated that the students would return to class in the same school building on 10 May (one week post-shooting), where the mental health professionals available to students, parents and teachers would be located. However, in the face of the public disapproval of parents, the Ministry issued a Clarification of the Intervention Plan for the Vladislav Ribnikar Primary School two days later. In this clarification, it was pointed out that traditional classes would not be held, but that the school would be open for those students who wanted to return to the school community. Parents and students were given full freedom to decide whether they would return to the school and which topics they would discuss with the mental health professionals and teachers situated in the school. Emphasising safety, the government and Ministry ensured increased police presence at the school.

News of the premature end to the school year – shortening the school year by ten days on the national level – was first leaked to the media on 29 May and officially confirmed by the Ministry on 1 June. This was the first official policy applied to schools on the national level, as previous recommendations were crafted specifically for the school of the shooting. According to this policy, schools would remain accessible to students seeking grade improvement, professional support or community engagement. This policy resulted in strong

negative reactions from the public, this time from both parents and teachers. Despite public opinion, the authorities maintained this policy with assurances that the standard graduation exams for students transitioning to high schools would proceed as planned, including additional points for students from the Vladislav Ribnikar Primary School.

### Sample

The qualitative data used for this study consisted of 16 official documents regarding education policies and clarifications of proposed policies, as well as 53 newspaper and blog articles focused on reactions to policies by authority representatives, teachers and parents. When analysing the newspaper and blog articles, the focus was on quoted statements of the stakeholders. In total, 69 documents were published in the period between 3 May and 7 June 2023.

### Data collection

Policy documents and clarifications were gathered from the official websites of the government and the Ministry of Education, with the selection based on two criteria: 1) publication between 3 May and 11 June, and 2) content related to policy responses to the school shooting. Statements responding to policies by different institutional stakeholders were searched for in different newspaper and blog articles published in the first 40 days after the mass school shooting occurred. The analysed articles were mainly selected from the newspaper journals *Insajder* and *Danas*, as well as from the blog *Zelena učionica*. The journals *Insajder* and *Danas* are recognised for their unbiased reporting (UNS, n.d.) and as such were found to be reliable media for this study. However, official representatives of teachers do not always speak their minds in the public media space, so it was necessary to seek alternative sources for teacher statements. The blog *Zelena učionica* is a common media space in which teachers speak their minds, so 21 blog articles from this website were included in our analysed data.

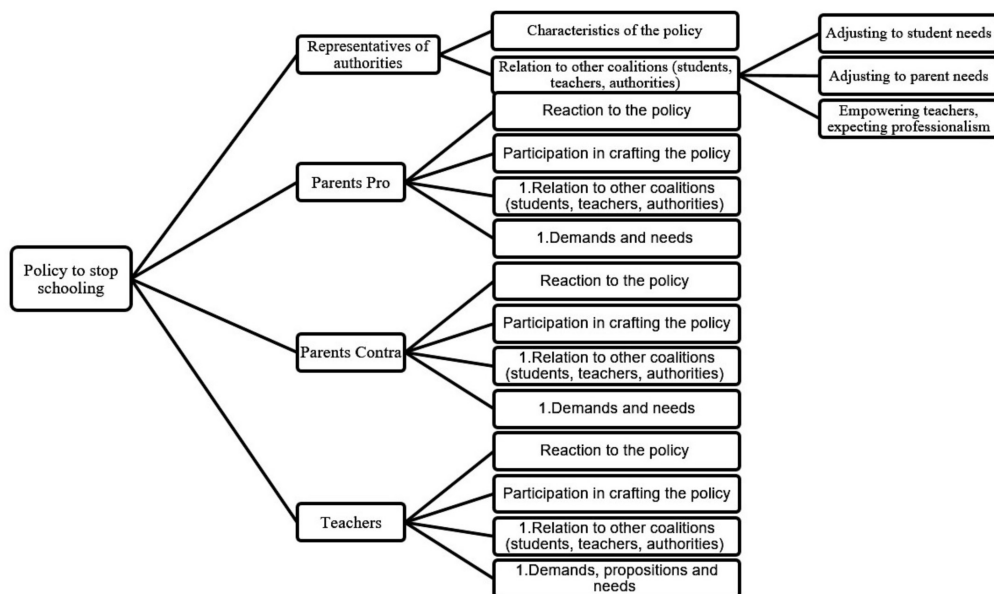
### Research design

In the first phase of the analysis, a detailed reading of all of the selected documents was undertaken in order to identify policy coalitions that found different meanings in two examined policies: 1) the decision to return to the Vladislav Ribnikar Primary School, and 2) the decision to end the school year prematurely. Before further analysis, the documents were grouped according



to the policy to which they referred, as well as according to the coalition that speaks about the given policy. Thus, the narratives were analysed regarding the policy to *return to the school* from the perspective of 1) authority representatives and 2) parents. For the second policy, the *premature end of schooling*, the narratives were analysed from the perspective of 1) authority representatives, 2) teachers, 3) parents in favour of continuing schooling, and 4) parents against continuing school.

After multiple readings of the selected documents, interpretative coding of the material was undertaken regarding the positions of different coalitions and policies. Although themes referring to the position of the coalitions in general are not part of the policy narrative analysis, they were useful in identifying the main themes that would facilitate understanding of the position of each coalition. The coding scheme and overarching themes for the policies were unified as much as possible for all of the identified coalitions, as shown in Figure 1. The coding scheme was organised to reflect 1) reactions to a specific policy, and 2) reactions from a specific coalition. With further analysis, codes became more numerous and specific to the identified coalitions, which is why they are not shown in Figure 1. All of the identified codes were deduced to later determine the situated meanings, cultural models and policy storylines. In trying to determine the cultural models of the policies introduced, a need to modify the term arose: the analysed policies were introduced in a moment of crisis, and as such do not represent stable and typical states. Hence, we assume that the cultural models that emerge from specific examined education policies relate to the implicit assumptions of each coalition about the role of school and schooling after the tragedy, which does not necessarily coincide with the ontological assumptions related to school in a period of stability (e.g., in a period of stability, the main implicit assumption could be that the role of school is learning and obtaining good grades, but in a moment of crisis, the primary role of school could be to provide mental health support). The last step of the process was to identify potential implications for the position of students in the education system based on situational meanings, the role of school and schooling and policy storylines from coalitions.

**Figure 1***Coding scheme for the policy to stop schooling*

After reading the materials, 30% of the content was coded together, identifying themes that referred to the policy itself and the position of coalitions in general. The remaining two-thirds of the narratives were coded independently, relying on a previously developed coding scheme. Differences were discussed by the researchers until agreement on the interpretation of the narratives was reached. The selection of narrative excerpts and situational meanings, the role of school and schooling, the policy storylines and the implications for students were identified through collaboration.

## Results

### Coalitions

The relevant coalitions were, in this case, the government and the Ministry of Education as *authority representatives*, *parents who advocated stopping schooling*, *parents who advocated the continuance of schooling*, and *teachers*.

The *representatives of authorities*, who were responsible for formulating education policies, aimed to foster community trust, emphasising collaboration with relevant institutions and prioritising student mental health. Their

approach allowed flexibility, granting parents and students autonomy in deciding on school attendance. However, the initial phase of policymaking was marked by non-transparent and non-inclusive practices, lacking a clear narrative of the incident's details. This approach strained relationships with both sets of parents and educators.

The *parents* of students of the Vladislav Ribnikar Primary School represented a unified group against the policy to return to the school building, demanding a transparent and inclusive approach from the government. As their influence on policymaking grew, a division emerged based on their views on continuing education post-shooting. One group of parents was *strongly for the end of schooling*, as they saw the trauma as insurmountable. Instead, they were advocating making the entire school building into a memorial centre. However, other parent groups viewed resuming classes as part of the process of overcoming the tragedy. These groups advocated for the continuation of schooling while dedicating a section of the school to a memorial centre, rather than closing the school completely.

The coalition that was the least heard and included in the process of creating and conducting education policies comprised the official representatives of *teachers*. Over time, teachers became more encouraged to assert their rights within the education system in the aftermath of the crisis, primarily demanding their right to be informed and to be trusted to do their job. Unlike parents, teachers never requested participation in the policy-making process. This coalition consisted of official representatives of teachers on the national level and, to the best of our knowledge, none of the teachers from this coalition were employed at the Vladislav Ribnikar Primary School.

It is important to note that the roles of these coalitions in the Serbian education system and the relationship between them are deeply rooted in the historical and cultural background of Serbia's past few decades (for more, see Ivić & Pešikan, 2012; Pešikan & Ivić, 2021). Bearing this in mind, the behaviours and dynamics of these coalitions largely emerge from already known and established roles, with respect to the uniqueness of the tragedy of the school shooting.

## Policy analysis

### *Return to the school*

For the policy to return to the school one week post-shooting, the narratives of the coalition of representatives of the government and the homogeneous coalition of parents were analysed, as they are the only coalitions that spoke publicly about the policy. The review of the situated meaning, the role of school

and schooling, the policy statement and the combined implications of these factors on children in vulnerable situations is presented in Table 1.

As stated in the chronology of events, the Ministry of Education addressed this policy in two official announcements: firstly declaring the “continuance of schooling” and secondly pointing out that “the school is open”. This slight difference in the phrasing (continuance against the opening of the school) was an attempt to calm the revolt of parents who expressed a strongly negative opinion on this policy. In this dynamic, it is noticeable that the representatives of the authorities did not direct the policy-making process only with regard to the opinions of experts (psychologists, pedagogists, psychiatrists, psychotherapists, etc.), but paid great attention to calming public opinion in an already extremely sensitive situation nationwide. Below is an example of the specific narrative created in the second address of the Ministry of Education:

*Given that a large number of children and parents want to come to their school and talk to their teachers, and that experts approve this, the school will be open to its students starting on Wednesday. This does not mean that regular classes will be held, but that there will be organised work and conversations with experts, all in the service of providing professional help to students, their parents and employees. Regular classes will be introduced to the school gradually, in agreement with parents and experts. (Republika Srbija Ministarstvo prosvete, 2023)*

In this narrative alone, several messages on the role of schooling in times of crisis can be deduced. The school was perceived as a space that is close and familiar to children, where the healing qualities of the school community formed at school could foster recovery from trauma. Interestingly, even though teachers were mentioned through their positive relationship with students (“*children want to come and talk to their teachers*”), they were not given a specific role in the later explanation of the plan for healing. As such, the teacher’s role remains unclear in the context of school and schooling in crisis. At the time of this narrative, no reconstructive policies had been undertaken, so the return to the school was organised in the building as it remained after the police finished their investigation. In the narrative of the authority, the school building itself does not have a negative symbolism, nor is it considered harmful to the students. Thus, the Ministry’s main storyline is that the recovery from trauma can be established by returning to the school, with the help of experts brought in to school.

On the other hand, parents provide a different narrative:

*The parents are united in the opinion that children should return to school;*

*they need rhythm, they need integration with their peers and teachers, but not in that place. (RTS, 2023)*

Unlike the authorities, parents perceive the school building and the school community as two different aspects of school. For this group of parents, the school building had lost a positive connotation, as it had become exclusively connected to the shooting. As such, the school building was a source of trauma, while the school community set in a different context could contribute to healing. Moreover, in their reaction to the policy, parents addressed the way it had been created. On the same occasion, the same parent said:

*We requested an urgent meeting of the parent counsel to revise the decision made by the crisis headquarters (representatives of the authorities), which was brought without (participation of) parents. (RTS, 2023)*

This narrative implies that parents believe they are entitled to an equal role in the policy-making process, and their main policy statement is consequently that the intervention plans and policies should be based on cooperation with them and the school community.

Several implications for students arise from these policy-meanings. The first is that establishing school routines may provide a sense of certainty and stability, which continues the role of school and schooling in the moment of crisis. The second implication is related to how this routine should be established. The healing effects of school may be limited to the school community, which leads to the conclusion that re-entering the school building, left in the same condition as it was on the day of the shooting, could re-traumatise the students and thus do more harm than good. The third implication highlights the risk of public displays of children's choices on how to deal with trauma. If the decision to return to school is left entirely up to students, then their choice could lead to their marginalisation if it does not align with the choices of others from their immediate surroundings, i.e., choosing to go to school even though your friends were shot could result in your being perceived as insensitive or emotionless, while choosing not to go to school if you are from a class not directly affected to the shooting could result in your being perceived as lacking resilience. Finally, it is possible that the most traumatised children would choose not to return to school, which could result in their being deprived of the required psychological help, as psychological support was provided exclusively in the school building.

**Table 1***Review of the analysis of the policy to return to school*

	Representatives of the authorities	Parents
Situated meaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Experts and staff of the Vladislav Ribnikar Primary School are collaborators in creating and conducting policies, while parents are collaborators in conducting policies.</li> <li>– Children and parents are responsible for returning to school.</li> <li>– Providing psychological help to students, parents and teachers is independent of the context in which it is provided.</li> <li>– School routines can fulfil psychological needs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Parents are left out of the process of creating policies.</li> <li>– The school building is a symbol of the tragedy and as such can cause re-traumatisation.</li> <li>– The school community (peers, teachers) can help overcome trauma if gathered at a different time and place.</li> </ul>
School and schooling in times of tragedy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– School healing qualities consist of both the school space (building) and the school community, and as such they are a source of stability for children.</li> <li>– In a moment of crisis, teachers are needed for their presence, while the rest of their role in overcoming trauma is unclear.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The greatest value of school is in the interaction that occurs between peers and teachers (the school community).</li> </ul>
Policy storyline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Experts' voices are the most important in times of tragedy.</li> <li>– Overcoming tragedy will be accomplished through returning to school and nurturing mental health.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Overcoming tragedy can be accomplished by uniting with friends and teachers outside of the school premises and by consulting parents in policymaking.</li> </ul>
Implication of the policy for children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Establishing school routines may provide a sense of certainty and stability.</li> <li>– Possibility of re-traumatisation due to entering the school building, the symbol of trauma.</li> <li>– Possibility of being marginalised by choosing either to return or not to return to school.</li> <li>– Possibility of being deprived of psychosocial support by not returning to school.</li> </ul>	

### *Stopping schooling*

The policy to stop schooling caused reactions from all of the represented coalitions. Their narratives are summarised in Table 2. According to their official statements, the representatives of the authorities conveyed several implied messages. The underlying assumption is that regular classes and schooling do not contribute to the mental health of students, and as such are not welcome in a moment of crisis. Moreover, in the Serbian language, school is phrased as an institution of education and upbringing (Serbian: *obrazovno-vaspitna ustanova*). In the moment of crisis, the authorities set aside the educational part of schooling and, with every recommendation in the intervention plan, shifted their activities to the upbringing of children and building character (teaching about empathy, socio-emotional skills, tolerance, etc.). This extreme shift suggests that the building of character and learning are not balanced in the regular way of Serbian schooling. In creating this policy, the authorities were also led

by parents' feelings and opinions, and were torn between the groups of parents who wanted to stop schooling entirely and those who wanted schooling to continue. This schism is evident in the following quote:

*We have had conversations on whether to stop schooling for a long time. Some parents requested stopping schooling from the beginning ... Realising what a major tragedy this is, the least we can do is to concede to this minority, while still doing something in the interest of what is best for the children, since this stopping is within the lawful 5% of deviation (from the annual state plan). (Cvjetić, 2023)*

In this narrative, it is clear that the authorities were not guided strictly by experts' opinions. This inconsistency in standards regarding making decisions, as well as the changes in the policies themselves, could lead to an increase in the feeling of uncertainty and instability for children.

By this time, the parents had formed two separate coalitions based on whether they wanted to continue schooling or not. For the group of parents who wanted to stop schooling (hereinafter: parents contra), life had been irreversibly changed and the only solution was to remove the school from their own and public memory. Hence, they not only requested a stop in schooling on the state level, but also an end to this particular school's function in the future and its complete transformation into a memorial centre. From their perspective, the school has no healing value, as reflected in a quote from one representative of this group: "... the only solution for overcoming the crisis is to stop schooling". The second group of parents (hereinafter: parents pro) were progressing in a different direction in their recovery. From their perspective, to return to school meant to overcome the tragedy they had encountered, or even more importantly: not to lose to a shooter. This thought is represented in the following quote:

*We won't allow a certain K. K. [the initials of the shooter] to triumph over all of us. In our opinion, any resolution other than returning to the school would be a victory of a crime against all of them and all of us. (Savet roditelja Osnovne škole "Vladislav Ribnikar", 2023)*

Based on the analysed quotes of the representatives of the authorities, it is clear that one group of parents was crucial to the introduction of this particular policy. On the other hand, teachers united in expressing a strongly negative opinion on the way and timing of its implementation. In their narrative, it is apparent that teachers had not been part of creating the policies, and had not even been consulted or informed about them. Based on their statements, we can deduce that the participation of teachers was minimised, while the participation

of certain groups of parents was maximised. This disproportion in power in the decision-making process for education policies resulted in teachers publicly evaluating the (in)competence of the leading authorities without hesitation. After this policy, teachers showed agency in attempts to be valued as a coalition that could contribute to the recovery of their students, as reflected in the following narrative:

*The Union of Teachers has assessed that the policy to stop schooling for 'safety reasons' is unjustified, as regular schooling with the predetermined curriculum is much safer for children than extracurricular activities.*  
(Beta, 2023)

Even if not stated explicitly, in this narrative, teachers are fighting for the right to use their pedagogical competencies and to engage with children in familiar forms of schooling, through which they can provide emotional support. From their perspective, traditional schooling could have a positive impact on the recovery from trauma, since it enables encounters between teachers and students. It is important to note that these narratives do not imply that teachers were against stopping school, especially since their initial reaction to the shooting was a collective strike and cancellation of schooling; their statement refers to the injustice of being excluded and not consulted, and the mistake of implementing this policy in an inconsistent way and at the wrong time.

The first implication this policy could have for children was inferred from the wider perspective of first deciding to continue schooling, and then to stop it, all while the coalitions expressed opinions that were not necessarily in line with the decision of the authorities. This inconsistency in policies and ways in which everyday school life is organised can increase the sense of uncertainty of students and consequently be detrimental to the process of recovery from trauma. Another implication of this specific cultural and situational context is that children and their parents were given a greater power role in creating and conducting policies than other stakeholders of education. It is important to note the potentially harmful effect of this disproportion in power, especially if considered in light of the training each of the coalitions has in the field of education, as well as the emotional involvement of each of the coalitions and their consequent ability to base their decision in a moment of crisis on verified and rational scientific knowledge. Finally, as well as depriving children of socialising in the regular school context, students are also denied traditional schooling. For teachers, too, traditional schooling had the benefit of providing a routine and a stable aspect of their life, and as such could potentially contribute to their wellbeing and trauma recovery.



**Table 2***Review of the analysis of the policy to stop schooling*

	Representatives of the authorities	Teachers	Parents Pro (Schooling)	Parents Contra (Schooling)
Situated meaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Regular classes do not contribute to mental health and are therefore cancelled.</li> <li>- Students and parents are bearers of the ways in which policy will be conducted.</li> <li>- Academic achievement remains important in a time of tragedy.</li> <li>- The school exists only in its dual role of a school and a memorial centre.</li> <li>- The policy is granted as a concession to a minority group of parents.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teachers' participation in the moment of school crisis is minimised.</li> <li>- The government is not competent to independently create a policy in the best interest of the education system.</li> <li>- Traditional schooling guarantees security.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The needs of the majority of parents are of secondary importance.</li> <li>- Going back to school as a way to fight the crime.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The voices of the minority are heard in the policy-making process.</li> <li>- Schooling harms recovery from trauma.</li> </ul>
School and schooling in times of tragedy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The greatest value of traditional schooling is the academic outcome.</li> <li>- School needs to be a place for building character instead of traditional learning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The greatest value of schooling is the connection between teachers and students, which occurs in traditional schooling.</li> <li>- Teachers are not considered to be equal to other stakeholders regarding questions about school and schooling.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- School and schooling are a source of overcoming crisis, an act of defiance, and a way to continue life.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- School and schooling have no value in the moment of crisis and are a source of re-traumatisation.</li> </ul>
Policy storyline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Schooling is tailored to students' and parents' needs.</li> <li>- The school should focus on the upbringing of students.</li> <li>- We value both the opinions and needs of the opposed parent coalitions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teachers must have priority in being informed about education policies.</li> <li>- Teachers' pedagogical competencies displayed in regular classes could enhance the recovery from tragedy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participation of parents and teachers in decisions regarding schooling is imperative.</li> <li>- The victory of life over death: life needs to go on.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In order to heal, school life needs to stop.</li> </ul>
Implication of the policy for children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Inconsistency in policies and ways in which everyday school life is organised can increase the sense of uncertainty of students.</li> <li>- The role of students (along with parents) in the evaluation of school performance increases in power over teachers.</li> <li>- The decisive voice of parents in policymaking can potentially be harmful to children.</li> <li>- Students who wish to continue schooling are deprived of an opportunity to attend regular school classes.</li> </ul>			

## Discussion

### Return to the school

#### *Different meanings of the policy*

Reinstating classes (even optionally) at the Vladislav Ribnikar Primary School one week post-shooting engendered significant contention between coalitions of authorities and parents; although not fundamentally flawed, this decision was criticised for its timing and location. Moreover, returning to the school was contrary to recommendations provided by nations previously affected by similar tragedies (Turunen & Punamaki, 2014; Turunen et al., 2014). The core of the discord lies in the different meanings attributed to the school by the authorities and parents. The authorities perceived the school building as integral to the school community, and as a space for psychological recovery and restoring routine, which is essential for student wellbeing. Conversely, parents viewed the site as a poignant reminder of the tragedy. They advocated for avoiding the school until renovations were completed, thus distinguishing between the school building and the school's community value. Despite their different positions, both sides eventually agreed that resuming normal activities would benefit student recovery. Furthermore, the authorities temporarily shifted their perspective on education, prioritising “character building” or the development of socio-emotional skills in students over traditional academic learning, which parents supported. The approach of emphasising psychosocial support and socio-emotional skill development aligns with past interventions and is deemed crucial in the immediate aftermath of such events (Currie & Hayes, 2021; Klun et al., 2023; Turunen & Punamaki, 2014; Stene et al., 2019).

Another underlined meaning of the policy produced by the authorities is the value of the education system and staff, especially of the teacher-student relationship. With closer examination of the policy itself, however, it becomes obvious that the role of the teacher in moments of crisis remains unclear. The policy denied teachers their teaching and pedagogical roles, as their participation was limited to their mere presence in the school building. Thus, trust in teachers by authorities remained more on a declarative than practical level (Pešikan & Ivić, 2021). In their reaction to the policy, parents relied on teachers' pedagogical skills, demonstrating trust in their ability to intervene in a crisis. With later official modifications to the policy, teachers were given vague guidelines, urging them to empathise, monitor for signs of distress, and maintain positive relationships with students. Such broad directives and unclear guidelines risk overwhelming teachers, pushing them beyond their capabilities or

leading to inaction (Krek, 2020; Jokić Zorkić et al., 2021). Clear guidelines and explanations are also important because many teachers still believe that their primary role in school is to teach students and not to help develop their character (Majska platforma, 2024).

Finally, the parents' reactions reflected a lack of trust in the representatives of the authorities, as they repeatedly requested official meetings with parents included. The implicit meaning of this reaction could be that the parents' voices should be valued at least equally to those of the official representatives or experts, as meetings without them should not result in final decisions.

### *Implications for students*

These meanings have several implications for students. Research indicates that school routines foster a sense of calmness, certainty and stability (Dyregrov et al., 2020; Schultz, et al., 2014; Turunen & Punamaki, 2014). However, resuming classes in a harmed school one week post-incident risks re-traumatisation (Hobfoll et al., 2007). Furthermore, the notion of returning to school to resume routines may mislead students, parents and teachers, as it is not about "getting back to old routines" but "establishing new ones" (Røkholt et al., 2016). Parents and teachers should receive clear instructions on gradually introducing new routines on the educational and psychosocial levels. Otherwise, it is very likely that parents and teachers will be left frustrated and in conflict with students due to uncertainties about how to put the general advice of "getting back to the routine" into action (Røkholt et al., 2016). The optional return to school could be interpreted as the government's attempt to demonstrate sensitivity and inclusiveness towards diverse student needs. While giving students the choice to return could be positive, it could also cause marginalisation if the students' decisions are in conflict with their peers' choices or societal expectations, i.e., choosing not to go to school while peers decide to go could result in a student being perceived as dramatic or lacking resilience. Furthermore, the most traumatised students are likely to avoid returning to a site associated with trauma, or to hesitate to seek help, which could result in this policy isolating those who are most in need of support (Somasundaram & van de Put, 2006). We therefore believe that a more effective strategy would be to relocate students to alternative schools until the renovation of their school is complete. After school reconstruction, we would advise gradual familiarisation with the new space, followed by a policy storyline that the traumatic incident belongs to the past and that the school building is once again a safe space (Turunen & Punamaki, 2014).

## Stopping schooling

### *Different meanings of the policy*

The government's decision to prematurely end schooling on a national level referred to cancelling regular classes, while extracurricular activities, preparatory sessions for exams, opportunities for grade improvement, professional support and school community engagement remained available. This policy directly denied teachers and students their most familiar space and activity for interaction, consequently making it harder for teachers to implement their pedagogical knowledge. Turning away from traditional teaching and learning was noticed only by teachers who felt this was not a good approach for students and their recovery. Instead of accentuating the valuable role of school and schooling, teachers felt that they were once again marginalised and that their authority was minimised, as in previous policy measures (Pešikan & Ivić, 2021). Moreover, as grades are essential in Serbian education for continuing to higher levels of schooling, by focusing on grades through this policy, the government may have been implying that it was time to move forward and think about the future. However, the lack of clear instructions on how to overcome the tragedy meant that none of the coalitions seemed ready to proceed into the future at the moment in question.

One of the most controversial meanings of introducing this policy was the deployment of power between one group of parents and the government, as it was stated that some parents became the deciding party for this policy. Both parent groups expressed their conflicting opinions in the media, which significantly impacted public opinion. Consequently, authority figures focused on appeasing parents and addressing their concerns, leading to an unusual situation where parents became highly influential in shaping education policies. A sensitive, tailored, collaborative approach to parents is important for support of vulnerable students (Plavčak, 2024); however, the newly created situation in the power dynamic of coalitions prompted a critical question: does the growing influence of parents in educational policymaking serve or undermine students' best interests?

### *Implications for students*

As well as impacting students of the Vladislav Ribnikar Primary School, the second policy also affected students on the national level. The decision to stop schooling meant that students were denied the right to have regular (traditional) classes where they usually gain knowledge and develop cognitive competencies. Moreover, abruptly ending the school routine exposed students and teachers, including those not directly impacted by the incident, to increased

stress and uncertainty: they were compelled to conclude the academic year in just 4 working days rather than the expected 14 working days.

Regarding minimising teachers' roles, the research aligns with teachers' observations, as a significant decline was observed in students' academic performance and increased absenteeism was recorded in the first year post-incident (Stene et al., 2019; Strom et al., 2016). In our opinion, teachers were denied the possibility to use their pedagogical skills to support children's academic challenges, as students were still in a position to acquire grades, but with no support for their cognitive processes. Moreover, preventing teachers from demonstrating their competencies – as well as their personal regard, respect and integrity – could result in a diminution of much-needed trustful role-relationship between teachers and students (Jokić Zorkić et al., 2021). There is a pressing need for teachers to be equipped with effective pedagogical methods for working with traumatised students, enabling them to support students' adjustment to new routines and facilitate their recovery of stability and security.

The introduced policy could have similar implications for students from the Vladislav Ribnikar Primary School, but there is an additional potential threat: the inconsistency in policies could even increase the already high level of insecurity and uncertainty among this vulnerable group of students.

## Conclusion

The present study aimed to explore how policymakers and institutional stakeholders find different meanings in the same policy, and to examine the implications of the policy's meanings for the position of students in the education system. The key findings refer to the damaging effect of inconsistency in policies on students' wellbeing and the importance of including the relevant expert parties in conducting policies. The analysis also highlighted important dynamics between different power roles in the policy-making process, revealing the unfavourable position of teachers in the decision-making process and the more influential position of different parent groups. These power roles are deeply rooted in the historical background of the Serbian education system, and to understand the dynamic of the policy-making process for the Vladislav Ribnikar Primary School it is crucial to also understand the relationship that had been built between coalitions in the two decades before the shooting.

In conclusion, we believe the main question should not be whether schooling should stop or continue, but how to create a line of consistent and stable recommendations aligned with the created policy. The greatest risk to students lies not in the specific decision about the cessation or continuation of

schooling, but in the fluctuation and uncertainty of policies, which gives rise to unease. The consistent application of either approach – stopping schooling with supportive psycho-social activities or continuing schooling in an alternate setting with gradual reintroduction – could effectively benefit students wellbeing.

It is important to note a few limits of this study. The first lies in the methodology of the analysed sample. Specifically, we relied on only a small number of news reports, some originating from a blog not obliged to follow journaling ethics. Hence, the analysed data might have been impacted by the subjective opinions of their authors. Future research should strive to rely only on selected objective materials that report further than 40 days post-tragedy, in order to gain a comprehensive perspective on the scope of the effect of the policies introduced. Secondly, in an effort to provide a focused analytical report on the policies introduced post-shooting, we overlooked the majority of policies initially brought by the government, as they did not refer directly to the education system (safety regulations, regulations of laws, etc). Although it was necessary to be selective in conducting the research, this may lead to providing only a glimpse of the big picture, i.e., neglecting the historical background of the education system in question. Finally, the third limitation of the study was the lack of data including children's perspectives on the introduced policies. Due to their young age, it is not possible to find official statements or representatives of this student group, and their parents are consequently given the role of speaking on their behalf. It is justified to believe that the opinions and perspectives of children and their parents may differ, so future research should find ways to include students as one of the coalitions for policy interpretation.

## References

- Beta. (2023, June 2). *Sindikat prosvetara traži od Vlade da preispita odluku o prevremenom završetku školske godine* [Teachers' union requests government to reconsider decision on early termination of the school year]. Insajder.  
<https://insajder.net/prenosimo/sindikat-prosvetara-trazi-od-vlade-da-preispita-odluku-o-prevremenom-zavrsetku-skolske-godine>
- Böhmer, M. (2023). *Amok at schools – prevention, intervention and aftercare in school shootings*. Springer. <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-658-38859-1>
- Butkus, S. L. (2020). *Investigating school shootings from 1996 to 2019 for processes needed to prevent and respond to future school shootings: A case study*. [Doctoral dissertation, North Central University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.
- Currie, S., & Hayes, B. (2021). *Psychological support for schools following a crisis or disaster: The journey of recovery: Report*. The British Psychological Society.

<https://doi.org/10.53841/bpsrep.2022.rep150>

Cvjetić, A. (2023, June 6). Milićević: Nastava se danas završava, mislim da je to najbolja moguća odluka [Milićević: Classes end today, I think this is the best possible decision]. Zelena učionica.

<https://zelenaucionica.com/milicevic-nastava-se-danas-završava-mislim-da-je-to-najbolja-moguca-odluka/>

Čaprić, G., & Videnović, M. (2024). PISA 2022 izveštaj za Republiku Srbiju [PISA 2022 Report for Republic of Serbia]. Zavod za vrednovanje kvaliteta obrazovanja i vaspitanja, Beograd.

Dyregrov, A., Dyregrov, K., & Lytje, M. (2020). Loss in the family – A reflection on how schools can support their students. *Bereavement Care*, 39(3), 95–101. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02682621.2020.1828722>

Dyregrov, K. (2006). The important role of the school following suicide in Norway. What support do young people wish that school could provide?. *Journal of Death and Dying*, 59(2), 147–161.

<https://doi.org/10.2190/OM.59.2.d>

Dyregrov, K., Endsjo, M., Idsoe, T., & Dyregrov, A. (2015). Suggestions for the ideal follow-up for bereaved students as seen by school personnel. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 20(3), 289–391.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13632752.2014.955676>

Đerić, I., & Gutvajn, N. (2023). Kako postupiti u kriznim situacijama: preporuke za školsku zajednicu [How to act in crisis situations: Recommendations for the school community]. Institut za pedagoška istraživanja. <https://www.ipisr.org.rs/images/vesti/Kako-postupiti-u-kriznim-situacijama.pdf>

Eifert, W. L. (2022). *The effect of school mass shooting and level of exposure on adolescents and young adults: A systematic literature review*. [Doctoral dissertation, Pepperdine University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Filozofski fakultet. (2023). Psihološke smernice za medijsko izveštavanje nakon kriznih događaja [Psychological guidelines for media reporting after crisis events]. Filozofski fakultet, Univerzitet u Beogradu, Odeljenje za psihologiju. <https://www.f.bg.ac.rs/files/PS-2023-5-9-212617.pdf>

Fischer, F. (2004). Reframing public policy: Discursive politics and deliberative practices. *Policy Sciences*, 37, 89–93. <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:OLIC.0000035505.23131.80>

Hobfoll, S. E., Watson, P., Bell, C. C., Bryant, R. A., Brymer, M. J., Friedman, M. J., Friedman, M., Gersons, B. P. E., de Jong, J. T. V. M., Layne, C. M., Maquen, S., Neria, Y., Norwood, A. E., Pynoos, R. S., Reissman, D., Ruzek, J. I., Shalev, A. Y., Solomon, Z., Steinberg, A. M., & Ursano, R. J. (2007). Five essential elements of immediate and mid-term mass trauma intervention: Empirical evidence. *Psychiatry*, 70(4), 283–315. <https://doi.org/10.1521/psyc.2007.70.4.283>

Ivić, I., & Pešikan, A. (2012). Education system reforms in an unstable political situation: The case of Serbia in the first decade. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, 2(2), 31–53.

<https://doi.org/10.26529/cepsj.383>

Jokić Zorkić, T., Mičić, K., & Kovács Cerović, T. (2021). Lost trust? The experiences of teachers and students during schooling disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, 11(Sp. Issue), 195–218. <https://doi.org/10.26529/cepsj.1150>

Jorgensen, B. F., Skarstein, D., & Schultz, J. (2015). Trying to understand the extreme: School children's narratives of the mass killings in Norway July 22, 2011. *Psychology Research and Behavior Management*, 8, 51–61. <https://doi.org/10.2147/PRBM.S73685>

- Klun, M., Frangež, D., & Ručman, B. (2023). Addressing violence against parents and peers and violence in schools through the perspective of ecological theory. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, Article 1681. <https://doi.org/10.26529/cepsj.1681>
- Kosanović, S., & Zemunović, M. (2023, May 7). *Dezinformacije o masakru u školi "Vladislav Ribnikar" [Disinformation about the massacre at the Vladislav Ribnikar Primary School]*. Fake News Tragač. <https://fakenews.rs/2023/05/07/dezinformacije-o-masakru-u-skoli-vladislav-ribnikar/>
- Krek, J. (2020). Structural reasons for school violence and education strategies. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, 10(2), 145–173. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1258375.pdf>
- Lankford, A., & Madfis E. (2018). Don't name them, don't show them, but report everything else: A pragmatic proposal for denying mass killers the attention they seek and deterring future offenders. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 62(2), 260–279. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764217730854>
- Madfis, E. (2016). In search of meaning: Are school rampage shootings random and senseless violence?. *The Journal of Psychology*, 151(1), 21–35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223980.2016.1196161>
- Majska platforma. (2024). *Izveštaj o uzrocima nasilja u društvu koje pogađa decu i mlade s preporukama za sistemske promene – Radna verzija* [Report on the causes of violence in society affecting children and youth with recommendations for systemic changes – working version]. [https://majskaplatforma.rs/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Obrazovanje\\_Majska-platforma.pdf](https://majskaplatforma.rs/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Obrazovanje_Majska-platforma.pdf)
- Martinez, M. (2019). An examination of higher education policy problems using narrative policy analysis. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 63(3), 369–384. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000276421882056>
- Mosqueda, C. M., Heath, M. A., Cutrer-Párraga, E. A., Ridge, R. D., Jackson, A. P., & Miller, E. (2021). Analysis of 48 hours of television news coverage following the Columbine High School shooting. *School Psychology Review*, 52(1), 57–71. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2372966x.2020.1870410>
- Muschert, G. W. (2007). Research in school shootings. *Sociology Compass*, 1(1), 60–80. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9020.2007.00008.x>
- Norris, F. H., Friedman, M. J., & Watson, P. J. (2002). 60,000 disaster victims speak: Part I. An empirical review of the empirical literature 1981–2001. *Psychiatry*, 65(3), 240–260. <https://doi.org/10.1521/psyc.65.3.207.20173>
- Perfect, M., Turley, M., Carlson, J., Yohanna, J., & Saint Gilles, M. (2016). School-related outcomes of Traumatic event exposure and traumatic stress symptoms in students: A systematic review of research from 1990 to 2015. *A Multidisciplinary Research and Practice Journal*, 8(1), 7–43. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12310-016-9175-2>
- Pešikan, A., & Ivić, I. (2021). The impact of specific social factors on changes in education in Serbia. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, 11(2), 59–76. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1309485.pdf>
- Plavčak, D. (2024). The families of special needs children from the perspective of vulnerability. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, 14(2), 155–170. <https://doi.org/10.26529/cepsj.1523>
- Republika Srbija Ministarstvo prosvete. (2023, May 8). *Pojasňjenje plana intervencije u krizi za Osnovnu školu "Vladislav Ribnikar" [Clarification of the crisis intervention plan for the Vladislav Ribnikar Primary School]*. <https://prosveta.gov.rs/vesti/pojasnenje-plana-intervencije-u-krizi-za-osnovnu-skolu-vladislav-ribnikar/>



- Røkholt, E. G., Schultz, J.-H., & Langballe, Å. (2016). Negotiating a new day: parents' contributions to supporting students' school functioning after exposure to trauma. *Psychology Research and Behavior Management*, 9, 81–93. <https://doi.org/10.2147/PRBM.S97229>
- RTS. (2023, May 10). Milena Vasić: Roditelji dece iz "Ribnikara" žele da se deca vrate u školu ali ne na to mesto [Milena Vasić: Parents of children from "Ribnikar" want for their children to return to school, but not to that place]. RTS. <https://www.rts.rs/vesti/drustvo/5188424/milena-vasic-roditelji-dece-iz-ribnikara-zele-da-se-deca-vrate-u-skolu-ali-ne-na-to-mesto.html>
- Savet roditelja Osnovne škole "Vladislav Ribnikar" (2023, May 30). Savet roditelja OŠ "Vladislav Ribnikar": Deca žele da idu u svoju školu, "neće da dozvole da ih jedan K. K. sve pobedi" [Parent council of the Vladislav Ribnikar Primary School: The children want to go to their school, "They won't allow a certain K. K. to defeat them all"]. Insajder. <https://insajder.net/prenosimo/savet-roditelja-os-vladislav-ribnikar-deca-zele-da-idu-u-svoju-skolu-nece-da-dozvole-da-ih-jedan-k-k-sve-pobedi>
- Schultz, J., Langballe, A., & Raundalen, M. (2014). Explaining the unexplainable: Designing a national strategy on classroom communication concerning the 22 July terror attack in Norway. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 5, 1–5. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3402/ejpt.v5.22758>
- Somasundaram, D. J., & van de Put, W. A. C. M. (2006). Management of trauma in special populations after a disaster. *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, 67, 64–73. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/7176747\\_Management\\_of\\_trauma\\_in\\_special\\_populations\\_after\\_a\\_disaster](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/7176747_Management_of_trauma_in_special_populations_after_a_disaster)
- Stene, L. E., Schultz, J., & Dyb, G. (2019). Returning to school after a terror attack: A longitudinal study of school functioning and health in terror-exposed youth. *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 28(3), 319–328. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-018-1196-y>
- Strom, I. F., Schultz, J., Wentzel-Larsen, T., & Dyb, G. (2016). School performance after experiencing trauma: A longitudinal study of school functioning in survivors of the Utoya shootings in 2011. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 7(1). <https://doi.org/10.3402/ejpt.v7.31359>
- Turunen, T., Haravuori, H., Pihlajamäki, J. J., Marttunen, M., & Punamäki, R. (2014). Framework of the outreach after a school shooting and the students' perceptions of the provided support. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 5(1), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.3402/ejpt.v5.23079>
- Turunen, T. & Punamäki, R. (2014). Psychosocial support for trauma-affected students after school shootings in Finland. *Violence and Victims*, 29(3), 476–491. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1891/0886-6708.VV-D-12-00059>
- UNICEF. (2023). *Preporuke za izveštavanje o masovnim pucnjavama* [Recommendations for reporting on mass shootings]. UNICEF. <https://www.unicef.org/serbia/media/23696/file>
- UNS. (n.d.). *Kodeks Novinara Srbije* [Code of Journalists of Serbia]. Retrieved February 15, 2024, from <https://www.medijskapismenost.net/Kodeks-novinara-Srbije>
- World Bank Group. (n.d.). *Government expenditure on education, total (% of GDP) – Serbia*. Retrieved July 7, 2024, from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.XPD.TOTL.GD.ZS?locations=RS>

## Biographical note

**SANJA STOJILJKOVIĆ** is a Junior Researcher at the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Belgrade, Serbia. Her broad research interests include educational psychology, developmental psychology and cyberpsychology. More precisely, in her research work she is mainly focused on the socio-emotional learning of youth in the digital context of social media, advocating the need to introduce digital and socio-emotional competencies into school curriculums.

**BARBARA BLAŽANIN** is a teaching assistant in the field of Educational Psychology in the Faculty of Special Education and Rehabilitation at the University of Belgrade, Serbia. Her research interests include socio-emotional learning, socio-emotional development, adolescence, academic identity and motivation in the academic context.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26529/cepsj.1889>

## Challenging Divisions Through Teacher Education and History Teaching: The Case of Bosnia and Herzegovina

LARISA KASUMAGIĆ-KAFEDŽIĆ\*<sup>1</sup> AND LEJLA MULALIĆ<sup>2</sup>

≈ Educating teachers to teach language, culture and history in a post-conflict country such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is still deeply divided and fragmented, implies enormous social and moral responsibilities. These endeavours represent continuous challenges where the processes of healing the wounds in such vulnerable situations, so deep and irreparable, are discussed and contextualised within the long-term social recovery in which the education of children and young people takes on a primary transformative role. The present paper examines the education policies and divisions in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the past twenty years, which reflect the segregation, politicisation and fragmentation in the post-war society. It also focuses on the role of educators in teaching for peace, antidiscrimination and intercultural understanding by addressing the issues of social exclusion, injustice, prejudice, privilege and violence across the curriculum. It problematises the construction and representation of historical and cultural knowledge, which is usually ethnocentric in orientation. Special emphasis is placed on the role of universities, i.e., university teachers and teacher educators, in promoting critical thinking and universal humanistic values among students in Bosnia and Herzegovina in general, and those studying at the English Department, University of Sarajevo, in particular. Drawing on the theories and resources of critical and intercultural pedagogy and peace education, the paper explores the possibilities of discussing stereotypes and prejudice with first-year BA students at the English Department within their Introduction to British Studies course, and with MA student teachers within their Interculturalism in Language Education course, which deals with peacebuilding and intercultural sensitivity in teaching English from a cultural perspective.

**Keywords:** ethnocentric education, stereotypes and prejudice, history teaching, teacher education, education for peace

1 \*Corresponding Author. University of Sarajevo - Faculty of Philosophy, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina; [larisa.kasumagic@ff.unsa.ba](mailto:larisa.kasumagic@ff.unsa.ba).

2 University of Sarajevo - Faculty of Philosophy, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

## Problematiziranje razdeljenosti skozi izobraževanje učiteljev in poučevanje zgodovine: primer Bosne in Hercegovine

LARISA KASUMAGIĆ-KAFEDŽIĆ IN LEJLA MULALIĆ

~ Izobraževanje učiteljev za poučevanje jezika, kulture in zgodovine v postkonfliktni državi, kot je Bosna in Hercegovina, ki je še vedno globoko razdeljena in razdrobljena, pomeni ogromno družbeno in moralno odgovornost. Ta prizadevanja predstavljajo stalne izzive, pri katerih se o procesih celjenja tako globokih in nepopravljivih ran v tako ranljivih razmerah razpravlja in jih umešča v kontekst dolgoročne družbene obnove, v kateri vzgoja in izobraževanje otrok in mladih prevzema primarno transformativno vlogo. Ta članek raziskuje vzgojno-izobraževalne politike in razdeljenosti v Bosni in Hercegovini v zadnjih dvajsetih letih, ki odražajo segregacijo, politizacijo in razdrobljenost v povojni družbi. Osredinja se tudi na vlogo učiteljev pri poučevanju za mir, nediskriminacijo in medkulturno razumevanje z obravnavo vprašanj družbene izključenosti, nepravilnosti, predsodkov, privilegijev in nasilja pri vseh predmetih. Problematizira oblikovanje in predstavljanje zgodovinskega in kulturnega znanja, ki je običajno etnocentrično usmerjeno. Poseben poudarek je na vlogi univerz, tj. visokošolskih učiteljev, tudi tistih, ki poučujejo na pedagoških programih, pri spodbujanju kritičnega mišljenja in univerzalnih humanističnih vrednot med študenti v Bosni in Hercegovini na splošno, še posebej pa med študenti, ki študirajo na Oddelku za angleščino Univerze v Sarajevu. Na podlagi teorij in virov s področja kritične in medkulturne pedagogike ter vzgoje za mir članek raziskuje možnosti razpravljanja o stereotipih in predsodkih s študenti prvega letnika dodiplomskega študija na Oddelku za angleščino v okviru predmeta Uvod v britanske študije in z magistrskimi študenti, bodočimi učitelji, v okviru predmeta Medkulturnost v jezikovnem izobraževanju, ki obravnava vzpostavljane miru in medkulturno občutljivost pri poučevanju angleščine s kulturnega vidika.

**Ključne besede:** etnocentrično izobraževanje, stereotipi in predsodki, poučevanje zgodovine, izobraževanje učiteljev, izobraževanje za mir

## Introduction

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is a post-communist, conflict-affected and fragile country that has continued to work through a large number of socioeconomic and political challenges for almost three decades after the end of the deadliest and most devastating war on the European continent since the end of World War II. After the breakup of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, the war in BiH (1992–1995) deepened ethnic divisions among the three main ethnic groups – Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs – and left a legacy of massive war trauma, polarisation and segregation that continues to impact society at all levels. As such, BiH is particularly vulnerable and its post-war development is still seen as paralysed, stagnated and regressed. The post-war governmental structures in BiH have enabled the emergence of three conflicting, irreconcilable and often incompatible curricular approaches and school systems, which foster three ethnonational world views among youth and new generations (Perry, 2015), who are left without a civic identity that could embrace all of them regardless of their language, their ethnicity or their religious affiliation. BiH is divided into two entities: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (predominantly Bosniak and Croat), which consists of ten cantons, each with its own Ministry or Department of Education; and Republika Srpska (predominantly Serb). There is also the self-governing administrative unit of the Brčko District. Each entity has its own Ministry of Education and the school curriculum often reflects the ethnic composition of the community such that the national group of subjects (mother language, history, civics, religious education) can significantly differ.

Unsurprisingly, it is not only post-conflict BiH that faces this reality; many conflict-affected societies and education systems with painful histories of massive human rights abuses and social wounds and traumas are grappling with similar efforts to find appropriate educational responses, frameworks and approaches in their post-conflict contexts. The tragic realities of the ongoing wars and armed conflicts, political divides and social polarisations, marketisation and technocratic approaches to education and learning, poverty and other major crises throughout the world create high levels of insecurity, loneliness, mental health problems, isolation and human suffering, which particularly affects the wellbeing of children and youth all around the globe. The UNESCO Report (2023) states that “in 2022 there were 33 active armed conflicts which were reported globally and the number of forcibly displaced people passed 100 million for the first time. In total, since the adoption of the United Nations Charter in 1946, over 250 armed conflicts have occurred across the globe” (p. 4).

Modelling an education system to respond to these different challenges in the vulnerable societies of today requires the full determination, in-depth rethinking and holistic vision of the education policymakers, whereby the role of schools and education reforms is framed in the perspectives of social justice and peace, as well as critical pedagogies that challenge inequalities and discrimination.

The main goal of the present paper is to discuss the role of the self-conscious engagement of university teachers who work within a deeply divisive education system and who advocate for the promotion of critical approaches to learning and reclaiming humanistic values for local and global responsibilities of social relevance among students in BiH in general, and those studying at the English Department, University of Sarajevo, in particular. These approaches are seen as critical to make small inroads and undertake activities in fragile and conflict-affected educational communities where “responses may be more sporadic, less theorised and less coordinated to engage with overarching needs” (Millican, 2018, p. 20). More generally, the goal of the paper is to underscore the importance of peacebuilding through the education system, which needs to systemically and structurally advocate for alternative pedagogical strategies and approaches that address the issues of divisiveness and polarisation. Aliu and Kačaniku (2023) indicate that “the changing role of teachers has called for a new paradigm of the teaching profession that recognises the potential of teachers to lead for supporting school development and change” (p. 37). The authors of the present paper hope to contribute to this discussion from their specific educational and cultural context, thereby enhancing the general understanding of the role of teachers in creating democratic and peaceful classrooms.

Drawing on the tenets of critical pedagogy (Giroux, 2020; Phipps & Guilherme, 2004) and the concept of border-pedagogy (Giroux, 2005), the paper presents two examples from the classroom, contextualised within the English Department of the University of Sarajevo, with the aim of demonstrating the relevance of teaching peace and overcoming divisiveness in post-conflict societies such as BiH.

The fact that both authors of this paper are to a great extent defined by their experience of war in BiH – one of them living through the siege of Sarajevo as a high school student and falling in love with literature and history in the face of constant shelling, and the other living through the war in Zenica as a high school graduate and as a refugee in Germany for almost a year, and shortly after the war joining an NGO to help war-traumatised children cope with their experiences – enables both of them to use the precious yet subversive potential of personal experience in university classroom teaching. This lends

authenticity, immediacy and relevance to their teaching, and privileges the individual over any other form of identity and responsibility. Acknowledging the importance of critical reflection in the classroom, it seems imperative to create a safe space for students to feel encouraged to reconsider their views on obviously shifting concepts of (ethnic) majority and minority, while recognising the notion of “us versus them” as an artificial construct.

### **Theoretical background: Critical pedagogy and intercultural language teaching as key pillars in education for peace**

Although rooted in the context of the infiltration of neoliberal capitalist ideology into every pore of society in the United States during the 1970s and 1980s, Giroux's theoretical framework of critical pedagogy is highly applicable to other periods and contexts. This is primarily due to the fact that “critical pedagogy as a moral and political practice does more than emphasize the importance of critical analysis and moral judgments. It also provides tools to unsettle common sense assumptions, theorize matters of self and social agency, and engage the ever-changing demands and promises of a democratic policy” (Giroux, 2020, p. 1). Likewise, rather than being an “a priori method”, critical pedagogy is “the outcome of particular struggles and is always related to the specificity of particular contexts, students, communities, and available resources” (Giroux, 2020, p. 2). The pressure of neoliberal capitalism to view education as a sort of job training leading to (personal) economic growth and better prospects in a highly competitive job market has gradually become visible in BiH in the last two decades, i.e., once it emerged from the devastating 1992–1995 war. Hence, the twin challenge of neoliberal capitalism and ethno-nationalism has proved to be crucial for the development of educational paradigms in post-conflict BiH. Critical pedagogy envisions classrooms that are not “reduced to a transmission model of teaching and limited to the propagation of a culture of conformity and the passive absorption of knowledge” (Giroux, 2020, p. 3). Instead, it aims to provide “students with alternative modes of teaching, social relations, and imagining rather than those that merely support the *status quo*” (Giroux, 2020, p. 4). In addition to these aspects, one of the most relevant missions of critical pedagogy is to draw attention to the interplay of knowledge and power. For students to become aware of these relationships, they should be encouraged to connect the classroom with the social, cultural and political contexts in which the process of teaching and learning is taking place.

Critical pedagogy of foreign language education is a new paradigm shift in language education, in which intercultural communication implies “a critical

use of language(s), a critical approach to one's own and other cultural backgrounds and a critical view of intercultural interaction" (Phipps & Guilherme, 2004, p. 3). There are several important concepts in relation to the intercultural approach to teaching. The first is that of *dissent*, with which students deal through "critical cultural awareness towards the Self and the Other and through honest and balanced negotiation" (Phipps & Guilherme, 2004, p. 3). Specifically, rather than nourishing "harmony and intercultural consensus" (Phipps & Guilherme, 2004, p. 3) as the only legitimate pedagogical goal, dissent provides immense possibilities to develop a sense of the Self and the Other in what is a very contradictory world. The second concept is that of (*critical*) *reflection* of students, which should be promoted instead of "the memorisation and interpretation of facts and [...] cultural generalisations or even stereotyping" (Phipps & Guilherme, 2004, p. 3). The notion of *difference* is the third integral element critical for in-depth understanding in an intercultural approach to teaching, since it endorses multiculturalism and intercultural values. Crucial for difference is Giroux's concept of *border pedagogy* (2005) because borders or margins, whether cultural, political or social, give rise to a sense of difference. Thus, critical pedagogy becomes inseparable from border-crossing as it "signals forms of transgression in which existing borders forged in domination can be challenged and redefined" (Giroux, 2005, p. 20). Furthermore, both students and teachers become "border-crossers in order to understand otherness in its own terms, and to further create borderlands in which diverse cultural resources allow for the fashioning of new identities within existing configurations of power" (Giroux 2005, p. 20).

These concepts and critical discussions of education could also be seen as framed within the larger field of peace education, which is the umbrella term of the "what" and "why" of peace teaching and learning. In communities emerging from histories of mass violence with ethnocentric approaches to education, peace education aims to "lay the foundations for healing from historical harms, ensuring their non-repetition, restoring trust among former enemies and building a stronger basis for a shared future" (Kasumagić-Kafedžić & Clarke-Habibi, 2023, p. 8). Since it is seen as only one aspect of the much wider project of "peacebuilding through education", it contributes to the recognition of the structural issues of educational governance, curriculum, access to all, quality and provision, which all play a very important role in shaping peace and conflict in one society (Novelli et al., 2015; Smith, 2010), where the interconnectedness of critical pedagogy and an intercultural approach to language teaching infuses peacebuilding values in teaching goals and fosters the development of education for peace.



## **Classroom initiatives in the context of divisiveness and ethnocentric education**

Many transitional societies, such as BiH, retain educational institutions that are deeply divided and segregated, and they often “mirror broader socio-political norms that are still in place”, which is “particularly true of cases where conflict or repression has had an identity-related dimension” (Duthie & Ramírez-Barat, 2018, p. 22). Following the war, BiH’s education system became highly segregated along ethnic divisions, especially in schools and neighbourhoods that remained physically segregated along ethnic lines. This is illustrated by the phenomenon of “two schools under one roof”, which is still present in many communities across the country. While this type of segregation “can be a reflection of identity and other social divisions, it can also be part of an explicit policy of privileging one group over another, and the persistence of segregated schools in the public system can contribute to reinforcing divisions and exacerbating tensions – by perpetuating stereotypes and prejudices – and hindering progress made by other initiatives designed to promote acknowledgment and build civic trust” (Duthie & Ramírez-Barat, 2018, p. 22). In the words of Giroux, numerous borders are continually installed, thus creating new teaching and learning contexts.

Even though BiH has committed to assuming responsibility for carrying out reforms of its compulsory public education system(s), through which society transmits values to its children and youth, many of the initiated reforms have stagnated and so-called “interim solutions” have become permanent (Perry, 2014). The monoperspective paradigm in the education system in BiH, with the “us versus them” narrative and a focus on one perspective and one worldview as the only “truth” (Perry, 2015), continues to shape the educational realities within the classroom. Likewise, the curriculum still seems to be dominated by the use of highly prescriptive content divided into separate subjects, frontal teacher-centred teaching methodology, a conservative worldview that favours conformism, and passive uncritical consumption of knowledge, while religion is represented as the exclusive domain of a single collective and its important determining factor (Perry, 2015; Soldo et al., 2017).

The most vulnerable groups in a system based on a monoperspective and ethnocentric approach to education are always children and young people, who are the victims of the structures from the past created and maintained by adults. Giroux notes that the experience of children and young people is crucial for understanding “the relationship between power and the lived realities shaped by material relations of power”. Accordingly, “educators need a new language in which young people are not detached from politics but become

central to any transformative notion of pedagogy conceived in terms of social and public responsibility” (Giroux, 2004b, p. 7).

In the sections below, we provide two examples of specific pedagogical approaches to monoperspectivity and ethnocentrism in education aimed at addressing the issues of segregation, discrimination, social exclusion and conflict. These examples are illustrations of socially responsible classrooms that focus on teaching peace in a deeply divided socio-political context.

The first example contextualises the teaching of peace at the Department of English Language and Literature of the University of Sarajevo by looking at the approaches to peace and conflict in educational contexts prior to university, in order to gain a better understanding of the knowledge and values students bring to the classrooms. First-year BA students of the said department take a course on British history and culture called Introduction to British Studies, in which a significant amount of time is dedicated to Britain’s regional identities. It is here that students encounter the story of “the Troubles” in Northern Ireland (for more details see, for example, Gibney, 2017), most of them for the first time. Given the common timeframe of the final years of the Troubles and the 1992–1995 war in BiH, as well as the prominence of ethnic and religious divides in both countries, interesting insights can be obtained from examining how these issues are treated in the classroom. Furthermore, drawing on the analogies between BiH and Northern Ireland, as well as the tenets of critical pedagogy, the paper will present a specific example of teaching practice in order to reflect on the power of stereotypes and prejudice in fragile societies, as well as the possibility of dismantling their harmful impact and transforming it into learning opportunities.

The second example examines the teaching methods and approaches employed in the curriculum of the teacher education programme for English language teachers at the same English Department, which was reformed in 2008 as part of the Bologna reform processes by the establishment of a distinct teacher education master’s programme for the first time in the history of the department. One of the modules in the Interculturalism in Language Education course, which is integral to the teacher education programme at the English Department, is dedicated to researching and learning about critical and peace pedagogies aimed at empowering students to recognise and address social issues in society. Students are encouraged and instructed to use literary and historical examples to guide them through their understanding of the present-day experiences of social injustice, segregation, polarisation and racism. In the treatment of the pre-service education or professional development curriculum, the role of teachers is not sufficiently explored, which is why it is critically important to acknowledge the fact that teachers may be expected to

play a range of roles as both agents and subjects of peacebuilding in conflict-affected contexts, which are some of the reflections illustrated in this section.

The authors of the present paper seek to illustrate the fact that self-conscious engagement in teaching is creating new cultural spaces by offering alternative pedagogical strategies within teacher development in dealing with contested narratives and sensitive topics in university classrooms, which are seen as “communal places that enhance the likelihood of collective effort in creating and sustaining a learning community” (hooks, 1994, p. 8). For this reason, classrooms are places in which these theoretical concepts should be subjected to the test of practical teaching in a particular socio-historical context.

### **Educational contexts prior to university: Bosnia and Herzegovina and Northern Ireland**

Forić-Plasto and Blagojević-Dujković (2023) analysed history curricula and textbooks in primary and secondary education in BiH in order to ascertain whether values of peace were promoted in the way that was envisaged by the relevant education reforms.

Their analysis of 14 different primary school history curricula and textbooks used in both BiH entities, including the cantons and the Brčko District, demonstrates that the representation of war throughout history is mostly reduced to depersonalised statistical data, factual accounts and the obscure language of politics, all of which fails to enable pupils to develop a sense of empathy for the ordinary people on all sides whose lives are devastated by war. Furthermore, wars are represented as inevitable and almost integral to the struggle for freedom and homeland, which is especially valid for the 1992–1995 war. The focus is on the suffering of only one ethnic group (Bosniaks, Croats or Serbs), rather than the destructive impact of war on all people, while the values of peace are largely ignored (Forić-Plasto & Blagojević-Dujković, 2023, pp. 172–173). The situation in high school textbooks and curricula is not significantly different. The emphasis is on reproductive learning, while references to peace are made only in the context of the work of the United Nations, thus limiting the discussion of peace to a factual account of peace organisations, rather than exploring peace as a universal value (Forić-Plasto & Blagojević-Dujković, 2023, p. 175). However, it is important to note that these conclusions are based on the available documents (curricula and text-books) and therefore do not take into account the efforts, creativity and courage of individual teachers to explore the margins of curricula and approach the prescribed units in ways that promote students’ skills of critical and multiple-perspective thinking.

The story of Northern Ireland reveals interesting parallels with post-conflict BiH. Following the period of violent conflict known as “the Troubles” (1968–1998) between Protestant unionists who identified with the UK and Catholic nationalists, most of whom wanted unification with the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland remains a divided society in spite of the peace process that resulted in the 1998 Good Friday Agreement (for more on the history of the conflict, see, for example, Gibney, 2017).

Religious separation is at the very core of education in Northern Ireland, so most children attend Protestant or Catholic schools. In 2011, a modest percentage of children attended integrated schools funded by the government (Smith, 2011, p. 57). As Smith (2011) explains, the concept of an inclusive civic identity is a contested issue in education, unlike national identity, which is based on binary oppositions and patriotic models of thinking (p. 66). However, the prospects of integrated education have changed for the better in the meantime, and Gallagher (2022) claims that support for integrated education is so high that in July 2022 “the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland announced additional funding of £1.9 million to support schools wishing to become integrated” (para. 2). However, Protestant and Catholic churches still insist on maintaining their own schools and have been unwilling to have their role in education reduced to make room for new approaches to integrated schooling (Gallagher, 2022, para. 4). This is an unambiguous example of the interplay of knowledge and power, comparable to the strong connection between political elites and education in BiH, which constitutes one of the main sites of contention according to critical pedagogy.

When it comes to teaching the controversial history of the Troubles, a survey of Northern Ireland’s secondary schools reveals that “the vast majority of Catholic schools teach this unit, which covers the years 1965–98”, while “just under half of ‘Protestant’ schools – those with a Protestant denomination or controlled by the state rather than by the Catholic church – teach the 1920–49 period instead” (Abrams, 2020, para. 4). According to Davies, “both units avoid controversy” (Abrams, 2020, para. 8):

Actually, there are some Catholics who have no idea what the Protestant story is. There’s a really positive Protestant story to tell: you could say it’s about freedom of thought, freedom of religion. They could point out that some of the earliest advocates of Irish independence were Protestant. Instead, we have an eviscerated, inoffensive curriculum that occupies the middle ground and which is not recognisable to people when they go home and talk about their history. (Abrams, 2020, para. 10)

The report written by the Centre for Children's Rights at Queen's University concludes the following:

Participants in all groups in the study were aware of the limitations of accounts shared with young people with concerns related to partiality or 'bias' linked most strongly to family accounts, but also to social media and accounts within the community. The potential to glorify or romanticise the past was a key concern where children were not included in discussions about the impact of the Troubles/Conflict in communities and families. Additionally, participants noted that selective or partial accounts may perpetuate sectarian views that can reinforce a divisive mind-set between communities across the generations. (McAlister et al., 2021, p. 9)

As well as sanitising uncomfortable truths about the past, a biased or selective approach to the contested history of the conflicts in BiH and Northern Ireland, which share many similarities in spite of their different historical backgrounds, fails to engage young people in a dialogue. Quite the contrary, such uncritical readings of the past, along with the lack of awareness of the necessity of reclaiming universal values of peace, only entrench young people deeper in their national, ethnic and religious myths, without allowing for a multifaceted inclusive narrative that primarily requires them to confront their own beliefs and question the truths propagated at school and within their families and communities. These contexts call for Giroux's border-crossing in order to lay bare the scaffolding behind the artificial mental borders and gain a deeper understanding of the processes of construction of ethnic and religious identities.

### **Teaching practice to reflect on the power of stereotypes and prejudice**

The familiarity of the notion of a divided society makes the story of Northern Ireland particularly valuable teaching content for first-year BA students of English in BiH. The course addresses an audience fresh from high school and still under the influence of controversial government policies on the history curriculum, especially the teaching of national history. The confluence of these factors in the context of British history and culture classes at the University of Sarajevo makes it possible to challenge monolithic perceptions of history, on the one hand, and mistrust or indifference towards the study of the past, on the other, by introducing students to the diversity of histories and cultures of the British Isles, while, at the same time, indirectly touching upon identity issues inherent to the complex history of BiH.

The specific example we would like to discuss is the concept of bystand-ing in a conflict based on the Corrymeela publication *The Choices We Made: Bystanding and Conflict in Northern Ireland* (Murphy & Pettis, 2020). This publication is an Educator's Guide developed with the aim of exploring human agency in times of conflict, not in order to instil a sense of guilt in those who did nothing to prevent injustice, but to make learning about history more meaningful for students (Murphy & Pettis, 2020, p. 6). Meaningful learning here refers to the fact that history is typically seen by students as either irrelevant and "boring", due to the dominance of instant experiences rooted in "the now" best exemplified by the use of social media; alternatively, it is perceived as problematic due to the uncomfortable questions it raises about the past. The guide consists of six personal stories, also available as short videos, and appropriate teaching strategies and activities to be used in class. Our students read the story entitled "He just crumpled" and watch the video where the story is narrated by the actual protagonist of the events, while the person appearing in the video is a professional actress with the fictional name Bronagh. It is about a Catholic woman driving in a so-called black taxi in West Belfast with her two sons in 1988. They are sharing the taxi with another man and his son. During the ride, Bronagh witnesses the shooting of a British soldier in the street. The man in the taxi is literally cheering, intoxicated with delight. Bronagh does nothing but remains speechless and ridden with a sense of guilt.

I should have done something. I should've got out and said to that young boy, "Are you all right?" Or even an act of contrition into his ear, which as a Catholic we're taught to do. But I didn't, I... I just went on. (Murphy & Pettis, 2020, p. 20)

Bronagh is relieved to learn on the news later that day that the soldier has been wounded but not killed. Nevertheless, she is haunted by the notion that she unwillingly participated in the gruesome act of violence. She tries to talk about her feelings with her sister, but encounters only a sobering reminder that she should mind the boundaries that clearly set the enemy outside the domain of empathy.

Our students are introduced to the socio-political and historical context of the Troubles before watching the video. They are also reminded to listen to each other carefully and respectfully, allow for differences of opinion, and feel no pressure to share with the rest of the class ideas and stories they are uncomfortable with, as the underlying notion of teaching sensitive topics is that everyone should feel safe. The teaching approach is aimed at understanding the causes of the conflict and recognising the extent to which ethnic and

religious stereotypes and prejudice, in this case among Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, contributed to the actual unfolding of the historical events. The power of ideas about the (ethnic, religious, racial, gender) Other as an enemy is foregrounded as the driving force of conflict. Likewise, the role of power centres such as the state and the church in creating and disseminating stereotypes and prejudice is highlighted and discussed. The goal is to demystify historical events as something inevitable and decided upon somewhere else, far away from ordinary people, and to develop an understanding that people are instrumental in creating, nourishing and abusing ideas that directly contribute to historical developments such as conflict, either by being part of centres of power or by uncritically accepting the narratives created by them.

In order to contextualise the teaching of the Northern Ireland conflict within BiH, students are encouraged to identify similarities between the two countries in terms of the power of negative perceptions, i.e., stereotypes and prejudice, of ethnic groups different from our own, as well as the nature of collective identities. This approach to potentially controversial issues is largely in line with what Judith L. Pace calls “contained risk-taking”, which is characterised by “careful calibration of risk” and “a compromise between openness and safety” (Pace, 2019, p. 229), so as to minimise the risk of inflammatory discourse that may accompany the creation of an open climate in the classroom (Pace, 2019, p. 230).

The story/video “He just crumpled” offers numerous teaching and learning possibilities in exploring the meaningfulness of war and violence as a legitimate response to diversity of opinion, religion and ethnicity. The shooting of a young man, the ecstatic approval of one witness, and the searing sense of guilt and shame of another witness unequivocally underline the power of the ideas on which we base our national, ethnic and religious identities. For students in BiH, the concept of Northern Irish Protestant and Catholic are no longer abstract and related to a far-away conflict. Quite the contrary, they often identify the power of the media in constructing a (biased) image of certain groups and communities; they also recognise the importance of family and community in transmitting these ideas and the (unused) potential of education to challenge these perceptions. Students of the English Department come from different parts of BiH and their experiences of the education system and its role in forming identities vary, which is why the possibility of encountering different stories and attitudes and having their own views challenged is particularly important. The concept of difference, which is integral to critical pedagogy, thereby becomes a site of constant negotiation for students in their attempt to critically examine the construction of identities.

The part of Bronagh's story that is suitable for discussion of these complex notions is the final part, in which she reduces the lofty patriotic and political slogans to a simple difference between life and death for the young British soldier on the streets of West Belfast in the midst of the Troubles. Although nominally she was a "bystander" in this particular situation, her true agency comes to life once she unmistakably recognises the absurdity of divisions as "natural" and unquestionable categories. She agreed to share her story with the activists at Corrymeela, thus setting an example for her sons as well as for the many other people who read her story. In doing so, she became an upstander, an active doer rather than the passive and frightened observer she initially imagined herself to be. Students do not immediately react to this part of her narrative because it does not have the dynamics of an action film visible in the shooting scene. Some of them insist there was nothing she could do and fail to notice the potential of her moral development towards the end of the story and the necessity of self-reflection in the face of ready-made perceptions and monolithic discourses on identity. This may cause dissent in the classroom, which should not be stifled to achieve uniformity of opinion but, on the contrary, should be used as a learning opportunity to deconstruct defeatist interpretations of Bronagh's story centred around the inevitability of war (in some parts of the world) and the powerlessness of ordinary people in the face of history. Careful facilitation of dialogue and an analysis of diverse resources such as images, murals, personal stories and text-books foregrounds the harmfulness of stereotypes and prejudice and the necessity of dismantling them. It is here that parallels to the challenges of peace and reconciliation in BiH can be made in order to make the learning and teaching of British history more meaningful and helpful in making ethical and socially responsible decisions outside of the classroom.

### **Teachers as agents of peace**

In the curriculum of the teacher education programme for English language teachers at the English Department of the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Sarajevo, special emphasis is put on an intercultural approach to language-culture didactics, a process in which it becomes critically relevant for student teachers to work on their own professional identity, educational values, beliefs and assumptions by critically reflecting on their intercultural sensitivity. The teacher education programme dedicates one full course to Interculturalism in Language Education, which offers new strategies, new goals and new practices in teacher education. The major shift is the emphasis on teaching as transformative and relation-based negotiated learning, thus moving away from



the emphasis on knowledge transmission and rote memorisation, towards critical pedagogy and intercultural learning (Kasumagić-Kafedžić, 2017, p. 49).

One of the modules in the Interculturalism in Language Education Course is dedicated to researching and learning about the *Facing History & Ourselves* methodology (<https://www.facinghistory.org/>), which aims to empower students by using literary and historical examples to guide them through the understanding of present-day experiences of social injustice, intolerance and racism. Two documentaries, “Eye of the Storm” and “A Class Divided” are used to discuss the role of the teacher Jane Elliott, who used a classroom experiment in 1970 to teach her third-graders a lesson in discrimination. The themes of prejudice, victims and victimisers, as well as human behaviour and the moral obligations of teachers, are contextualised for post-war society in BiH, and the student teachers are invited to critically reflect on the strategies, methods and activities used by Ms Eliot and compare them to the methods for teaching contested issues in classrooms in BiH of today. The applicability and adequacy of certain methods and strategies are also critically evaluated.

Such approaches to teacher preparation are critical in conflict-affected societies, since they embrace the understanding that schools, as future workplaces of teachers, should be seen as “cultural areas where diverse ideological and social forms are in constant struggle” (Pennycook, 1990, p. 24, as cited in Crookes, 2010). In such an environment, critical pedagogy, as the underlying pedagogical philosophy of teacher educators, would seek “to understand and critique the historical and socio-political context of schooling and to develop pedagogical practices that aim not only to change the nature of schooling but also the wider society” (Pennycook, 1990, p. 24, as cited in Crookes, 2010). In this sense, the way society decides to educate future teachers and prepare them for their work in classrooms becomes a critical stepping stone of the university pre-service teacher education curriculum, which should support future teachers to view language, culture or history education as an important component of constructing their own teacher identities. Teacher cognition and teacher conceptualisation of how they perceive the goals of education and schooling in conflict-affected education systems are rarely given the deserved representation in the literature and the teacher education curriculum. While teachers “are usually implied rather than addressed specifically” (Horner et al., 2015, as cited in Clarke-Habibi, 2018, p. 3) in the treatment of the pre-service education or professional development curriculum, it is critical to acknowledge that they “may be *expected* to play a range of roles as both agents and subjects of peacebuilding in conflict-affected contexts: from technocrats to reflexive practitioners, as well as agents of transformation, democratisation, healing, peace and/or resistance”

(Horner et al., 2015, as cited in Clarke-Habibi, 2018, p. 3) and “yet, little corresponding attention is given to the practical, social and personal challenges they face in striving to fulfil these role expectations” (Clarke-Habibi, 2018, p. 3).

It is therefore critical, as illustrated in the examples of the course on Interculturalism in Language Education, to support student teachers in the self-reflection process to understand how they assess their experiences in promoting the values of peace and nonviolence in their teaching, and how their own past experiences have shaped the conceptions and worldviews that they would like to integrate into their teaching.

In one of the reflection assignments of the Interculturalism in Language Education Course, a first-year master’s student teacher reflected (Kasumagić-Kafedžić, 2017, p. 54):

A deep-seated anger is never a solution, especially in educational contexts. As an educator, I want my students to develop their own identity, not the assumed identity of their environment. I want them to critically think of their own culture and fight the stereotypes and labels they have been served throughout their life, labels pertaining to them or the people from other cultures. The best way to achieve this goal is to introduce cultural and intercultural activities and workshops into curricula, establish intercultural school clubs, or develop inter-ethnic school cooperation. Students must be shown both mirrors and windows of their culture; mirrors to see themselves as a part of social change in their culture, and windows to look through them into the yard of a different culture. I want to be there to help my students open that window.

In this course, students are given different assignments to critically reflect on their own social and political roles in the post-conflict society and education system, by designing their method and framework of an intercultural approach to English as a Foreign Language specific to the local needs and environment. In a different task, another student teacher reflected (Kasumagić-Kafedžić, 2017, p. 55):

In order to apply intercultural pedagogy, we first need to “find and meet” our interculturality inside ourselves and dare to open our minds and hearts to something new and different. We need to learn not to be judgmental and to allow the time to really meet someone. I believe I have been lucky enough to have lived in two culturally different parts of Bosnia. When you live and attend primary and secondary school in one place, you get accustomed to a certain perspective and attitudes which form your personality. Not being exposed to the “other” you are not even prepared to live with

those others and you have no possibility to gain it because you are told that they are a minority and they should be the ones who are supposed to assimilate into your prevailing and dominant culture.

The observations made by the student teachers indicate the importance of initiating and using non-judgmental reflection to interrogate and challenge our own perceptions and values in teaching, which will then inform the decisions we make in the classroom.

Since “much of peace education literature continues to assume that *prescribed* peace education curricula translate neatly into *taught* curricula; that professional teachers function as abstracted *conduits* of peacebuilding, uninfluenced by their own conflict-affected pasts or the prevailing collective narratives; and that post-conflict peace educators are *at ease* with visions of a reconciled future in their own violence-affected society” (Clarke-Habibi, 2018, p. 3), it is of utmost importance that future teachers recognise the risks and challenges of leaving the safety nets of university classroom discussions and acknowledge all of the prospects and fears of addressing constructively and openly some of the contested issues in their own school communities and in connection to their country’s violent and turbulent past.

One of the key learning outcomes that the teacher educator in this course underscores is that the teacher’s understanding of peace and social justice should be founded on acknowledging the ways in which history has shaped their own positionality in education, or in the words of Giroux (2005, p. 25) “student experience has to be analyzed as part of a broader democratic politics of voice and difference”. The just assessment of lessons focusing on language, history, culture and literature should be embedded in the teacher education curriculum and analysed through the lenses of peace pedagogies.

## Conclusion

The idea of the transformative role of education in addressing the issues of divisiveness explored in this paper brings to the fore Giroux’s concept of “educated hope”, understood not only as a policy, but also as “a pedagogical and performative practice that provides the foundation for enabling human beings to learn about their potential as moral and civic agents” (2004a, p. 38). This concept best captures the essence of subversive self-reflexive teaching of the sensitive topics discussed throughout this paper, as it brings together personal experience/responsibility and “a progressive sense of social change” along with the different futures enacted by it (Giroux, 2004a, pp. 38–39).

University teachers, like all other educators, are not considered neutral figures, devoid of history or identity, or devoid of power or peacebuilding agency. They are positioned socially and politically in relation to the conflict legacy in their localities. BiH can be seen as a locality and place defined as a borderland between East and West. Such positionality can also imply infinite possibilities, both of conflict and creative cultural exchange, which is why the lives of people in BiH are always shaped by the burden of history, but also blessed with an enlightening plurality. As Stradling notes, our personal identities are always in a state of becoming, while our national identities are continually shaped by shared experiences, both admirable and shameful (Stradling, 2001, p. 151). Likewise, “collective memory may be a social ‘fact’, yet individuals have minds and emotions that are part of the narratives constructed; all these need to be constantly acknowledged and interrogated” (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2017, p. 148).

Teaching foreign languages, cultures and historical events requires the teacher to consistently, systematically and methodically pursue coherent teaching strategies and guide student learning as appropriate in the given context. In doing so, teachers need to work on their own professional identity and educational values, while acknowledging the impact of their prior learning and experience. Likewise, critical pedagogy helps students of languages, culture and history to deconstruct preconceived notions and to promote the transformation of the self, by looking back and connecting previous experiences to present realities, thus constructing new meaning. The process of negotiating between the demanding content of a course and the unmapped territories of our personal experience is not always pleasurable and may sometimes turn into moments of heavy silence or unease, but even these moments of quiet conflict can be precious learning opportunities for students and teachers alike.

The role of universities, as institutions educating new generations of citizens and shaping the values for local and global responsibilities, becomes crucial in countries and education systems affected by painful histories. The impact of post-war realities on universities in BiH is further complicated by the so-called “neoliberal project” or the tendency to downsize “unprofitable” disciplines or fields, such as the humanities and social sciences, as they are not adaptable to the “free market as the primary mechanism for all human exchange and interaction” (Kenway et al., 2015, p. 262). One aspect of this socio-political trend that is particularly relevant for BiH is the fact that disciplines labelled as unpopular and unmarketable are the rare sites of resistance at universities, as they “help give voice to subaltern knowledges and people”, thus enacting “dangerous knowledges” (Kenway et al., 2015, p. 263).

Universities are not isolated islands in the political, structural and social web of changes and daily realities. “When reforming norms and institutions within education systems, it is equally important to address aspects of segregation among different groups, a common structural legacy of past human rights violations” (Duthie & Ramírez-Barat, 2018, p. 22).

## References

- Abrams, F. (2020, July 14). *Is the curriculum dividing Northern Ireland's schools along Troubles lines?* The Guardian.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/jul/14/is-the-curriculum-dividing-northern-irelands-schools-along-troubles-lines>
- Aliu, J., & Kačaniku, F. (2023). An Exploration of teacher leadership: Are future teachers ready to lead?. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, 13(4), 37–62. <https://doi.org/10.26529/cepsj.1634>
- Bekerman, Z., & Zembylas, M. (2017). Mediating collective memories and official histories in conflict-affected societies: Pedagogical responses to “individual” narratives and competing collective memories. In H. Å. Elmersjö, A. Clark, & M. Vinterek (Eds.), *International perspectives on teaching rival histories* (pp. 133–155). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Clarke-Habibi, S. (2018). Teachers' perspectives on educating for peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina. *Journal of Peace Education*, 15(2), 144–168. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17400201.2018.1463209>
- Crookes, G. (2010). The practicality and relevance of second language critical pedagogy. *Language Teaching*, 43(3), 333–348. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444809990292>
- Duthie, R., & Ramírez-Barat, C. (2018). Introduction: Addressing the educational legacies of human rights violations. In C. Ramírez-Barat, & M. Schulze (Eds.), *Transitional justice and education: Engaging young people in peacebuilding and reconciliation* (pp. 17–42). V&R unipress.
- Forić-Plasto, M., & Blagojević-Dujković, B. (2023). Peace in history education of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In L. Kasumagić-Kafedžić, & S. Clarke-Habibi (Eds.), *Peace pedagogies in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (pp. 163–185). Springer.
- Gallagher, T. (2022, August 16). *Integrated education in Northern Ireland: Why progress is slow despite support*. The Conversation.  
<https://theconversation.com/integrated-education-in-northern-ireland-why-progress-is-slow-despite-support-187881>
- Gibney, J. (2017). *A short history of Ireland, 1500–2000*. Yale University Press.
- Giroux, H. A. (2004a). When hope is subversive. *Tikkun*, 19(6), 38–39.  
<https://doi.org/10.1215/08879982-2004-6027>
- Giroux, H. A. (2004b). Betraying the intellectual tradition: Public intellectuals and the crisis of youth. In A. Phipps, & M. Guilherme (Eds.), *Critical pedagogy: Political approaches to language and intercultural communication* (pp. 7–21). Multilingual Matters Ltd.

- Giroux, H. A. (2005). *Border crossings: Cultural workers and the politics of education* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Giroux, H. A. (2020). *On critical pedagogy* (2nd ed.). Bloomsbury Academic.
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. Routledge.
- Kasumagić-Kafedžić, L. (2017). Exploring challenges and possibilities in pre-service teacher education: Critical and intercultural pedagogy in post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina. In R. Gordon, T. Akutsu, C. J. McDermott, & J. W. Lallas (Eds.), *Challenges associated with cross-cultural and at-risk student engagement* (pp. 42–62). IGI Global.
- Kasumagić-Kafedžić, L., & Clarke-Habibi, S. (2023). Peace pedagogies: A review of key theories and approaches. In L. Kasumagić-Kafedžić, & S. Clarke-Habibi (Eds.), *Peace pedagogies in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Theory and practice in formal education* (pp. 3–42). Springer.
- Kenway J., Boden R., & Fahey J. (2015). Seeking the necessary 'resources of hope' in the neoliberal university. In M. Thornton (Ed.), *Through a glass darkly* (pp. 259–281). ANU Press.
- McAlister S., Corr M. L., Dwyer C., Drummond, O., & Fargas-Malet M. (2021). *'It didn't end in 1998': Examining the impacts of conflict legacy across generations*. Queen's University Belfast.
- Millican, J. (2018). The social role and responsibility of a university in different social and political contexts. In J. Millican (Ed.), *Universities and conflict: The role of higher education in peacebuilding and resistance* (pp. 13–28). Routledge.
- Murphy, K., & Pettis, S. (2020). *Educators' guide. The choices we made: Bystanding and conflict in Northern Ireland*. The Corrymeela Press.
- Novelli, M., Lopes Cardozo, M., & Smith, A. (2015). *A theoretical framework for analysing the contribution of education to sustainable peacebuilding: 4Rs in conflict-affected contexts*. University of Amsterdam.
- Pace, J. L. (2019). Contained risk-taking: Preparing preservice teachers to teach controversial issues in three countries. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 47(2), 228–260.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2019.1595240>
- Perry, V. (2014, October 12). *The permanent interim: Bosnia and Herzegovina's ongoing educational crisis*. E-International Relations.  
<http://www.e-ir.info/2014/10/12/the-permanent-interim-bosnia-and-herzegovinas-ongoing-educational-crisis/>
- Perry, V. (2015). *Countering the cultivation of extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina: The case for comprehensive education reform*. Democratization Policy Council.
- Phipps, A., & Guilherme, M. (2004). *Critical pedagogy: Political approaches to language and intercultural communication*. Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Smith, A. (2010). *The influence of education on conflict and peacebuilding. Paper prepared for the Education for ALL Global Monitoring Report 2011, The Hidden Crisis: Armed Conflict and Education*. Paris UNESCO.
- Smith, A. (2011). Education and reconciliation in Northern Ireland. In J. Paulson (Ed.), *Education and reconciliation: Exploring conflict and post-conflict situations* (pp. 55–80). Continuum.

Soldo, A., Trbić, D., Husremović, D., Veličković, N., Čelebičić, I., & Ibrahimović, N. (2017). *Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina: What do we (not) teach children? Content analysis of textbooks of the national group of subjects in primary schools*. Open Society Foundations & proMENTE.

Stradling, R. (2001). *Teaching 20th-century European history*. Council of Europe Publishing.

UNESCO. (2023). *Harnessing intercultural competencies for peacebuilding: Report*. UNESCO.

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000388190>

## Biographical note

**LARISA KASUMAGIĆ-KAFEDŽIĆ**, PhD, is an associate professor at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sarajevo. She is a 2003-04 Cornell University Humphrey Fellow Alumni, and 2022-23 Cornell University Fulbright Visiting Scholar Alumni. Her research interests are in the fields of intercultural and peace education, reflective and critical pedagogy, language and culture learning, teacher development, and action research in language classrooms. She is the founder and president of the Peace Education Hub which was established at the University of Sarajevo in early 2020.

**LEJLA MULALIĆ**, PhD, is an associate professor in the field of British literature and culture at the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Her main areas of research are: contemporary British and specifically Scottish literature, vulnerability studies and ethics of care, historical novel, and the role of literature, history, and culture studies in peace education.





DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26529/cepsj.1897>

## Dropout From the Primary Education System of Roma Children from Substandard Settlements in Serbia: The View of Pedagogical Assistants

---

STEFAN MILUTINOVIĆ<sup>\*1</sup> AND VOJIN SIMUNOVIĆ<sup>2</sup>

~ A large number of Roma in the territory of the Republic of Serbia live in substandard settlements, where poor living conditions have a detrimental effect on the education of children. Pedagogical assistants maintain almost daily contact with children who live in such settlements. In addition to direct pedagogical work, their job also involves cooperating with the children's families. The present research explores the perspectives of pedagogical assistants in Belgrade's primary schools on the dropout rates of Roma children from substandard settlements, focusing on individual, school and family factors that contribute to school dropout. The sample consisted of 40 pedagogical assistants and was gender balanced. All of the research participants were interviewed individually. The main findings of the thematic analysis are that girls drop out of the primary education system more often than boys, and that the main contributing factors to dropout are related to the attitudes of parents, especially fathers, towards children's education, parental participation in children's school life, and the school's response to the child's needs, including the response of pedagogical assistants. The results are discussed within the context of potential solutions to reduce dropout rates among this group of primary school children.

**Keywords:** school dropout, pedagogical assistants, Roma, substandard settlements, Serbia

---

1    \*Corresponding Author. MA student at the University of Belgrade, Belgrade, Serbia; [steff.milutinovic@gmail.com](mailto:steff.milutinovic@gmail.com).

2    LIRA Lab, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, Belgrade, Serbia.

## Osip romskih otrok iz podstandardnih naselij v Srbiji iz sistema osnovnošolskega izobraževanja: pogled pedagoških pomočnikov

STEFAN MILUTINOVIĆ IN VOJIN SIMUNOVIĆ

Veliko število Romov na ozemlju Republike Srbije živi v podstandardnih naseljih, v katerih slabe življenjske razmere škodljivo vplivajo na vzgojo in izobraževanje otrok. Pedagoški pomočniki ohranjajo skoraj vsakodnevni stik z otroki, ki živijo v takšnih naseljih. Poleg neposrednega pedagoškega dela njihovo delo vključuje tudi sodelovanje z družinami otrok. Ta raziskava preiskuje poglede pedagoških pomočnikov v beograjskih osnovnih šolah na osip romskih otrok iz podstandardnih naselij, pri čemer se osredinja na individualne, šolske in na družinske dejavnike, ki prispevajo k osipu v šolah. Vzorec je predstavljalo 40 pedagoških pomočnikov in je bil uravnotežen glede na spol. Z vsemi udeleženci raziskave so bili opravljeni individualni intervjuji. Glavne ugotovitve tematske analize so, da deklice pogosteje opuščajo osnovnošolsko vzgojo in izobraževanje kot dečki in da so glavni dejavniki, ki prispevajo k osipu, povezani z odnosom staršev, zlasti očetov, do vzgoje in izobraževanja otrok, s sodelovanjem staršev v otrokovem šolskem življenju in z odzivom šole na otrokove potrebe, vključno z odzivom pedagoških pomočnikov. Izsledki so obravnavani v okviru mogočih rešitev za zmanjšanje osipa v tej skupini osnovnošolskih otrok.

**Ključne besede:** osip v šolah, pedagoški pomočniki, Romi, podstandardna naselja, Srbija

## Introduction

Along with other groups of so-called Traveller peoples (Council of Europe, 2012), Roma are one of the largest transnational ethnic minorities in Europe (Leggio, 2011), simultaneously characterised by the epithet of the most marginalised (Rutigliano, 2020). The Roma people on the European continent, who constitute an extremely complex and diverse group with a rich heritage, represent the third largest national minority in the Republic of Serbia (RZS, 2023). Due to their specific and complex position, the Roma national minority has been the subject of many studies and analyses in various disciplines.

The exact number of Roma living in Serbia is hard to determine. A particular challenge in determining the number of Roma is the census within substandard Roma settlements, due to factors such as the informal nature of these communities, the lack of official records, frequent migrations, and a reluctance among some residents to participate in official surveys. In terms of their socioeconomic conditions, living standards and cultural practices, Roma living in substandard settlements are notably distinct from both the Roma population living in other locations and from other ethnic groups in the Republic of Serbia. The living conditions in substandard Roma settlements are likely the most unfavourable in Serbia and represent one of the greatest challenges faced by a significant portion of the Roma national minority. The term 'substandard' clearly indicates that living conditions are below standard (UN-Habitat, 2003), as defined by five key elements: 1) inadequate access to drinking water; 2) lack of sewage infrastructure and water supply; 3) poor quality of housing units; 4) high population density; and 5) illegal and uncertain status of housing units (Živković & Đorđević, 2015). The settlements themselves may be constructed exclusively of improvised shacks. All of the settlements contain various housing units, and some also contain so-called container homes, which are mobile houses allocated to residents, usually for humanitarian reasons (Jovanović, 2014).

Located mostly on the outskirts of cities, along rivers and marshlands, substandard settlements reflect the grotesque dimension of socioeconomic marginalization, the lack of adequate infrastructure for daily functioning, and the lack of educational and healthcare resources. According to the latest data, there are a total of 702 substandard settlements in Serbia, with the largest number (117) located in the territory of Belgrade (Đurić, 2021). The life challenges that already existed in substandard settlements were further exasperated during and after the Covid-19 pandemic (Đurić, 2021).

Educational outcomes in these settlements are significantly impacted by marginalisation and discrimination, resulting in low school attendance rates and

high dropout rates, particularly among Roma children. According to Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) reports, around 37% of Roma children in Serbia fail to complete primary school, highlighting significant educational challenges for this group (UNICEF, 2016). The main purpose of the present paper is to examine the factors that influence dropout from primary education in substandard settlements from the perspective of pedagogical assistants, whose direct involvement in the educational process offers valuable insights and data that can inform the development of targeted interventions to reduce early school leaving and support the inclusion of marginalised groups in the education system.

### **Theoretical framework**

School dropout is a multifaceted and complex issue influenced by a range of interacting factors, as confirmed by extensive research (Lamote et al., 2013; Rumberger, 2004). The problem is particularly prevalent in communities affected by poverty, with dropout rates being especially high in marginalised areas with high unemployment and low educational attainment (Videnović & Lazarević, 2017). This issue is particularly evident in Roma communities living in substandard settlements, which exhibit some of the lowest primary school completion rates (Krstić et al., 2017). Within the framework of Ecological Developmental Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Stepanović-Ilić et al., 2015), the problem of school dropout involves factors operating at various levels of generality (different ecosystems).

In the microsystem, immediate factors such as family dynamics, the child's relationships with teachers, peer interactions and the school environment have a direct impact on the likelihood of dropout. For instance, children growing up in large families may receive less parental care and support in their education (Dustmann & van Soest, 2008). Empirical research also reveals a disparity between parents' attitudes towards education and their actual behaviours, with many parents from substandard settlements expressing concerns about their children's education, while failing to provide adequate support (Anđelković & Pavlović-Babić, 2004; Stepanović et al., 2015). Poor living conditions and inadequate household environments in these communities further discourage children and their parents from engaging with the education system. This discouragement often stems from a lack of resources and support, which makes the education system seem inaccessible or unattainable to them, thus diminishing their motivation to prioritise schooling (Rumberger, 1983).

In the mesosystem, the connection between home and school is critical. For example, when parents are unable to effectively collaborate with schools

due to social isolation or language barriers, this disconnect can negatively impact students' educational outcomes (Foley et al., 2014; Rumberger, 2011).

The exosystem encompasses factors that indirectly impact the child, such as parental job instability, long working hours or seasonal work. These factors can increase the risk of dropout by, for example, limiting the time parents can devote to their children and their education (Allensworth, 2005; Entwisle et al., 2004; Peraita & Pastor, 2000).

At the broader, macrosystem level, societal issues such as economic instability, education policies and cultural attitudes towards education play a significant role; for instance, education policies that do not adequately address the needs of marginalised communities can exacerbate dropout rates (Ioana et al., 2015; Rumberger, 2011). Cultural attitudes towards education and social discrimination also impact the overall educational environment and student retention.

Finally, the chronosystem encompasses life events that can disrupt a child's educational journey. Significant changes, such as the birth of a sibling, family relocations, parental divorce, early marriage or pregnancy, can profoundly affect the student's ability to remain in school (Allensworth, 2005; Birchall, 2018). These disruptions can lead to increased dropout rates as students struggle to adapt to new circumstances.

### **Pedagogical assistants: Legal regulation of the profession and their role in the education of children from substandard settlements**

Pedagogical assistants play a key role in tackling the high dropout rates among Roma students by helping educators and parents to better integrate these students into the education system (Bennett et al., 2021; Kovács Cerović & Daiute, 2017; Miliwojević, 2015; Webster et al., 2011; White & Kelly, 2010). Their direct involvement provides valuable insights and data for developing targeted interventions to address the dropout problem effectively. By understanding and addressing factors across various ecosystems, more comprehensive strategies can be developed to reduce dropout rates and improve educational outcomes for marginalised communities.

The role of pedagogical assistants in supporting minority groups has been a recognised global practice since the early 1960s, with significant development across European countries in the 1980s (Breyer et al., 2021; Miliwojević, 2015). Initially, the initiative to engage assistants from the Roma community was driven by the civil sector and supported by local authorities and educational institutions in countries such as Spain, the Czech Republic, Slovakia,

Finland, France and Romania during the 1980s and 1990s (Rus, 2004). Pedagogical assistants are responsible for supporting both students and educators, enhancing educational outcomes for children from minority groups and promoting inclusive educational environments.

In Serbia, the implementation of pedagogical assistants began in 1997 within preschool settings and was extended to primary schools in 2002. This initiative was initially driven by project initiatives from international organisations focused on the Roma community (Milivojević, 2015). The role of Roma assistants gradually gained recognition through a socio-political framework that included political documents such as the *Roma Decade (2005–2015)*, the *Strategy for the Improvement of the Status of Roma in Serbia (2009)*, and the *Law on the Foundations of the Education System (2009)*. Financial support from organisations such as the Open Society Foundation, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and the Roma Education Fund further supported this initiative (Starčević et al., 2016). Over time, with backing from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, the role of Roma assistants evolved from providing targeted support for Roma students to offering assistance to all students in need, which led to the formalisation of their role within the legal framework in 2009 (Milivojević, 2015).

According to the Regulation on Pedagogical and Andragogical Assistants (The Government of the Republic of Serbia, 2019), these professionals are responsible for providing additional educational support to Roma students and assisting teachers, educators and other professionals in both teaching and extracurricular activities. Their duties include supporting students in learning and continuing their education, aiding schools in creating inclusive learning environments, empowering Roma families, and facilitating collaboration between Roma families, communities and local institutions (Klaus & Siraj, 2020). Research in Central and Eastern European countries shows that pedagogical assistants positively impact attendance rates, reduce dropout rates and improve the academic performance of Roma children (Bačlija-Brajnik & Prebilič, 2019). Given their critical role, it is essential to review the legal foundations and sources related to pedagogical assistants to enhance their effectiveness and integration into the education system.

As highlighted in the report *Educational Inclusion of Children of Roma Nationality* by Jovanović et al. (2013), several key legal and strategic documents serve as the foundation for implementing inclusive educational mechanisms and improving the status of Roma in the EU and Serbia.

As in most areas, there is abundant Serbian legislation regarding the institution of pedagogical assistants, with a range of legal, sub-legal and strategic

documents regulating the status, rights and obligations of pedagogical assistants, while also emphasising their significance in the education of children from the Roma population.

### **Research aim and research question**

The present research aims to explore the perspectives of pedagogical assistants employed in primary schools in Belgrade regarding the dropout rates of Roma children from substandard settlements. By analysing the practical insights provided by these assistants, the study seeks to address the following key research question: *What are the primary individual, school and family factors contributing to the dropout of children from primary schools?* The research takes a specific approach by focusing on a largely overlooked perspective, i.e., the experiences of individuals who work directly with children from substandard settlements. This viewpoint offers valuable insights from those who are both experts and actively engaged in the educational processes regarding these children.

### **Method**

The research utilised the method of semi-structured individual interviews. The questions posed to all of the respondents are available at OSF (2023), while additional questions, designed to explore specific topics in more depth, were tailored for respondents with relevant expertise or experience. Each pedagogical assistant responded to 15 questions, providing a rich description of their own experience and insights from practical work with this population and school staff. It is important to note that all of the participants had been actively involved in the work of primary schools over the three years prior to the interviews, which was an additional factor contributing to the freshness of the information source for this research. The pedagogical assistants were asked a set of questions focusing on individual, family and school-related factors that contribute to school dropout among Roma children. The questions aimed to explore the assistants' insights into various dimensions of this complex issue; for example, one question addressed whether boys or girls are more at risk of dropping out. Follow-up questions inquired into the reasons for this, prompting the assistants to elaborate on why they believe boys or girls are at greater risk. Another question examined whether behavioural problems are more prevalent among boys or girls, and how these issues might relate to school dropout. In addition to individual and family factors, we also explored school-related risks;

for example, we asked, “What are the main risks within schools that impact dropout?” This question aimed to identify systemic or environmental factors within the school setting – such as teacher attitudes, curriculum relevance or peer discrimination – that contribute to the high dropout rates among Roma children. Some researchers consider this method as a prototype of qualitative research (Warren, 2002). Unlike structured interviews or certain other methods, the semi-structured interview offers more freedom in following the dialogue process, allowing greater content production by the participants based on different perspectives on the issue. All of this provides opportunities for the interviewer to be more visible in the interview and to emphasise questions that are considered more important for the research goal (Brinkman, 2014).

### Sample

The research sample included 40 Roma pedagogical assistants, 57.5% of whom were female, aged between 31 and 60 years ( $M = 44.93$ ,  $SD = 7.14$ ). All of the participants had at least three years of work experience in primary schools in Belgrade and were proficient in the Romani language. Regarding educational level, 7 of the assistants (17.5%) had completed higher education and held either a bachelor's or master's degree; 11 (27.5%) had completed four-year secondary education and were actively pursuing further studies, while 22 (55%) had completed four-year secondary education. All of the participating assistants were employed in Belgrade schools where Roma students from substandard settlements made up 5–10% of the student population.

### Data collection and analysis

The interviews were conducted by a qualified psychologist with over six years of experience in humanitarian work focused on Roma people in Belgrade.

The research was conducted from April to September 2023. The majority of the interviews were conducted in schools, at local civic organisations and during home visits. Information related to the identity of the participants was carefully protected through specially designed codes, ensuring a high level of confidentiality in the research process. There were no major issues regarding comprehension of the question content during the data collection process. An assertive approach to conducting the interviews provided the participants with additional freedom to illustrate their opinions with examples from practice, with all of their variations, differences and informality (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).



Audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed in detail and analysed using thematic analysis methodology (Vilg, 2016). This descriptive and interpretative method is used to answer research questions that include personal experiences, opinions, practices and the like, with the aim of obtaining the overall story revealed by the identified themes. The thematic analysis itself consisted of the following steps: familiarisation with the data through repeated readings of the transcript, generation of the initial codes, observation of themes, and generation of final themes.

## Results

Table 1 lists the generated themes and the number of codes for each theme.

**Table 1**

*Themes and codes*

Theme	Number of codes
INDIVIDUAL FACTORS	
Gender	14
Behavioural problems	9
Lack of motivation	9
School as preparation for the labour market	5
FAMILY FACTORS	
Single parents	8
Large number of siblings	6
Illness of parents	6
Severe poverty	6
Migration inside Serbia and abroad	6
SCHOOL FACTORS	
Discrimination	15
Irregular attendance and absenteeism	10
Problem with or lack of implementation of individualised teaching	10
Decrease in the number of pedagogical assistants in schools	9
Insufficient support from the school psychologist or pedagogue	9
Cancellation of material aid from the school and associates (textbooks, accessories)	8
Lack of motivation among teachers	8

### Individual Factors

Thematic analysis identified four key individual factors that contribute to the primary school dropout rates among Roma children from substandard settlements.

Gender was highlighted as a critical factor influencing dropout rates,

with girls dropping out more frequently than boys due to early marriages and cultural expectations. For example:

*“Among the Ashkali, who hold strong patriarchal beliefs, girls are more likely to drop out, as they are expected to stay home and bear children.”* (F6)<sup>3</sup>

*“One of the girls in my class is already pregnant at the age of 13, while still in the seventh grade.”* (F11)

*“I had a situation with two girls whose father is in prison. They bullied all the other children in school.”* (F11)

Both boys and girls exhibit behavioural issues, but girls are often more vulnerable to violence in the community and school:

*“Two girls in my class, whose father is in prison, bully the other children.”* (F11)

*“There is a girl in my class who was physically abused at home.”* (F6)

*“Now in my class, one girl is about to give birth, even though she’s in the seventh grade, only 13 years old.”* (F6)

Boys, in particular, show less interest in school, perceiving it as impractical for their lives:

*“Boys often say that what they learn in school is irrelevant for real life.”* (M8)

*“They often give up because they believe it’s not necessary for their lives, and because they’re not learning anything practical.”* (M17)

Many boys prioritise entering the labour market over completing their education:

*“For boys, it’s about growing up quickly and starting to work early to support their family. That’s why they believe school isn’t necessary.”* (M17)

*“Boys are expected to become independent and take care of themselves early, and they often see school as an obstacle to achieving that.”* (M17)

The main individual factors leading to dropout among Roma children include cultural expectations surrounding gender roles, behavioural challenges, lack of motivation, and the pressure for boys to enter the labour market early. These factors are interwoven with the broader socioeconomic and cultural context of Roma families living in substandard settlements.

3 The letters F (female) and M (male), along with the numbers in parentheses preceding the quotes, represent the respondent’s gender and years of work experience.

## Family Factors

The analysis also identified family-related factors that significantly influence school dropout rates. The effects of these factors are as follows.

Children from single-parent families, particularly those headed by mothers, are at a higher risk of dropping out:

*“Many of the mothers are sick and rely on their eldest daughters to take care of household chores, which leads to absenteeism.” (M10)*

*“Their oldest daughters stay home to help when their mothers are in poor health.” (M10)*

In larger families, children, especially girls, often take on more household responsibilities, which impacts their ability to attend school:

*“Older children, especially girls, take care of their younger siblings, which means they miss a lot of school.” (M10)*

Parents with health issues or families living in extreme poverty find it difficult to prioritise their children's education:

*“I have cases with several mothers who are in poor health and rely on their eldest daughters to help around the house, which leads to irregular school attendance.” (F14)*

*“The child is absent when they have to take care of the family while the parent goes to collect secondary waste for recycling.” (F14)*

Frequent family migrations, both within Serbia and abroad, further disrupt children's education:

*“When families move abroad and then return, they often can't get their children back into school because they have no documents proving their previous education.” (F7)*

The family environment, particularly in terms of single-parent families, poverty and frequent migration, creates significant barriers for Roma children in maintaining consistent school attendance and staying engaged in the educational process.

## School Factors

Several school-related factors contribute to the high dropout rates among Roma children. This concerns the following.

Roma children often experience discrimination in schools, which exacerbates their marginalisation:

*“Roma children are still seated at the back of the classroom or even in separate rooms.” (F9)*

*“If children are cleaner and better groomed, they are more accepted, but poorer children face greater discrimination.” (F6)*

*“The poorer the settlement, the worse the discrimination children face.” (M9)*

Absenteeism is one of the key issues that pedagogical assistants are expected to address:

*“Our main task is to track down children who are frequently absent, which often requires going into the settlements to understand the root of the problem.” (F7)*

*“Due to absences, we often have to go out into the field, but we also face bigger issues like drug abuse and child trafficking.” (F18)*

Despite legal requirements, individualised education plans (IEPs) for Roma children are often poorly implemented:

*“In our school, IEPs are rarely applied, and when they are, Roma students are segregated into combined classes, which is not allowed by law.” (F8)*

*“The psychologist even tells parents that IEPs are no longer valid, which is not true.” (F6)*

The reduction in material support from schools and the lack of involvement by school psychologists and pedagogues also negatively affects the retention of Roma children:

*“Since the pandemic, schools have stopped providing free school supplies, and there is little support for these children.” (F11)*

*“Teachers pass the responsibility of extra classes to pedagogical assistants, which is unfair.” (M8)*

School-related factors such as discrimination, absenteeism and a lack of adequate support systems contribute significantly to the dropout rates of Roma children. Addressing these issues requires a systemic change in how schools engage with marginalised communities and enforce inclusive educational practices.

## Discussion

The most vulnerable part of the Roma minority suffers the most from the inequalities in the educational process. In the prevailing narrative about Roma inclusion in education, it is commonly believed that Roma people do not value education sufficiently, resulting in less effort being invested in their children's schooling (Bašić, 2021). The narratives of the pedagogical assistants interviewed in the present study show the opposite: the parents of these children place a high value on education, want their children to attend school, and want to participate more in the educational process of their children, but little has been done to support their involvement. These claims are consistent with the previous findings of Kovács Cerović et al. (2012), which showed a similar trend in parental attitudes towards the inclusion of their children in the education system.

The pedagogical assistants also noted that the challenges faced by Roma children, resulting in an increased risk of dropout, are numerous, complex and interconnected, and cannot be considered separately. Probably the most critical point regarding individual and family reasons is the lack of measures aimed at the impoverished population, which would primarily reduce the existential vulnerability of families. This issue often results in girls skipping school to manage household responsibilities due to their parents being overwhelmed or working, while boys are forced to earn money to support the family. Our respondents frequently highlighted the fact that almost no institution deals with this aspect of the dropout problem, which is similar to the conclusion drawn from previous research conducted by the Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit (SIPRU) of the Government of the Republic of Serbia (Milivojević, 2015).

Our respondents linked the high dropout rates to various school-related factors. The most critical issues identified include segregation occurring through several school service procedures, deficiencies in the material assistance provided to children through the social welfare system, and challenges related to the work of pedagogical assistants.

Further analysis of the pedagogical assistants' statements reveals that dropout and absenteeism from school are influenced not only by general poverty, but also by the varying levels of poverty within individual communities. When families can provide their children with basic living conditions, it helps reduce the risk of dropout. These insights are in accordance with the findings of previous studies that examined this issue (Jovanović, 2014; SIPRU, 2020).

In schools, significant problems arise from staff insensitivity and a lack of education in the field, as well as inadequate monitoring and supervision of

inclusion measures. This often leads to children being placed in adult education facilities or segregated classes. Additionally, there is an issue with the insufficient number of pedagogical assistants as well as their unregulated legal status, which prevents them from addressing all of the personal and family issues faced by children at risk of dropout. Consequently, pedagogical assistants have less time to focus on education, which is their primary role. Nearly half of the assistants in the sample report that supplementary classes are not implemented in their schools, despite these classes being suggested by UNICEF (2014) as a key mechanism for reducing student failure and dropout rates.

The pedagogical assistants also pointed out several factors that they believe strongly influence the educational process of these children, increasing the risk of dropout. These include the role of minority coordinators, social welfare centres and the language of instruction in schools. On further examination of the reasons highlighted by the pedagogical assistants, it is clear that these factors play a significant role, particularly given that the issues leading to dropout are multifaceted and cannot be confined to just the micro level. However, these aspects were not explored in detail in the interviews and analysis.

The conclusions drawn from the present research align closely with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Developmental Theory, which emphasises the interaction of various environmental systems in shaping individual development. The findings illustrate that dropout rates among Roma children are influenced by multiple interconnected factors across different levels of their environment.

At the microsystem level, individual factors such as gender, behavioural problems and lack of motivation are directly impacted by family dynamics and interactions with school personnel, especially pedagogical assistants. The mesosystem, which involves the interaction between family and school, is reflected in the challenges that arise from single-parent households, parental illness and a lack of family support for children's education. At the broader exosystem level, external factors such as poverty, parental job instability and migration patterns exacerbate the difficulties faced by children, often leading to irregular attendance or complete dropout. Finally, societal-level macrosystem factors, including discrimination within schools and insufficient support from educational institutions, further contribute to the exclusion of these children from the education system. By recognising how these systems interact, the present research highlights the need for comprehensive interventions that address not only the individual needs of children, but also their family circumstances, school environments and broader societal influences. This approach is essential for effectively reducing dropout rates and promoting inclusive education for marginalised communities.

## Practical implications and recommendations

Based on the analysis of problems from the perspective of pedagogical assistants and the groups of factors influencing dropout, as well as considering the systemic factors that are directly related and have a causal relationship, recommendations can be made to primarily address the root issue: poverty. An essential step in planning and implementing dropout prevention measures is establishing a system that assesses the vulnerability of the Roma minority across Serbia, including specific settlements. This will require a thorough census and an accurate count of Roma in informal settlements. After an initial assessment of the poverty level through an analysis of the settlements where children live, appropriate measures can be predicted. These measures should focus on enhancing the social welfare system through more substantial and less formalistic material benefits, which would improve the overall socioeconomic status of families. However, it is important to note that this approach assumes the need for stronger cooperation between the social welfare system and the education system.

In addition to addressing individual and family factors influencing dropout rates, it is crucial to consolidate dropout prevention efforts into a single legislative act. This act should define key concepts and principles, assign responsibilities to relevant institutions, and establish mechanisms for cooperation and collaboration. It should also designate entities responsible for comprehensive oversight of inclusion measures and specify penalties and sanctions for non-compliance with legal provisions.

## Limitations and future research

While the present study offers potentially valuable insights, it does have several limitations. The findings are specific to Serbia and may not be applicable to education systems in other countries. The research focuses on Roma children in substandard settlements and relies on interviews with 40 participants, which could limit the generalisability of the results. Moreover, the face-to-face interviews may have been influenced by social desirability bias.

Future research should delve into the dropout-related issues mentioned in our interviews but not thoroughly explored in this study, such as the role of minority coordinators, social welfare centres and the language of instruction in schools. Using techniques like online questionnaires could also prove beneficial, as they would enable the inclusion of a larger number of teaching assistants and ensure anonymity, thereby minimising socially desirable responses.

## Conclusion

The present study highlights the multifaceted factors contributing to school dropout among Roma children in substandard settlements, with key influences stemming from individual, family and school environments. The insights provided by pedagogical assistants emphasise the critical role of socio-cultural norms, poverty and inadequate support systems in exacerbating dropout rates. Addressing these issues requires a holistic approach, including improving collaboration between families, schools and social services, and strengthening the role of pedagogical assistants to better support at-risk students.

## References

- Allensworth, E. M. (2005). *Graduation and dropout trends in Chicago: A look at cohorts of students from 1991 through 2004*. University of Chicago Consortium on School Research.  
<https://consortium.uchicago.edu/publications/graduation-and-dropout-trends-chicago-look-cohorts-students-1991-2004>
- Andelković, D., & Pavlović-Babić, D. (2004). Porodično okruženje kao potporni sistem za školovanje dece iz perspektive roditelja [The family environment as a support system for children's education from the parents' perspective]. In D. Plut, & Z. Krnjaić (Eds.), *Obrazovanje i društvena kriza: dokument o jednom vremenu [Education and social crisis: A document of one age]* (pp. 185—217). Institut za psihologiju.
- Bačlija-Brajnik, I., & Prebilić, V. (2019). Roma teaching assistants in primary schools: Support teaching staff or maids and nannies?. *Teorija in praksa*, 56(2).  
<https://www.fdv.uni-lj.si/docs/default-source/tip/romski--e-pomoćnici--ce-v-osnovni-šoli-podporno-pedagoško-osebje-ali-služkinje-in-varuške.pdf?sfvrsn=0>
- Bašić, G. (2021). *Romi u Republici Srbiji: izazovi diskriminacije [Roma in the Republic of Serbia: Challenges of discrimination]*. Minority Rights Group Europe (MRGE) / Evropska grupa za prava manjina. <http://iriss.idn.org.rs/1187/>
- Bennett, S., Gallagher, T., Somma, M., & White, R. (2021). Transitioning towards inclusion: A triangulated view of the role of educational assistants. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 21(3), 187—197. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12508>
- Birchall, J. (2018). Early marriage, pregnancy and girl child school dropout. *Knowledge, Evidence and Learning for Development*, 2(7), 1—15. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12413/14285>
- Breyer, C., Lederer, J., & Gasteiger-Klicpera, B. (2021). Learning and support assistants in inclusive education: A transnational analysis of assistance services in Europe. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 36(3), 344—357. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2020.1754546>
- Brinkman, S. (2014). Unstructured and semi-structured interviewing. In P. Leavy (Ed.), *The Oxford*



*handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 277—299). Oxford University Press.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*.

Harvard University Press.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1986). Recent advances in research on the ecology of human development. In R. K. Silbereisen, K. Eyferth, & G. Rudinger (Eds.), *Development as action in context*. Springer.

[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-662-02475-1\\_15](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-662-02475-1_15)

Council of Europe. (2012). *Human rights of Roma and Travellers in Europe*.

<https://book.coe.int/en/minorities/4870-human-rights-of-roma-and-travellers-in-europe.html>

Dustmann, C., & van Soest, A. (2008). Part-time work, school success and school leaving. In C.

Dustmann, B. Fitzenberger, & S. Machin (Eds.), *The economics of education and training. Studies in empirical economics* (pp. 23—45). Physica-Verlag HD. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-7908-2022-5\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-7908-2022-5_3)

Đurić, R. (2021). *Romologija [Romology]*. Tim za socijalno uključivanje i smanjenje siromaštva Vlade Republike Srbije.

<https://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/SIPRU-Romologija.pdf>

Entwisle, D. R., Alexander, K. L., & Steffel-Olson, L. S. (2004). Temporary as compared to permanent high school dropout. *Social Forces*, 82(3), 1181—1205. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.2004.0036>

Foley, K., Gallipoli, G., & Green, D. A. (2014). Ability, parental valuation of education, and the high school dropout decision. *Journal of Human Resources*, 49(4), 906—944.

<https://doi.org/10.3368/jhr.49.4.906>

Ioana, M. I., Anda, M. I., Cornelia, P., & Mariana, C. R. (2015). School dropout—A social problem in Romania. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 182, 623—628.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.04.795>

Jovanović, S. (2014). *Procena stanja u podstandardnim romskim naseljima u 21 opštini u Srbiji [Assessment of conditions in substandard Roma settlements in 21 municipalities in Serbia]*. OSCE Mission to Serbia.

Jovanović, V., Petrović, D., Milivojević, Z., Jeremić, J., & Lažetić, P. (2013). *Obrazovna inkluzija dece romske nacionalnosti: izveštaj o sprovedenom monitoringu u osnovnoškolskom obrazovanju [Educational inclusion of Roma children: Report on the monitoring conducted in primary education]*. Centar za obrazovne politike, Belgrade, Serbia.

[https://www.cep.edu.rs/public/Obrazovna\\_inkluzija\\_dece\\_romske\\_nacionalnosti-1.pdf](https://www.cep.edu.rs/public/Obrazovna_inkluzija_dece_romske_nacionalnosti-1.pdf)

Klaus, S., & Siraj, I. (2020). Improving Roma participation in European early childhood education systems through cultural brokering. *London Review of Education*, 18(1), 50—64.

<https://doi.org/10.18546/LRE.18.1.04>

Kovács Cerović, T., & Daiute, C. (2017). *Minority teachers - Roma in Serbia - Narrate education reform*. Institute of Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, Association of Pedagogical Assistants of Serbia.

[https://www.colettedaiute.org/uploads/9/6/3/0/9630980/daiute\\_et\\_al.\\_2017.pdf](https://www.colettedaiute.org/uploads/9/6/3/0/9630980/daiute_et_al._2017.pdf)

Kovács Cerović, T., Vizek Vidović, V., & Powell, S. (2012). *South East Europe cross countries survey of parents' views; School governance and social inclusion, involvement of parents*. University of Ljubljana,

Faculty of Education, Center for Educational Policy Studies.

[https://narip.cep.edu.rs/biblioteka/literatura\\_na\\_srpskom\\_jeziku/upravljanje\\_skolom\\_i\\_socijalna\\_inkluzija.pdf](https://narip.cep.edu.rs/biblioteka/literatura_na_srpskom_jeziku/upravljanje_skolom_i_socijalna_inkluzija.pdf)

Krstić, K., Stepanović-Ilić, I., & Videnović, M. (2017). Odustajanje od u školovanja u osnovnom i srednjem obrazovanju u Republici Srbiji [Student dropout in primary and secondary education in the Republic of Serbia]. *Psihološka istraživanja*, 20(1), 27—50. <https://doi.org/10.5937/PsIstra1701027K>

Lamote, C., Speybroeck, S., Van Den Noortgate, W., & Van Damme, J. (2013). Different pathways towards dropout: The role of engagement in early school leaving. *Oxford Review of Education*, 39(6), 739—760. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2013.854202>

Leggio, D.V. (2011). The dialect of the Mitrovica Roma. *Romani Studies*, 21(1), 57—113.

<https://doi.org/10.3828/rs.2011.3>

Lory, B. (2021). Écrire une histoire des Tsiganes balkaniques. [How to write a history of the Balkan Gypsies?]. *Balkanologie*, 16(1). <https://doi.org/10.4000/balkanologie.3073>

Milivojević, Z. (2015). *Analiza pravnog okvira i aktuelnog statusa i prakse pedagoških asistenata* [Analysis of the legal framework, current status, and practices of pedagogical assistants.] Tim za socijalno uključivanje i smanjenje siromaštva Republike Srbije.

[https://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Analiza\\_pravnog\\_okvira\\_i\\_aktuelnog\\_statusa\\_i\\_prakse\\_pedagoskih\\_asistenata.pdf](https://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Analiza_pravnog_okvira_i_aktuelnog_statusa_i_prakse_pedagoskih_asistenata.pdf)

OSF. (2023). *Dropout from the primary education system of Roma children from substandard settlements: The view of pedagogical assistants, general questions*. OSF/The Open Science Framework. [https://osf.io/pdnxh/?view\\_only=19fo66a84dd4489bbdb5b9810c579a09](https://osf.io/pdnxh/?view_only=19fo66a84dd4489bbdb5b9810c579a09)

Peraita, C., & Pastor, M. (2000). The primary school dropout in Spain: The influence of family background and labor market conditions. *Education economics*, 8(2), 157—168.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/096452900410721>

Potter, J., & Wetherell, M. (1987). *Discourse and social psychology: Beyond attitudes and behaviour*. Sage Publications, Inc.

<https://alingavreliuc.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/potterwetherell-discourse-and-social-psychology.pdf>

Rumberger, R.W. (1983). Dropping out of high school: The influence of race, sex, and family background. *American Educational Research Journal*, 20(2) 199—220. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1162594>

Rumberger, R.W. (2004). Why students drop out of school?. In G. Orfield (Ed.), *Dropouts in America: Confronting the graduation rate crisis* (pp. 131—155). Harvard Education Press.

Rumberger, R.W. (2011). *Dropping out: Why students drop out of high school and what can be done about it*. Harvard University Press. <https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674063167>

Rutigliano, A. (2020). *Inclusion of Roma students in Europe: A literature review and examples of policy initiatives*. OECD Education Working Paper No. 228. OECD.

[https://one.oecd.org/document/EDU/WKP\(2020\)16/En/pdf](https://one.oecd.org/document/EDU/WKP(2020)16/En/pdf)

Rus, C. (2004). *The training of Roma/Gypsy school mediators and assistants – report*. Council of Europe. [https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/roma/Source/Mediators\\_EN.pdf](https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/roma/Source/Mediators_EN.pdf)

- RZS. (2023). *Popis stanovništva, domaćinstava i stanova 2022. godine - Nacionalna pripadnost: podaci po opštinama i gradovima [Census of Population, Households, and Housing 2022 - National Affiliation: Data by Municipalities and Cities]*. RZS - Republički zavod za statistiku.  
<https://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G2023/Pdf/G20234001.pdf>
- SIPRU. (2020). *Mapiranje podstandardnih romskih naselja prema rizicima i pristupu pravima u Republici Srbiji [Mapping of substandard Roma settlements according to risks and access to rights in the Republic of Serbia]*. SIPRU - Tim za socijalno uključivanje i smanjenje siromaštva.  
[https://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Mapiranje\\_podstandardnih\\_romskih\\_naselja\\_prema\\_rizicima\\_i\\_pristupu\\_pravima\\_sa\\_narocitim\\_osvrtnom\\_na\\_COVID-19.pdf](https://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Mapiranje_podstandardnih_romskih_naselja_prema_rizicima_i_pristupu_pravima_sa_narocitim_osvrtnom_na_COVID-19.pdf)
- Starčević, J., Dimitrijević, B., & Macura-Milovanović, S. (2016). Rethinking the role of pedagogical assistants: Establishing cooperation between Roma families and schools in Serbia. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, 6(4), 73–91. <https://doi.org/10.26529/cepsj.54>
- Stepanović-Ilić, I., Videnović, M., & Lazarević, L. (2015). Odustajanje od školovanja – analiza studija slučaja iz ugla ekološkog pristupa [Dropping out of school – A case study analysis from the perspective of the ecological approach]. *Nastava i vaspitanje*, 64(3), 453–468.  
<https://doi.org/10.5937/nasvas1503453S>
- The Government of the Republic of Serbia. (2019). *Pravilnik o pedagoškom asistentu i adragoškom asistentu [Regulation on Pedagogical Assistants and Andragogical Assistants]*. Vlada RS/The Government of the Republic of Serbia.  
<https://pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SIGlasnikPortal/eli/rep/sgrs/ministarstva/pravilnik/2019/87/14/reg>
- UN-Habitat. (2003). *The challenge of slums. Global Report on Human Settlements*. Earthscan.  
<https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/download-manager-files/The%20Challenge%20of%20Slums%20-%20Global%20Report%20on%20Human%20Settlements%202003.pdf>
- UNICEF. (2014). *Analiza uticaja politika: Pružanje podrške učenicima iz osetljivih grupa u preduniverzitetskom obrazovanju [Policy impact analysis: Providing support to students from vulnerable groups in pre-university education]*. UNICEF & SIPRU.  
<https://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Analiza-uticaja-politika-Pruzanje-dodatne-podrške-ucenicima-iz-osetljivih-grupa-u-preduniverzitetskom-obrazovanju.pdf>
- UNICEF. (2016). *Roma children being left behind from an early age*. UNICEF.  
[https://mics.unicef.org/news\\_entries/24](https://mics.unicef.org/news_entries/24)
- Videnović, M., & Lazarević, L. (2017). Familial and individual reasons for student dropout: Schools' perception. *Psihološka istraživanja*, 20(1), 72–83. <https://doi.org/10.5937/PsIstra1701071V>
- Vilig, K. (2016). *Kvalitativna istraživanja u psihologiji [Qualitative research in psychology]*. Clío.
- Warren, C. A. B. (2002). Qualitative interviewing. In J. F. Gubrium, & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research: Context & method* (pp. 83–101). Sage.
- Webster, R., Blatchford, P., Bassett, P., Brown, P., Martin, C., & Russell, A. (2011). The wider pedagogical role of teaching assistants. *School Leadership and Management*, 31(1), 3–20.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2010.540562>

White, S. W., & Kelly, F. D. (2010). The school counselor's role in school dropout prevention. *Journal of Counselling & Development*, 88, 227—235. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6678.2010.tb00014.x>

Živković, L., & Đorđević, A. (2015). *General characteristics of substandard Roma settlements in Serbia and a proposal for further development initiatives for the improvement of the living conditions of the Roma community*. OSCE Mission to Serbia.

<https://www.osce.org/serbia/159711?download=true>

## Biographical note

**STEFAN MILUTINOVIĆ** is a psychologist and master's student in Educational Policy at the University of Belgrade, Serbia. He currently works in an elementary school setting. His research interests encompass educational psychology, intercultural education, and social cognition.

**VOJIN SIMUNOVIĆ**, PhD, is a Research Associate at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, Serbia, affiliated with the Department of Psychology and the LIRA Laboratory. His research interests include social cognition, developmental psychology, and applied psychology.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26529/cepsj.1584>

## The Role and Effect of Profanity in Children's Literature

SABINA VIŠČEK<sup>1</sup>

∞ The controversy about using inappropriate language in children's literature is constantly debated and repeatedly attracts the attention of the public. In Slovenia, this happened when the novel *Na zeleno vejo* by Andrej Predin was assigned as the text for the Cankar competition, a Slovenian language competition. Several reading mentors and other readers, specifically adults, were bothered by its use of profanity and vulgar phrases. However, no literature is immune from the use of profanity and cursing, not even children's literature. As seen in various picture books and short illustrated stories, there are instances of adults, children, and even animals using profanity. Through the analysis, synthesis, and comparative method of mostly modern literary Slovenian texts, suitable for the first six years of Slovenia's nine-year primary school, it was found that profanity and expletives are stylistically and semantically diverse, and their pragmatic nature must be considered. It was established that, in most cases, profanity and insults are justifiably placed in Slovenian literary works for children. Most often, they appear as a motif; less often, they are used as the central theme (or motif) in the text. A significant role is played by the reading mentor, who must alert the readers to the function of profanity in the text.

**Keywords:** profanity, expletives, children's literature, taboo, offensive language

---

<sup>1</sup> DZS, Slovenia; [sabinaviscek@gmail.com](mailto:sabinaviscek@gmail.com).

## Vloga in učinek preklinjanja v otroški literaturi

---

SABINA VIŠČEK

☞ Polemika o neprimernem jeziku v mladinski literaturi je vedno aktualna tema, ki večkrat pritegne pozornost širše javnosti. V Sloveniji se je to zgodilo z romanom *Na zeleno vejo* Andreja Predina, ko je bilo besedilo predpisano za Cankarjevo tekmovanje, tekmovanje iz znanja slovenščine. Nekatere mentorje branija in druge bralce, predvsem odrasle, so zmotile kletvice in vulgarizmi. Nobena literatura pa ni imuna na preklinjanje, tudi otroška ne. V njej, kot je razvidno iz slikanic in kratkih ilustriranih zgodb, preklinjajo odrasli, otroci in živali. V analizi in sintezi ter komparativni metodi večinoma sodobnih pripovednih slovenskih besedil, primernih za prvo in drugo vzgojno-izobraževalno obdobje osnovne šole, je bilo ugotovljeno, da so kletvice in psovke stilno in semantično raznovrstne, pri čemer je treba nujno upoštevati njihovo pragmatičnost. Ugotovljeno je bilo, da so kletvice in psovke v večini primerov vsebinsko in vizualno upravičeno umeščene v slovenska literarna dela za otroke. Največkrat nastopajo kot motiv, redkeje so osrednja tema (ali motiv) v besedilu. Pomembno vlogo ima mentor branija, ki mora bralce opozoriti na funkcijo kletvice v besedilu.

**Ključne besede:** kletvice, psovke, otroška literatura, tabu, žaljivke

## Introduction

Cursing is associated with problematic and taboo content in children's literature, which is relevant even in modern times (Saksida, 2022); it is an extremely broad and subjective phenomenon, as some definitions (Andresson, Trudgill 2007; Lyung, 2011 as cited in Beers Fägersten, 2017) see it as an expression of language that should not be understood literally, is tabooed, or stigmatised and evokes strong emotions. The most frequently used profanities are usually also the most offensive. In the context of sociolinguistics and linguistic pragmatics, this is known as 'the swearing paradox' (Beers Fägersten, 2012). Thus, cursing also found in children's poetry (we will not focus on it in this article) can be perceived with the negative stylistic characteristics of the words, which are stylistically justified as the aesthetics of ugly or as part of subversive children's literature. It can be seen in the folk literature, but Rozman-Roza stands out among contemporary authors, most prominently in his *Vabilo na Gravžev dan*, which was published in his first book – *Rimanice za predgospodiče* (1993), which was pointed out by Saksida (2001). Blažić sees the aesthetics of ugly in the theatre piece titled *Pika*, where she describes it as being part of the author's 'linguistic and literary style' (Blažić, 2009, p. 463).

Nežmah, in the book *Kletvice in psovke* (1997), divides cursing into two types; one is cursing or insulting, and the other is *profanity in the narrower sense*, and at the same time, points out the essential differences between the two. He defines an insult as 'a word or a phrase that insultingly describes the addressee' (p. 83). In the online version of the *Dictionary of the Slovenian standard language* (SSKJ 2),<sup>2</sup> curse words are defined as crude and very insulting words or expressions, usually uttered in strong emotional situations, and lists examples of usage ('psôvka -e ž (ō) groba, zelo žaljiva beseda, besedna zveza, izrečena navadno v afektu: izreči psovko; odgovoriti s psovko; grda, prostaška, ekspr. sočna psovka; psovke in kletve / ekspr. obkladati, obmetavati se s psovkami') (Fran). Profanities 'do not merely cause a person to get offended; they are considered as a form of verbal aggression shown in portraying projections or negative characteristics onto the addressee' (Nežmah, 1997, p. 84). In the online version of SSKJ 2, profanity is defined as crude and very insulting words or expressions, usually uttered in strong emotional situations ('klétvica -e ž (ē) nav. ekspr. groba beseda, besedna zveza, izrečena navadno v afektu: grda kletvica') (Fran), which indicates that the standard dictionary of the Slovene language does not distinguish between the two. Both curse words and profanities are listed in the SSKJ 2 with the expressive qualifies, indicating a word, meaning or

2 Dictionary of the Slovenian Standard Language, revised and updated edition.

expression which is emotionally marked ('ki označuje besedo, pomen ali zvezo, ki je čustveno zaznamovana') (Slovar novejšega besedja); therefore, dictionary definitions are not the same as definitions of concepts related to a specific use of language in literature and how readers respond to such stylistic devices.

A swear word consists of an entity that is 'metaphorical in the literal sense (ox, swine, dog, bastard, etc.), [...] or metonymic (ass, dick, cunt, etc.)' (Nežmah, 1997, p. 85). Profanity requires a verb in the Slovenian syntax, which provides a negative projection. When a speaker expresses it, the aggression is caused by them but is portrayed by summoning supernatural forces (e.g., *hudič te vzemi!* – *may the devil take you*). Profanity is, therefore, linked to the future, whereas curse words are linked to the present. Both are present in the language in their interpellative and referential form. The latter means that the addressee is not cursed; they are just a witness to the act (Nežmah, 1997, pp. 81–88). Special emphasis needs to be placed on the function of profanity from the linguistic perspective. 'In phraseology, profanity is considered as pragmatic idioms with a strongly emphasized expressive function' (Bratina, 2006, p. 366 as cited in Babič, 2015, p. 41). Jakop explains the difference between exclamations, profanities, and curse words according to their level of negative emotional tension and who these expressions are intended for: 'with exclamations the speaker expresses their feelings, with profanity negative emotions that are not necessarily aimed at the addressee, and curse words are linguistic devices, which are used to reject the addressee' (Jakop, 2006, pp. 127–130).

Nežmah (1997) also tackles the semantic treatment of profane or cursing forms, citing four categories. The first entails profanity in which the speaker 'does not wish to be the object of violence' (p. 100), or rather those in which the speaker declines any form of association (such as *jebi se!* – *fuck you*). The second category is comprised of profanity and curse words, which make the speaker the aggressor at a symbolic level (examples like *jebem ti ...!* – *fuck your ...!* and *pasji sin* – *son of a bitch*). He further defines the third category as a group of profane expressions (such as *mandi te gleda*, which translates *to go to hell*), which are phrases denoting 'ridicule and superiority used by the speaker to decline any form of cooperation in a common act' (Nežmah, 1997, p. 130). The fourth category consists of profanity, such as *mam te polno rit!* – *I am sick of you!*, in which the speaker is so exasperated with the other person that they wish to eliminate their existence and wish they had never been born if it is interpreted in a particularly negative way (Nežmah, 1997). A special place is occupied by insults (*idiot*), which Nežmah classifies as curse words. Since the addressee can be offended by non-offensive words, it is necessary to distinguish insult from the offence. The insulter first marks themselves with an insulting word, as it shows



them as uncultured and rude because they have become linguistically vulgar by using obscene words' (Nežmah, 1997, p. 13). Fran defines insults in Slovene as: '*žaljiva beseda, besedna zveza: izreči, zapisati žaljivko; ekspr. požreti žaljivko; slabš. zabrusiti komu žaljivko; ekspr. obkladati koga z žaljivkami*' (summarised: an insulting word or expression and provides examples of usage).

People use profanity for varied reasons. It is usually tied to a 'traumatic situation an individual is in' (Nežmah, 1997, p. 8). Therefore, it serves the purpose of expressing negative emotions when the subject is angry, disappointed, or frustrated in any way. The function of profanity is the release of emotional tension, as previously noted by Austin (1990, p. 135) since he classifies swearing as a wish in the group of behabitives by their illocutionary force, with which he indicates: 'the concept of reaction to the behaviour and fate of other people, or attitudes and expressions of attitudes towards the past and expected behaviour of someone else.' However, Austin does not have a completely definitive opinion of the group, as there are opportunities for accidents and insincerity. Profanity acts in the role of 'filler words or the obscene term is used to make what is said more expressive (not only negative but positive)' (Babič, 2015, p. 39). Sometimes, they are present in completely neutral situations to provoke humour, even when the context of the statement is not humorous (Beers Fägersten, 2012).

Babič analysed the aesthetic structure of profanity and concluded that they are mostly one-word or shorter fixed phrases, which are characterised by certain stylistic procedures giving them greater expressiveness, such as personification, transfer of (negative) qualities, exaggeration, and oxymoron. The power of profanity that has to do with sexuality is specifically emphasised, but these are most effective if we do not euphemise them. Profanity use depends on the speaker and on the circumstances surrounding the speaker (like the presence of children) (Babič, 2015, p. 42-43). Younger children usually use swear words because they enjoy the sound of these or feel they are learning a new word that seems to be forbidden. The author points out that despite replacing the taboo word with another more acceptable one, adult speakers still recognise the spoken word in the function of cursing (Babič & Voolaid, 2018, p. 157). It would most certainly be worth exploring whether this is recognised by children as well and to what extent. Most people know how to use profanity (Nežmah, 1997) even if they have never practised the skill or were even adamantly against using improper language (Allan & Burridge, 2006).

Children can learn the skill exceedingly early in their development. Most extensive expansion to vocabulary happens between the ages of three and four when children learn to name-call, insult, curse, and use obscene language and gender-related insults. By the time they enter elementary school, they already

know an average of 42 profanities and curse words (Jay & Jay, 2014). In contrast, teenagers tend to use profanities and insults in their slang with the intention of conveying persuasiveness, as determined by Stramljič Breznik (2007).

Profanity and curse words cannot be marked as inappropriate *a priori* since the pragmatic aspect needs to be taken into account, and the profanity or curse word needs to be contextualised, which means looking into who uttered the profanity, the emotional state of the speaker and the function of used profanity, given the fact that children are usually discouraged from swearing. In the classic fairy tale *Sapramiška* by Makarovič, first published in 1976, the main protagonist, Sapramiška, uses profanity to convey her distress, and it somehow gives her more confidence. Makarovič is also far from being the only Slovenian author who uses profanity and curse words in her texts. The rise of swearing in children's literature is also evident in other countries; the UK has even considered introducing special labels to alert readers to the words. In contrast, this type of censorship has never been present in Slovenia; there are no warnings even in the manuals for qualitative reading of children's books, published by the City Library of Ljubljana under the leadership of Pionirska - the Centre for Youth Literature and Librarianship.

## Method

### Materials used in the research

This article analyses the most outstanding examples of children's literature in terms of literary quality, namely shorter fairy tales and nonsensical narratives, realistic problem texts and poems, by explaining how stylistic devices are related to the literary content. Mainly, 16 contemporary narrative children's texts (published from 1981 to 2017) suitable primarily for children in the first six years of primary school<sup>3</sup> were analysed,<sup>4</sup> in which curse words and/or profanity appear. Most of these texts were recipients of the most important Slovenian awards or were nominated for them (*večernica* or *desetnica*). This was also the criterion for choosing appropriate literature for this research.

3 We considered children's texts, which are of high quality in terms of their cognitive, aesthetic, and ethical value (Kos 2001).

4 In alphabetical order: Arnuš Pupis, T. (2017). *Za devetimi gorami*. Komelj, M. (2009). *Kako sta se gospod in gospa pomirila*. Konec Lorenzutti, N. (2016). *Avtobus ob treh: (ali Društvo mlajših starejših bratov)*. Koren, M. (2006). *Eva in kozel*. Koren, M. (2011). *Mihec*. Kovačič, L. (1981). *Zgodbe iz mesta Rič-Rač*. Lainšček, F. (2009). *Mišek Miško in Belamiška*. Makarovič, S. (2014). *Zlata mačka preja*. Muck, D. (2001). *Anica in grozovitež*. Pavček, T. (2012). *Juri Muri v Afriki: o fantu, ki se ni maral umivati*. Pikalo, M. (2001). *Luža. Zgodbe za mladino*. Sokolov, C. (2012). *Se bomo zmenili in druge zgodbe*. Svetina, P. (2016). *Sosed pod stropom*. Vegri, S. (2016). *Naročje kamenčkov*. Zupan, D. (2013). *Tinček in tri zlate ribice*. Zupan, D. (2014). *Jaz, Franci Grdi*.

## Instruments for gathering data

A detailed analysis was applied to literary texts, which includes inter-textual comparisons and evaluation of themes and effects of explored children's texts.

In the analysis of the texts, two methods were used to analyse profanity and curse words from the point of view of aesthetic structure, as well as profane and curse forms with a semantic approach: the analysis and the synthesis that explores the justification of using these elements in texts for children. Additionally, the comparative method was employed to compare the chosen by using the Fran<sup>5</sup> website, which provides data about the number of occurrences and their contexts.

## Research design

The quantitative aspect of used profanities, such as the number of occurrences in a given text, is less important, even if that is precisely the reason why we cultivate a taboo around those texts; more interesting are adult readers' reactions to such texts. They complained about inappropriate language in the novel *Na zeleno vejo* (2007) by Predin, which was selected in the Cankar competition<sup>6</sup> for the 2011/12 school year, even though it enables critical, in-depth literary reading in the third educational period of primary school. But regardless of the attempts at a censorship strategy, the mentor 'must also choose literary provocations, socially critical topics, and more demanding texts, [...], which a given curricular reader perceives as taboo (inappropriate) texts precisely because of their incomprehensibility and foreignness!' (Saksida, 2015, p. 112).

5 The website states it 'includes dictionaries, linguistic resources for Slovenian language and communicates with other websites that were made or are still being developed by the Inštitut za slovenski jezik Frana Ramovša ZRC SAZU (Fran Ramovš Institute of the Slovenian Language ZRC SAZU), and other dictionaries that were digitalised by the same institute. It also enables data mining in other Slovenian linguistic corpora. The purpose of the portal is to provide access to dictionary information to as wide a circle of users as possible, therefore, it enables both completely simple as well as very complex queries.' (Retrieved on November 28th, 2022)

6 The Cankar Award Competition is an optional form of reading competence assessment that motivates pupils and students from the first grade of primary school to the fourth grade of secondary school to read, explore, and evaluate literary texts and to respond to their messages by writing either short texts (in the first educational period) or later complex essays about literature they have read.

## Results and discussion

Among the Slovenian texts in which profanity or insults provide a central theme, a nonsense story titled *Dva zmerjalca* by Kovačič, published in the book *Zgodbe iz mesta Rič-Rač* (1981), stands out. The two brothers in the story use different animal names to insult each other. Every time one of them expresses an insult, it becomes real. A goat and a donkey enter their room first, but the brothers do not seem to understand and just continue by blaming each other and calling each other 'an idiot, an oaf' (*Zdaj pa imaš, ti butec, ti tele*; Kovačič, 1981, p. 68)<sup>7</sup>. The animals send the brothers to the shed but continue insulting each other but taking it to a tenser degree. The insults used by these animals have the aesthetic structure of adult profanities and have a humorous effect. Above all, exaggeration and the transmission of negative traits are in the foreground, using descriptive insults, saying how the other party is cursing like three hundred little brothers - cursers, describing the other as being crude and intolerable just as three hundred circus guards or telling them to leave the house and citing a string of profanities such as three hundred dormice fur hats and roasts (Kovačič, 1981, p. 73). In the text, Kovačič plays with profanities from the point of view of stylistic features, as he understands them literally, which is not allowed (Babič, 2015). By doing so, the author creates an almost grotesque ambience. In Fran, the word *butec* (idiot) is marked with the derogatory qualifier, *tele* (an oaf) with the vulgar slang qualifier. Definition of the word *tristo* (three hundred) in SSKJ includes it being considered a profanity, used in phrases such as three hundred devils, where is it; three hundred hairy ones - there are different variations of the latter, and it is also considered as a reinforcement to an insulting or profane expression ('kot kletvica: tristo hudičev, kje pa je; tristo kosmatih; tristo zelenih, tako pa ne gre / kot podkrepitev tristo mačkov, da ga ne ujameš'). Using this template, children can easily make their own derivatives and create new innovative forms of profanity.

Blažić (2011, p. 77), who wrote about the subversive style, pointed out the stylistic originality of Makarovič's texts, which is also reflected in her use of profanity: 'the author's frequent use of children-like profanities stylistically characterises her attitude towards the world either positively or negatively' (*oh, hell, three hundred fern seeds, three hundred sapramiš devils, three hundred Darwins - o, jebelacesta, tristo praprotnih semen, tristo sapramišjih vragov, tristo darvinov*). Sometimes, these are merely implied, for example: "She screamed Balkan curses, threw a corn cob at her own husband's head, and out of sheer desperation began to smear her head with chicken dung' (Makarovič, 2008a, p.

7 All translations of literary text were made by author of article.

65)'' (as cited in Blažić, 2011, p. 77). *Jebelacesta* has the added qualifier colloquial and indicates something that makes the speaker uncomfortable or surprised.

In Makarovič's fairy tales, often the smallest characters, such as Sapramiška, often use profanity or curses. They also use it to defend themselves or stand up for themselves; this is what the bee does in the fairy tale *Medena pravljica*. The book was first published in 1995. The bee threatens the bear when it sits on the flowers: 'Move your fat ass!' ('Dvigni svojo debelo rit!') (Makarovič, 2014, p. 169). Fran defines *ass* (*rit*) as a vulgar qualifier. In the fairy tale, honey is the source of all problems, and the animals release their frustration precisely by using profanity. The little mouse mocks the squirrel by singing: 'I stick my tongue out to you, squirrel /her calls are following me/little mouse, big tongue, i i i, /what kind do you have?' ('Kažem jezik veverici,/spremljajo me njeni klici,/majhna miška, velik jezik, i i i,/kakšnega imaš pa ti?') (Makarovič 2014, pp. 172-173). In the continuation of the story, the inattentive hedgehog dirties up his wife's lair, which causes a big argument. The hedgehog curses and insults on his own: 'Gosh darn, this woman!' ('Arduš, kakšna baba!') (p. 177). Fran defines *arduš* (*gosh darn*) as a colloquial qualifier and 'expresses strong reinforcement to the claim', while *baba* (*woman*) has the pejorative qualifier, as does the adjective *zabit* (*stupid*). He pities himself and sings: 'She calls me: Stupid hedgehog, /you don't even know, /what it means to be a mother, /birth three little hedgehogs to this world [...] more than her spines/and chestnut shells/ I am pricked by her sharp and poisonous/evil tongue ...' (Makarovič, 2014, p. 178). However, the hedgehog does not surrender and let his wife win; he uses profanity, too. He becomes overwhelmed by anger and curses: 'Darn drill, sweet Jesus, three hundred chestnut shells, dagnabbit' and adds 'son of a gun' ('Orka svedr, krščenduš, tristo ježic kostanjevih, orka la pipa ferdamana' in še 'arduš nahamol') (Makarovič, 2014, p.179). By using such language, the author creates word play and escalates the description of the hedgehog's rage; his emotions are so intense that the author paradoxically best describes him precisely with silence. Fran defines *orka* (*darn*) as 'reluctance, impatience' ('nejevoljo, nestrpnost'), *krščenduš* (*sweet Jesus*) has the colloquial qualifier and expresses 'strong reinforcement to the claim'. When the hedgehog's spines also become dirty, the profanity reaches a climax and the narrator (Makarovič, 2014, p. 180) states: 'It is completely improper, and I dare not repeat what he has said while he disappeared into the forest.' Honey residue becomes stuck to the badger's paw, who takes advantage of the situation and tries to wipe himself in the fur of the fox. The fox goes crazy and screams: 'Jeepers! Have you gone insane?! You dare to wipe your paws into my fur? You uncouth beast, you ugly bastard!' ('Jasasna! Kaj si znorel?! V moj kožuh si drzneš brisati svoje umazane tace? Zverina neotesana,

*prasec grdi!')* (Makarovič, 2014, p. 181). Makarovič uses every new character to escalate the power of profanity, where the latter expression shows a marked resemblance to human speech. From the badger's perspective, the fox does not humiliate him. By comparing him to a *beast* (*zverina*) or a *bastard* (*prasec*), she places herself to his level, a perspective used by the author to mock the fox (who is a metaphor for an arrogant fool) and the badger (who is a metaphor for the ignorant opportunist). The way the fox uses profanity in the example resembles the strength of profanity used by the chicken homemaker Emilia. Fran provides two definitions for the word *zverina* (*beast*): '2. pejor. a crude, cruel man: *they were afraid that they would get a beast as their commander; it is not good to deal with such a selfish beast* / used as a curse word - *you beast, you have no heart*' ('2. slabš. surov, okruten človek: *bali so se, da bi dobili za poveljnika kako zverino; ni dobro imeti opravka s tako sebično zverino / kot psovka zverina, nimaš nič srca*'). *Prasec* (*bastard*) bears two distinct meanings pertaining to the text: '2. vulgar slang worthless, useless man: *what bastard betrayed them* / used as a curse word – *cursed bastard*' ('2. nizko ničvreden, malovreden človek: *kateri prasec jih je izdal / kot psovka prekleti prasec*), 3. vulgar slang – a dirty man: *I have to wash this bastard*' (3. *nizko umazan človek: umiti moram tega prasca*«).

Vegri used profanity in her poem '*Jebenti*', *reče mulc*, which is quite often heard among adults. By using it, the child expresses their frustration, since they immediately 'pounce into the kids' ('*v mulce zakadi*'), and Fran defines it with the vulgar qualifier and claims that it 'expresses anger, displeasure' ('*izraža jezo, nejevoljo*'). The poem alone serves as a platform for the topics of life and death. Replacing the chosen profanity with a new euphemism, like '*j-word*' (*jebenti*), would not achieve the desired effect, because the latter not only sounds different, but it is also exceedingly difficult to imagine an angry person screaming '*j-word*'. In order for profanities to come across as such, they need to correspond to their phonological image (Bowers & Pleydell-Pearce, 2011). The use of '*jebi ga*' (fuck it), which was considered to be trivial when it was first published, is justified by Novak (1994) in his poem *Marjetične meditacije* by saying:

In my private life I almost never use profanity, and it is not because of respect towards bearing decency on the outside but because I believe that I am incapable of portraying it with enough credibility or in a natural way. [...] As a writer, however, I think that literature must take advantage of every plain of a language. The decisive point of the poem *Marjetične meditacije* cannot be portrayed without any kind of supplement to that profanity. If '*jebi ga*' would have been substituted with an expression like 'Oh, well! What can we do? Such is life!' he would have destroyed it irreversibly. (p. 9)

The statement by Novak relates to the complexity of profanity usage in children's literature, which is by no means intended to merely shock and provoke. It is a well-considered move that needs to be founded in the text in order for it to achieve its intended message, which also immensely and with a great measure of honesty attracts the younger generations. Mihec finds himself in a difficult family situation in a book titled by his name by Koren, who hears quite a few profanities because of his father's drinking. Classmate Leon insults him: 'Go away! You are annoying! And your dad is drunk all the time!' (*Bež stran! Zoprni si! In tvoj oče je kar naprej pijan!*) (Koren, 2011, p. 34). Mihec does not return the favour but instead bites his shoulder. That is how he releases his frustration. By kicking Mihec out of his company, Leon shows a distinct dislike for his company, as if he were uttering a profanity, even though he is not. Even the statement *zoprni* (annoying) can be made into the curse word *zoprnež* (an annoying person, moron). Profanities are used even by the king in the *Juri Muri v Afriki: O fantu, ki se ni maral umivati* (2012) by Pavček. It was first published in 1958. The king orders his people to quickly wash *the dirty boy*. Fran adds an expressive qualifier to the word and adds the example '*watch your mouth, you dirty boy*'; (*kako pa govoriš, umazanec umazani*) (Pavček, 2012, p.17).

Texts that are heavily wrapped around profanity are rare in Slovenia. A visual substitute of profane words with a picture is seen in Zavadlav's illustrations in the book *Tinček in tri zlate ribice* (2013) by Zupan. The illustration shows the canary named Fiko, screaming at the cat and saying: '*There is no greater fool than Feliks the cat.*' (*'Ni ga bedačka čez Feliksa mačka.'*) (Zupan, 2012, p. 26). There are seven little clouds coming from his mouth, bearing arbitrary characters and letters and little pictures, which could resemble profanity or insults. This is important information for readers when reading a picture book as a multimodal text (Batič & Lebar Kac, 2020). A similar visual upgrade to the text was done by Košir in *Anica in grozovitež* (2001) by Muck, in which the father says, '*God damn it*' (*'Sto hudirjev'*) (Muck, 2001, p. 57), even if not explicitly stated in the text.

Quite unexpectedly, profanity and swearing appear in Pikalo's stories entitled *Luža* (2001). The tales of Ran the pre-schooler are mostly humorous, even when he finds himself in an uncomfortable situation. When children scold him, he fights back: '*I gave them the middle finger. This means you are in charge.*' (*'Jaz sem jim pokazal sredinski prst. To pomeni, da si ti ta glavni.'*) (Pikalo, 2001, p. 32). Later, however, he changes his narrative: '*When you show your middle finger, it means that you're like a boar if you know.*' (*'Če pokažeš sredinca, to pomeni, da si tak kot merjasec, če veš.'*) (p. 54). At certain points, the insults are made indirectly, like here: '*Dad said that when I write, the president needs to have the big P.*' (*'Oči*



*je rekel, ko to pišem, da predsednik ni mali, ampak veliki »p«*') (p. 21). When Ran catches his parents in the bed, Dad is embarrassed: '*Dad said they were playing adults. Shoot, I forgot to turn off the stove!*' (*Igrava se očije in mame, je rekel oči. O, mater, v kuhinji sem pozabil ugasnit plin!*;) (p. 68). Luža (boy's nickname) educationally summarises some profanities from the text and formulates a principle: 'In my kindergarten, we are not allowed to say ugly or English words: *drek, šit, ful, kul, tu mač, izi*, and such. But the grown-ups still use them if you know.' (*V mojem vrtcu ne smemo govorit grdih besed in angleških: drek, šit, ful, kul, tu mač, izi in take. Samo ta veliki jih vseeno govorijo, če veš.*) (p. 100). Embarrassed adults also use '*shit on a stick (drek na palici)*' (p. 38) and the profanity '*Get out of here (pojdi se solit)*' (p. 46). The irony of the end of this story is when the school psychologist inappropriately reacts during a school aptitude test because she does not understand Luža's joke about the frog. She calls him: 'Fine, you little rascal tadpole ...' (*Prav, paglavec paglavi...*) (p. 103). Fran cites an additional expressive qualifier to the expression *paglavec* (tadpole), whereas *mater* (shoot) and *drek* (shit) have the vulgar slang qualifier, the latter even pejorative, but it is not clear from the text which context was implied.

Curse words are used in their diminutive forms, used intentionally by the author in order to reduce their power but retain the intent of insulting, as was done by Koren in her story titled *Eva in kozel* (2006). Kozel (the goat) says to Eva after she had an unnecessary fight with her classmate: '*Oh, you can be such a goat sometimes!*' (*Eh, ti si včasih tudi prava kozica!*) (p. 25). Fran defines the expression *koza* (goat) as pejorative and as 'stupid goat, you goaty goat'.

Insults in children's literature seem to be present in the form of profanity. They are frequently used by adults (animals and people) to reinforce their opinion about something, especially when they are trying to teach the children a lesson. One such example can be seen in *Mišek Miško in Belamiška* (2009) by Lainšček, when the parents forbid their children from socialising with each other. Belamiška's dad says: '*You are going to get it if I catch you again with that grey scoundrel!*' he scolds her. '*That is just not appropriate for a lady like you.*' (*Gorje ti, če te še kdaj dobim s tem sivim falotom!*) ji žuga. '*To se za gospodično pač ne spodobi.*') (Lainšček, 2009, para. 9). Probably the most innovative, even if in the negative sense, and also the most insulting statement, is the one made by Belamiška's dad: '*Grey mice dig in the dirt day and night and that's why mud sticks to them,*' he explains. '*(Sive miši dan in noč rijejo po zemlji, zato se jih drži blato,*' ji pojasni.)' (Lainšček, 2009, para. 9). By saying this, the father completely devalues the identity of grey mice, since the profane statement can be understood literally and metaphorically. Grey mice are, according to him, dirty because of the work they do (literal meaning), and dirty because they *dig* their way through



life (metaphorical meaning). Lainšček uses the insult *falot* (*scoundrel*) (Fran also qualifies it as a curse word) and, thus, creates a linguistic image to reinforce the mentality of grey mice: they are poor, so they must be fraudulent. At the same time, Miško's dad warns his son: '*I do not want you seeing that white gal! he explains. That is just not appropriate for a village boy!*' ('*Nočem, da se še kdaj srečaš s to belo frajlo! mu pojasni. To se za fanta iz vasi pač ne spodobi.*') (Lainšček, 2009, para. 9). He has nothing nice to say about the white mice and thinks they take them for fools. He is relentless in his last statement, as he rudely says: '*We know what is right, and we are not uptight.*' ('*Vemo, kaj je prav, in se ne držimo, kot bi im- ele zlato pero v riti.*') (Lainšček, 2009, para. 10). The mice dads are full of prejudice and despise one another, which is clear from the insults they use. Those clearly convey their social and economic status, which is also present in the illustrations; while the white mouse's dad is fully clothed and wearing glasses, the grey dad is wearing blue overalls, without a T-shirt or glasses. Even though *frajla* (*gal*) is not considered an insult, in the given context, it most certainly functions as such since the dad said it in order to insult Belamiška and hurt Miško (even if for a worthy cause). When the mice dads start arguing when they cannot seem to find their young, the insults become equalised on both ends (Belamiška and Miško are called *brats* - *smrklja*, *smrkavec*).

Anger is present in the picture book by Komelj titled *Kako sta se gospod in gospa pomirila* (2009). Mister (*gospod*) and Madame (*gospa*) insult pigeons on their balcony by calling them 'Trash!' or 'Flying rats!' ('*Nesnaga golobja!*' and '*Leteče podgane!*') (para. 3).

In Slovenian children's literature, we also find an example of an insult uttered at a cemetery. Sokolov, in the story *Enkrat vsak umre*, published in the book *Se bomo zmenili in druge zgodbe* (2012), uses her precise sense of children's curiosity and an indirect indication of education to lead us into thinking about what is appropriate. The undertakers are commenting on a child chewing his gum: '*The undertakers standing in a line with sombre faces shook their heads. [...] I mean ...; 'Kids these days!'; 'Where are his parents?!'; 'Why do people bring kids like these to funerals?' ('Pogrebci v vrsti so mrko gledali in zmajevali z glavo. [...] 'Mislim ...' 'Mularija!' 'Le kje ima starše?!' 'Zakaj take pamže sploh vlačijo na pogrebe?'*' (p. 163). Fran defines the expression *mularija* (*kids*) as colloquial.

In problem literature, cursing (insulting) can be a reason for the marked distress of the literary hero. Such reading demands a sensitive and attentive reader who is capable of close reading. At first, the cat is in a completely unequal speaking position in Zupan's fantastic story entitled *Jaz, Franci Grdi* (2014). He is the last and the weakest kitten in the litter, and he barely survived. Almost every family member picks on him because he is so small. The insults

deeply affect his confidence: *'My tears have run out. I somehow became numb and got used to the insults. I just ignored them. There was nothing left for me to do. I was not the crybaby anymore, just a loser.'* (*Solze so mi presahnile. Postal sem nekako otopel, navadil sem se na žaljivke. Kar preslišal sem jih. Saj mi drugEGA ni preostalo. Nisem bil več Cmera, samo še Zguba.*) (p. 11). We know that the protagonist suffers because of the verbal abuse and neglect. His siblings call him *a rat spawn* or *a rat son* (*podganji izrodek, podganji sin*). By using the latter expression, they insult their mum, who then *'gave the kids a few slaps'* (*'je mulcem prisolila nekaj klofut'*; p. 15). These are most certainly one of the harshest profanities present in children's literature and are equal to the curse word *son of a bitch* (*pasji sin*) according to their power and semantic structure. According to Nežmah (1997), this is considered to be a triple degradation and even Fran cites the expression *zguba* (*loser*) with the pejorative qualifier and is considered to be a curse word. The siblings use the mentioned curse word to degrade their brother back to a cub or to a creature that has degenerated (being worse than themselves), degrade him to another creature (from a cat to a rat), and insult the mother because this means that she mated with a rat, not a cat. Because there is an accident with coal in the woodshed where the cat's family lives, the cat finds Mato, who names him 'Franci Grdi'. Mato takes care of him, but the mum does not like him at first and calls Franci Grdi *the toothless hairless creature*. With a great measure of self-irony, the cat says to himself: *'Loser, you're an idiot.'* (*'Zguba, ti si butec.'*) (p. 30) because he just cannot seem to believe how nice he feels next to Mato. Franci gets his biggest win when he hounded out the neighbour's cat, who came from a dysfunctional family and his dad was an alcoholic. He talks about his owner and says: *'He called women names and father Boris was extremely mad, so they frequently fought.'* (*'Ženske je obkladal z grdimi imeni, da je bil oče Boris že hudo jezen in sta se večkrat sporekla.'*) (p. 47). This motif is established even in interpersonal relations. When the mother becomes upset because Mato compares the gentleman who was interested in the cat to a dummy, the father makes an ironic comment and creates a euphemism: *'You can't say Tavsiga is a dummy, but Mr Tavsiga is not too open-minded'* (*'Ne smeš reči Tavsiga je tepec, ampak gospod Tavsiga ni preveč odprte glave.'*) (p. 35). *Tepec* (*dummy*) Fran cites as pejorative and lists it as a curse word. Zupan very effectively, and, above all, with a great deal of sensitivity and empathy, shows the context of cursing or insulting in different relationships (between animal cubs, siblings, between two adults, and an adult and a child). He confronts his readers without embellishments that sometimes, the most terrible things are said by the family. Whether the profanity is spoken or implied by the person, the writer always takes the side of the victim.

In the novel, *Avtobus ob treh* (2016) by Konc Lorenzutti, Tine Lavrenčič from the coast and Uroš Zajc from the capital Ljubljana spend an interesting summer together. When Uroš overhears his friend's dad curse, Tine explains what the words mean. 'Let me translate for you. *Dio povero* means *poor God*, *porka* means *dirty*, but I do not know what *maštela* (*bucket*) means. It is probably something dirty.' ('*Ti prevedem: Dio povero pomeni revni Bog, porka pomeni umazana, ne vem pa, kaj je maštela. Po moje nekakšna packarija.*') (p. 136). Fran defines the expression *porka* as vulgar slang since it 'denotes a strong reinforcement to the statement: *porka*, everything is going awry / *porka* *madona* *porkamadona*; (*izraža močno podkrepitev trditve: porka, vse gre narobe / porka madona porkamadona*'). This profanity first causes Uroš from Ljubljana to be perplexed and wonder about its foreignness. At the same time, Tine is also curious and can only guess what that last part meant. Uroš keeps repeating the word for so long until he misuses it and insults Tine's brother Nace, who is worried about his father's health. But the use of profanity is nevertheless appropriate, as there is an educational aspect between peers; Tine apologises, saying that Uroš just wanted to release his pain. Profanity connected to God is rare in children's literature. Foreign curse words are usually better received than others since it is the foreign aspect of these expressions that gives them the additional expressiveness (Babič, 2015). Simultaneously, uttering such taboo words, even profanity in your first language, causes much more anxiety than if expressed in a different language (Haris et al. as cited in Bowers and Pleydell-Pearce, 2011). In this novel, the mother and Tine later have a fight, but the profanities become implied. Tine is ashamed after it because of the words he used when speaking to his mother, which is also the reason why he does not dare to repeat them.

The same humorous atmosphere, but in a nonsensical perspective, is created by the cursing phone in the story *O sitnem telefončku*. It is one of the stories published in *Sosed pod stropom* (2016), written by Peter Svetina. The lost telephone insults quite a few passers-by, calling mister Boža an *ugly and improper man* (*grdavž and nemarnež*) and his dog a *monster* (*tolovaj*), *blighter* (*zmenec*) and a *nitwit* (*teslo*). All these expressions carry the expressive qualifier as per Fran, except for *nitwit* (*teslo*), which is defined as pejorative. He additionally insults a student called Gaja and calls her a *brat* (*smrklja*). Even though the text contains no explicit indication, it is relatively easy to imagine a touch-screen phone in the form of an old grumpy complainer. Even more innovative is the use of *jebenti* (*fuck*) in Svetina's story called *Loto in te reči*, published in the book under the same name by Svetina. The reporter Frančišek Požar is surprised by the fact that the Hamburg Blisk implies a beautiful and intelligent woman, not a man. Upon meeting her for the first time, he says: 'Oh, *fuck!*' and in the same breath 'Sorry!.' ('O, *jebenti!*' in v

*isti sapi tudi 'Oprostite!')* (p. 64). What makes the usage of this profanity creative is the fact that Svetina annotated it and wrote: 'This profanity does not belong in children's literature. The editor should be warned. Appropriate expressions to use: *gosh darn it, barnacles, damn, sweet Jesus, and blimey.*' ('*To je kletvica, ki v otroško literaturo ne sodi. Nanjo bo treba opozoriti urednico. Kletvice, ki bi v otroško literaturo lahko sodile, so: sakrabort, hejnata, hudimana, presneto, gromska strela in krščen matiček.*') (p. 64). With this, Svetina not only destigmatises the profanity in a humorous way but unobtrusively urges younger and adult readers (and editors) to think about language style. Fran defines *jebenti* as vulgar, the expression *hejnata* is not listed in the dictionary, *hudimana* as a euphemism, and the rest (*gromska strela* and *krščen matiček*) are also missing from the dictionary.

Another example of uttered insults, which do not reach the addressee directly, was used by Arnuš Pupis in her story *Vsega je kriv polh*, published in the book *Za devetimi drevesi* (2017). The forest animals are running out of food after their winter hibernation, so the bear and the wolf blame the dormouse as the thief at the meeting, since he is missing. The rest insult the dormouse with insults they would never say to his face, such as: *sakramenski zlikovec* (*God-damned villain*), *kradljivec potuhnjeni* (*sneaky thief*), *brezdelnež* (*idler*) in *presneti polh* (*damned dormouse*) (p. 89). Fran defines *sakramenski* (*God-damned*) as expressive, 'denoting a negative attitude towards the person or thing' and as an expression that can function 'as a curse word - god-damned hoyden' ('*ki izraža negativen odnos do osebe, stvari*' in *lahko učinkuje tudi 'kot psovka sakramenska frklja'*).

This indicates the influence of the fairy tale *Mojca Pokrajculja*, since the dormouse and the bunny are blamed for something they did not even do (Blažič, 2017). The animals in *Mojca Pokrajculja* apologise to the bunny at the initiative of the squirrel, but they almost blame the little owl. It remains problematic that nobody was punished for their deeds - the bear, the wolf, and neither the fox in *Mojca Pokrajculja*. So, the wolf and the bear, who cunningly assume the role of authority, maintain a violent attitude in the background.

## Conclusions

We have analysed profanity and curse words present in Slovene children's literature; for the most part, their presence seems to be contextually and visually justified. Most frequently, they are present as motifs, on rare occasions as the central theme (or motif) of the text, which can be seen in *Jaz, Franci Grdi*, the nonsensical story *Dva zmerljivca* published in *Zgodbe iz mesta Rič-Rač*, and the fairy tale *Medena pravljica*.

The results of our analysis of the studied literature also indicated that adults, children, and animals use profanity, most often in a family setting or within their closed circle (among friends and neighbours). A gender comparison shows that boys or men tend to curse more. Girls or women characters in Makarovič's work are an exception, however, since they tend to curse even more than their male counterparts. When a given literary person curses in problem literature, such as *Jaz*, *Franci Grdi*, or literature with problematic motives, such as in *Enkrat vsak umre*, the persons present are often silent or hardly say anything, which indicates an unequal position between the speakers. Very rarely do we see the offender (the one using profanity) being rejected (*Avtobus ob treh*, *Mihec*). When characters are equal to each other by intellect and status, using profanity is bilateral. This is the echo principle, as can be seen in real-life situations (Beers Fägersten, 2012). Another response to profanity is laughter, as can be seen in *Eva in kozel*. The texts contain predominately euphemised profanity used by adults in their daily lives (*jebenti*, *jebelacesta*, *drek na palici*, *mater*); there were also some foreign expressions too (*dio povero*, *porka maštela*, *šit*), insults made up by mixing the two (*orka sveder*, *orka la pipa ferdamana*), and neologisms were quite frequent (*tristo ježic kostanjevih*). The latter were mainly minted by Makarovič. Given their stylistic characteristics typical of those used by adults (if we can call them that), they are functional with young readers precisely for their convincing and innovative wordplay. However, the most innovative euphemised profanity (*o*, *jebenti*) was used by Svetina, who added a humorous footnote to the original text, in which he intently alerted the readership to it being inappropriate and, in doing so, listed even more profanities. Analysis of children's novels would have most likely indicated more instances of profanities and curse words, but those would not have been as innovative as those present in children's literature. Literary characters curse because they are angry, surprised, embarrassed, or just to create wordplay, but never during playing. Texts for children also contained expressions such as *kletvica* (profanity), *žaliti* (insult), *zmerjati* (name calling), *preklinjati* (curse), but they do not carry the same definition as those outlined by Nežmah (1997). Frequently, the definitions for profanity and curse words are confused, probably also because they have the same definition in the *Dictionary of the Slovenian Standard Language*.

Profanities, curse words and insults analysed in these texts are mostly defined in Fran; however, curse words and more innovative words are not. Texts also frequently contained colloquialisms used to strongly reinforce the speaker's statement, such as *arduš*, *orka*, *krščenduš*, *porka*, and even *tristo*, and vulgarisms, such as: *jebenti*, *rit*, and *drek*.

Curse words and insults must be read with a certain amount of performativity since these become clear only within the context (*slon* (elephant) and *žirafa*

(giraffe) are not profanities per se). Most frequently used were the metaphorical curse words, such as *kozel* and *kozica* (goat). The reading mentor must make sense of the function of profanities in conversation, especially when children notice or overlook them, but they are essential for understanding a specific textual context. Why did somebody curse? Is every word considered to be inappropriate in certain contexts? Why does one expression insult a person and the other does not?

Insulting among younger children is connected to their non-verbal communication, which is why characters in fairy tales stick their tongues out or give the finger. In instances where insulting is the dominant motif, it is sensible to talk to the readers about the emotions and circumstances of such insults. Who insulted who and why? Are they equal in their relationship? Who is the victim? It is also relevant to note whether the insult is uttered by the character on their own or is aimed at another person whom they are trying to humiliate. It is not recommended to read passages in which profanity occupies the central part of the text (e.g., the fight between the mice in Lainšček's work) without the students knowing the entire context. The readers need to understand that profanities can have a humorous effect on the reader even when the literary character is not in a humorous situation (such as the hedgehog in *Medena pravljica*). When a given profanity or curse word is hidden, this can be implied in a multitude of ways. In the first example, the insult is written only with the first letter (the 'p-word'), and then it is depicted only visually with arbitrary characters that, in each sequence, mean nothing. It happens quite often, especially when the subject is in an intense emotional state of anger, indignation, or rage, that the author merely describes his speech.

Regardless of whether the youngest readers understand the meaning of profanities used (for a six-year-old, 'three hundred Darwins' is demanding), the contextual perception of their expressiveness (in the sense that it is an inappropriate word) and the effect that swearing has on a young reader is essential. With the presence of profanities in children's literature, the tolerance for this kind of language is rising, which is why the reading mentor must be able to evaluate the importance of cursing in texts and be able to argue for such quality texts in literature lessons in front of potential censors. Even if profanity and insults interrupt the conversation in children's texts, it is only momentarily; then, the conversation must continue, which is the essence of any reading event.

## References

- Allain, K., & Burrige, K. (2006). *Forbidden Words. Taboo and the Censoring of Language*. Cambridge University Press.
- Arnuš Pupis, T. (2017). *Za devetimi gorami*. [Behind the Nine Mountains]. (T. Komadina, illus.). Miš.
- Austin, Langshaw J. (1900). *Kako napravimo kaj z besedami*. [How to Do Things With Words]. (Vol. 4). ŠKUC: Znanstveni inštitut Filozofske fakultete.
- Babič, S. (2015). *Beseda ni konj*. [The Word Is Not a Horse]. Založba ZRC, ZRC SAZU.
- Batič, J., & Lebar Kac, P. (2020). Cross-curricular analysis of picture books in the fifth grade of primary school: a case study. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, 10(4), 165-185.  
<https://doi.org/10.26529/cepsj.910>
- Beers Fägersten, K. (2012). *Who's Swearing Now? The Social Aspects of Conversational Swearing*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Beers Fägersten, K., & Stapleton, K. (Eds.). (2017). *Advances in Swearing Research: New languages and new contexts*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Blažič, M. M. (2009). Ljubljansčina in druga stilna sredstva v besedilih Andreja Rozmana Rože na primeru Pike Nogavičke. [The Ljubljana Dialect and Other Stylistic Devices in Andrej Rozman Roža's Literary Texts (Pippi Longstocking's Case)]. *Slovenska narečja med sistemom in rabo* (pp. 463-469). Znanstvena založba Filozofske fakultete.
- Blažič, M. (2011). Izvirnost v mladinskih besedilih Svetlane Makarovič. [Originality in Svetlane Makarovič's Youth Texts]. *Jezik in slovstvo*, 56(1-2), 73-86.  
<http://www.dlib.si/details/URN:NBN:SI:doc-WO3KSONF>
- Blažič, M. M. (2017). Slovenska ljudska pravljica Deklica in piskrček (Mojca Pokrajculja, ATU 283c\*) in njene literarne priredbe. [The Slovenian Folk Tale The Girl and the Pisser (Mojca Pokrajculja, ATU 283c\*) and Its Literary Adaptations]. [http://pefprints.pef.uni-lj.si/4866/1/Blazic\\_Deklica\\_piskrcek.pdf](http://pefprints.pef.uni-lj.si/4866/1/Blazic_Deklica_piskrcek.pdf)
- Bowers Jeffrey, S., & Pleydell-Pearce Christopher, W. (2011). Swearing, Euphemisms, and Linguistic Relativity. *PLoS ONE*, 6/7 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0022341>
- Fran - Slovarji Inštituta za slovenski jezik Frana Ramovša ZRC SAZU. <https://www.fran.si/>
- Granbom-Herranen, L., Babič, S., & Voolaid, P. (2015). Proverbial Expressions in Newspapers. Comparative Study in Estonia, Finland and Slovenia. *Traditiones: zbornik Instituta za slovensko narodopisje in Glasbenonarodopisnega inštituta ZRC SAZU= Acta Instituti ethnographiae et Instituti ethnomusicologiae Slovenorum*, 44(3), 5-32. <https://doi.org/10.3986/Traditio2015440301>
- Jay K. L., & Jay T. B. (2013). A child's garden of curses: a gender, historical, and age-related evaluation of the taboo lexicon. *American Journal of Psychology*, 126(4), 459-475.  
<https://doi.org/10.5406/amerjpsyc.126.4.0459>
- Komelj, M. (2009). *Kako sta se gospod in gospa pomirila*. [How Mr. and Mrs. Reconciled]. (Z. Čoh, illus.). Mladinska knjiga.
- Konc Lorenzutti, N. (2016). *Avtobus ob treh: (ali Društvo mlajših starejših bratov)*. [Bus at Three O'Clock: (or Younger Elder Brothers Society)]. Miš.



- Koren, M. (2006). *Eva in kozel*. [Eve and the Goat]. (S. Bricelj, Illust.). Mladinska knjiga.
- Koren, M. (2011). *Mihec*. [Mihec]. Mladinska knjiga.
- Kos, J. (2001). *Literarna teorija*. [Literary Theory]. DZS.
- Kovačič, L. (1981). *Zgodbe iz mesta Rič-Rač*. [Tales From the Town Of Rič-Rač]. (M. Bizovičar, Illust.). Mladinska knjiga.
- Lainšček, F. (2009). *Mišek Miško in Belamiška*. [Mouse Miško and Belamiška]. (M. Kozjek, Illust.). Mladinska knjiga.
- Makarovič, S. (2014). *Zlata mačja preja*. [Golden Cat Yarn]. Mladinska knjiga.
- Muck, D. (2001). *Anica in grozovitež*. [Anica and a Man of Horror]. (A. Košir, Illust.). Mladinska knjiga.
- Nežmah, B. (1997). *Kletvice in psovke*. [Curses and Expletives]. Nova revija.
- Novak, A. B. (1994). Poezija med čudenjem in trivialnostjo pričakovanja. [Poetry Between Wonder and the Triviality of Expectation]. *Otrok in knjiga*, 21(37), 7-14.
- Pavček, T. (2012). *Juri Muri v Afriki: o fantu, ki se ni maral umivati*. [Juri Muri in Africa: About a Boy Who Didn't Want to Wash]. (D. Stepančič, Illust.). Miš.
- Pikalo, M. (2001). *Luža. Zgodbe za mladino*. [A Puddle. Stories for Young People]. Prešernova družba.
- Predin, A. (2007). *Na zeleno vejo*. [On the Green Branch]. Modrijan.
- Saksida, I. (2001). "Nekaj nezasišanega": tabu teme v slovenski mladinski poeziji od ljudske pesmi do sodobnosti. ["Something Unheard Of": Taboo Topics in Slovenian Children's Poetry From Folk Songs to Contemporary Times]. *Jezik in slovstvo*, 47(1-2), 5-16.
- Saksida, I. (2015). Kurikularni bralci. Tabuji in cenzorske strategije (primer Cankarjevo tekmovanje). [Curriculum Readers, Taboos, and Censorship Strategies: (The Case of the Cankar Award Contest)]. *Jezik in slovstvo*, 60(3-4), 105-114.
- Saksida, I. (2022). The Contemporary Slovenian Picture Book and Slovenian Curriculum for Kindergartens. In M. Verdonik (Ed.), *Mjesto i uloga slikovnice u odgoju i obrazovanju danas i sutra* (pp. 16-30). Sveučilište u Rijeci, Učiteljski fakultet.
- Slovar novejšega besedja. [https://fran.si/131/snb-slovar-novejsega-besedja/datoteke/SNB\\_Zgradba.pdf](https://fran.si/131/snb-slovar-novejsega-besedja/datoteke/SNB_Zgradba.pdf)
- Sokolov, C. (2012). *Se bomo zmenili in druge zgodbe*. [We Will Talk About It and Other Stories]. (T. Komadina, Illus.). Mladinska knjiga.
- Stramljič Breznik, I. (2007). Slovenska slengovska frazeologija danes. [Slovenian Slang Phraseology Today]. *Slovenski jezik – Slovene Linguistic Studies*, 6, 183-193.
- Svetina, P. (2016). *Sosed pod stropom*. [My Neighbour up There]. (P. Škerl, Illust.). KUD Sodobnost International.
- Vegri, S. (2016). *Naročje kamenčkov*. [Bosom of Pebbles]. (D. Stepančič, Illust.). Miš.
- Zupan, D. (2013). *Tinček in tri zlate ribice*. [Tinček and Three Goldfish]. (A. Zavadla, Illust.). Miš.
- Zupan, D. (2014). *Jaz, Franci Grdi*. [I, Franci the Ugly One]. (T. Komadina, Illus.). Miš.



## Biographical note

**SABINA VIŠČEK**, PhD, primary school teacher, was an assistant in the field of didactics of Slovenian language at the University of Primorska, Faculty of Education and is employed as an editor for elementary school material at the Slovenian publishing house DZS. Her field of research is problem literature, reading in the first and second educational periods of elementary school. She is the co-author of textbooks.



DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26529/cepsj.1542>

## Rural Teacher Competencies: An International Comparative Study on the Territorial Dimension of Rural Schools

JUAN LORENZO LACRUZ<sup>\*1</sup>, FRANCESC BUSCÀ DONET<sup>2</sup> AND  
PILAR ABÓS OLIVARES<sup>3</sup>

☞ This article presents the results of a descriptive study carried out within the framework of the FOPROMAR project, obtained after administering a questionnaire regarding competences related to the territorial dimension of rural schools among teachers working in rural schools in Spain (Aragon and Catalonia), France (Aquitaine) and Portugal (Alto Alentejo). The questionnaire included three parts (professional profile, competences on the territorial dimension of the school and knowledge about the territory), but only the results referring to the competences section are presented, showing the level of relevance and the degree of mastery that teachers express in relation to these competences. According to the results, the competences with the greatest mastery are those referring to the design and development of programmes, followed by professional competences and school-community relations. This order is also found in the assessment carried out, indicating that they are more valued than mastered. One of the conclusions is the need to reinforce competences not included in training plans, but considered more necessary and important for working in rural schools.

**Keywords:** rural school, territorial dimension, teaching competences, teacher training

1 <sup>\*</sup>Corresponding Author. Faculty of Education, University of Zaragoza, Zaragoza, Spain; [jlorenzo@unizar.es](mailto:jlorenzo@unizar.es).

2 Faculty of Education, University of Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain.

3 Faculty of Social and Human Sciences of Teruel, University of Zaragoza, Zaragoza, Spain.

## Kompetence učiteljev na podeželskih šolah: mednarodna primerjalna študija o ozemeljski dimenziji podeželskih šol

---

JUAN LORENZO LACRUZ, FRANCESC BUSCÀ DONET IN PILAR ABÓS OLIVARES

~ V tem članku so predstavljeni izsledki opisne študije, izvedene v okviru projekta FOPROMAR, ki so bili pridobljeni po posredovanju vprašalnika o kompetencah, povezanih z ozemeljsko dimenzijo podeželskih šol, med učitelji, ki delajo na podeželskih šolah v Španiji (Aragonija in Katalonija), Franciji (Akvitaniya) in na Portugalskem (Alto Alentejo). Vprašalnik je vseboval tri dele (poklicni profil, kompetence o ozemeljski dimenziji šole in znanje o ozemlju), vendar so predstavljeni le rezultati, ki se nanašajo na del o kompetencah in ki kažejo stopnjo pomembnosti in obvladovanja, ki jo učitelji izražajo v povezavi s temi kompetencami. Glede na rezultate so najbolj obvladane kompetence, ki se nanašajo na oblikovanje in razvoj programov, sledijo strokovne kompetence ter odnosi med šolo in skupnostjo. Ta vrstni red je razviden tudi iz opravljenega ocenjevanja, kar kaže, da so bolj cenjene kot obvladane. Ena izmed ugotovitev je, da je treba okrepiti kompetence, ki niso vključene v načrte usposabljanja, vendar se štejejo za bolj potrebne in pomembne za delo v podeželskih šolah.

**Ključne besede:** podeželska šola, ozemeljska dimenzija, kompetence poučevanja, usposabljanje učiteljev

## Introduction and theoretical background

The changes that rural territories have undergone in recent decades are closely linked to the provision of public services, among which schools are fundamental. According to Eurostat (2023), based on January 1, 2021 population data, only 21% of the EU population lived in rural regions, despite the fact that predominantly rural regions accounted for almost half (45%) of the EU's area. Due to the existence of major differences in geographic, socio-economic and educational aspects between urban-rural Europe (Eurostat, 2022), there is no single concept of rural territory, although the size of the municipality continues to be the criterion most commonly employed.

From a demographic point of view, there are several criteria for considering a territory as rural. The OECD sets the limit at 150 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>, resulting in three categories of regions: predominantly rural, intermediate and predominantly urban. For its part, the European Commission sets the limit at 100 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup> and, with the statistical intervention of population density, establishes three zones: high population density (equal to or greater than 500 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup> and 50,000 inhabitants), intermediate (between 100 and 500 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup> and a population of at least 50,000) and low population density (fewer than 100 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup> and fewer than 50,000 inhabitants).

The relationship between the school and the rural community where it is located has been acquiring an important role in educational research (Hargreaves et al., 2020). Accordingly, the concept of rural territory is gaining other qualitative and socio-cultural factors that lend it a changing meaning in which geographic, economic, social and cultural factors play an important role. Moreover, the importance of context is gaining an interesting role in the study of the rural school, taking into account its socio-economic impact (Raggl, 2019), the need to integrate the teaching-learning process into the local context, and the school's active role in the community (Fargas-Malet & Bagley, 2021). To this end, training – both initial and ongoing – becomes a basic element for quality education in rural schools. In this regard, Carrete-Marín and Domingo-Peñafiel argue for the need for “teacher training that is not based on urbanised patterns, so as not to import a standardised and graded teaching model. Rural classrooms require a specific pedagogical model due to their organisational peculiarities” (2022, p. 70).

The school has become a key element in the struggle against depopulation, by guaranteeing the basic service provided by the school itself and linking it to other cultural services. In this scenario, many of the changes undergone by rural societies pass through the rural school and its educational community, insofar as the school is part of the state's institutional system, concentrates social diversity,

contributes to the formation of future rural social capital and, consequently, is a core element in shaping rural societies and their territory (Fundació Món Rural, 2019). In this sense, as Boix points out, “By territorial dimension we mean that the rural school is a dynamic actor in the rural community from several perspectives that complement each other: as an active member of a territorial institutional system, as a receiver of identities and emotions, as local social capital and as a shaping element in rural social construction” (Boix, 2014, p. 89). In this regard, population diversity also depends on its specific adaptation (structural, administrative, socio-educational services, etc.), as well as on a diversified definition of rural space, which is reflected as a constant in the different European regions addressed in this study, connecting school and education in various European rural contexts with their territorial dimension, as well as with their competency and training aspects.

The main research goal of the general project underpinning this work was to propose a permanent training plan and initial training proposals to meet the competency needs of rural teachers, structured into three specific objectives:

1. *To identify the competences of rural teachers to carry out their formative function as well as their competences as invigorators of the territorial aspect of the rural school.*
2. To determine the latent educational knowledge in the school and/or territory that allows the school to promote the territorial dimension.
3. To draw up the bases that guide the design of initial and permanent training plans for rural teachers and to give a public presentation of the project in each partner state.

The present paper focuses on the first of these three goals. Specifically, this objective assumes as a research problem an analysis of the competence needs of rural teachers from the point of view of the territorial dimension of education in rural contexts in regions of three different European countries.

## **Rural schools in the territories studied**

The FOPROMAR project, the partial findings of which are presented in this article, aims to provide a glimpse of some of the key challenges facing the rural context of southern European countries, and how their educational policies and school organisation are faring in the establishment of diagnoses and indications for improvement. Therefore, “it is essential to take into account this challenge in the training of teachers who will play their role in such a unique and diversified context as the rural environment” (Fundació del Món Rural, 2019, p. 27). Consequently, we have developed an analytical approach to the situation of the rural school model in the different regions and countries taking part.

## Spain

The organisation of rural schools in Spain is conditioned by an administrative structure that divides the country into 17 autonomous communities and two autonomous cities, and by the existence of a regulatory body that establishes a single education system with regional differences and similarities in its management and operation, in the hands of the autonomous communities, as well as with coordination mechanisms aimed at ensuring coherence. In addition, the importance of other lower administrative levels (province, district and municipality) in maintaining rural schools should be noted.

The existence of this single system is based on a first legislative tier in which an Organic Law sets out the basic principles, guaranteeing the order of competence of each of the autonomous communities in educational matters (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, 2021). The recently enacted LOMLOE (Organic Law Modifying Organic Education) includes *a new look* at the subject of education in rural territories, emphasising the need for it to be the *object of a special provision* by the administrations, which must provide “the organisational means and systems necessary to meet their particular needs and guarantee equal opportunities” (Article 82.1), considering the *specific nature* of rural schools and their schooling conditions, as well as the free provision of school transportation and canteen and boarding services (Article 82.2). Furthermore, it is committed to the dignification and maintenance of rural schools in line with the Sustainable Development Goals by stating in its “Fifth Additional Provision” on “Priorities in Territorial Cooperation Programmes” the need to strengthen rural and island schools and teachers’ professional development in order to achieve Goal 4 of the 2030 Agenda.<sup>4</sup>

## Aragón

With a population of 1,326,261 (according to the official census figures of the Aragonese Institute of Statistics as of 01 January 2021, published and revised by Royal Decree 1065/2021 of 30 November 2021),<sup>5</sup> the Autonomous Community of Aragón, is a very unbalanced territory, with 50.63% of the population being concentrated in the capital, Zaragoza. The provinces of Huesca and Teruel account for 63.8% of the territory and 27.35% of the total population, thus shaping a net rural space (Spanish Network for Rural Development, 2018).

4 Due to the recent publication of the law, however, there is currently a lack of adapted regulatory development at the autonomous community level. The data provided for the communities studied are therefore earlier data that were valid at the time of the research.

5 Available at: [https://www.aragon.es/documents/20127/1909615/20211227\\_comunicado\\_cifrasoficiales.pdf/f8f35d22-oda9-3691-acb6-60d713eb8c55?t=1640607857456](https://www.aragon.es/documents/20127/1909615/20211227_comunicado_cifrasoficiales.pdf/f8f35d22-oda9-3691-acb6-60d713eb8c55?t=1640607857456)

With respect to the distribution of the population and municipalities according to the size of the municipality, the figures provided by the Municipal Register of Inhabitants of 01 January 2021 allow us to approach the reality of its irregular demographic distribution over the Aragonese territory. This is because, according to glossary of the National Institute of Statistics,<sup>6</sup> 674 of the 731 municipalities in Aragón have fewer than 2,000 inhabitants, with these municipalities accounting for a total of 210,283 inhabitants. These figures, coupled with an aging population pyramid,<sup>7</sup> give us an idea of the demographic and territorial idiosyncrasy of the Autonomous Community of Aragón.

In the area of non-university education, Aragón assumes the competences assigned in the second phase of decentralisation conducted in 1999, whereby the organisation of the rural school is governed by Royal Decree 273/1986, of 24 December 1986, on the Constitution of Rural Grouped Schools of Basic General Education (EGB in Spanish) (Official State Journal of 09 January 1987), whose general bases have not been modified by any autonomous regulation, in spite of the existence of an important rural territory. Rural Grouped Schools (CRA in Spanish) are a group of schools that unite to form a *single centre*, maintaining their basic structure and coexisting alongside incomplete and/or unitary non-grouped schools.

### *Catalonia*

The Autonomous Community of Catalonia has a total population of 7,763,362 (according to the municipal census of the National Institute of Statistics of 01 January 2021)<sup>8</sup> occupying 947 municipalities of which 593 have a population of fewer than 2,000 inhabitants, 737 do not exceed 5,000 inhabitants, 826 have fewer than 10,000 inhabitants and 43 have more than 30,000 inhabitants, accounting for 63.5% of the overall population.

The distribution of the Catalan population according to the size of the municipalities with fewer than 2,000 inhabitants reveals that 345,825 inhabitants live in areas considered small or rural according to the glossary of the National Institute of Statistics. In addition, the population density of Catalonia is 242.3 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>.

Catalonia was one of the first communities to assume the transfer of competences in 1981, and in 1988 published Decree 195/1988, of 27 July, on Rural School Zones (ZER in Spanish) for public primary schools (Official Journal of the Generalitat de Catalunya - DOGC of 19 August 1988).

6 Available at: <https://www.ine.es/DEFIne/?L=0>

7 Available at: <https://www.aragon.es/-/piramides-de-poblacion.-aragon>

8 Available at: <https://www.ine.es/jaxiT3/Datos.htm?t=2915>



During the 1980s, many activities were carried out regarding the rural school. They were initiated by the teachers' movement of the Rural School Secretariat (SERC in Spanish), whose organisational model takes into account the importance of the schooling context and the quality of education in villages. Following a lengthy process of discussion, the SERC teachers approved the document the School Zoning Project for Rural Schools.

The ZER model, in which a group of rural schools that maintain their autonomy as centres share an educational project, as well as travelling specialist teachers, is still in force today and coexists with some rural multigrade schools that are not grouped. It should be noted that Catalonia has a long history of innovation and research in education in general and in schools in rural contexts in particular (Tahull & Montero, 2018; Burrial, Sala, Samper & Torres-González, 2018; Ion, Díaz-Vicario & Suárez, 2021).

## France

The organisation of rural schools in France is determined by a political-administrative structure divided into regions (13) and departments (101), with the smallest administrative division being the commune (36,682).

Decisions regarding education policy are made by the Ministry of National Education, although in terms of management it is a fairly decentralised educational system.<sup>9</sup> In France, a rural school is considered to be a school located in common rural and/or mountain areas and can adopt different structures: unitary/multigrade schools, inter-municipal school groupings (RPI in French) and/or rural education networks (REE in French). This kind of specific school has some characteristics fundamentally linked to the rural exodus and the demographic decline that gave rise to the single classes mentioned above. However, this can allow for innovative pedagogy insofar as autonomy is promoted, as well as greater personalisation of education and better continuity between the different classes.

Its main limitations are the constant decrease in student numbers, the problems of access to the educational establishment and the lack of attractiveness to teachers. For this reason, the Ministry of National Education intends to provide greater supervision and funding for this type of school.

In addition, one of the aspects considered fundamental is the issue of relations between territory and education (Champollion, 2011), for which

<sup>9</sup> For example, primary education is provided by the communes and school transportation is in the hands of the departments.

so-called Rurality Agreements<sup>10</sup> have been developed between the Ministry and the Departments in order to strengthen rural schools.

### *Aquitaine*

As part of the 2014 territorial reform, Aquitaine merged in 2016 with the bordering regions of Poitou-Charentes and Limousin, becoming New Aquitaine, comprising 12 departments. Despite the high population density of New Aquitaine (71.5 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>), which is due to the existence of large cities, some of the departments are considered rural and mountainous areas.<sup>11</sup> Since the 1990s, these departments have been very important in the defence of small rural schools through the creation of different associations, such as the National Federation of Rural Schools, created in 1992.

## **Portugal**

Portugal's political-administrative organisation consists of 18 continental districts and two autonomous regions, divided into 308 municipalities. In addition, the provinces (or natural regions),<sup>12</sup> although without administrative value, continue to be an important reference for most Portuguese. However, the education system offers a centralised model, without a specific regulation for rural schools, but granting a great deal of autonomy and flexibility to the centres and great importance to the municipalities. In Portugal, a rural school is characterised by being located in a rural or peri-rural area, generally small in size, sparsely populated and often isolated. The country is experiencing an exodus from rural to urban areas, where more and better quality services can be found due to the infrastructure imbalance affecting their provision in unpopulated areas. This phenomenon contributes to the desertification of the countryside, making it difficult for rural schools to remain and leading to a reduction in the population (Fundació del Món Rural, 2019, p. 38).

In spite of this, and in relation to the situation of rural schools, which are multi-grade schools with basic education students, Portugal has undergone a major process of urbanisation over the last decade, leading to the disappearance of many rural schools or the removal of the higher cycles (from ages 11 to 15) of basic education, in favour of a more efficient and higher quality system,<sup>13</sup> despite the role given to the rural school as a dynamic organisation for local and community development (Amiguiinho, 2008).

10 In 2017, 40 of the planned 60 departments were covered by an agreement.

11 Creuse, Dordogne and Vienne.

12 Created through a reform in 1936, they were formally dissolved with the entry into force of the 1976 Constitution.

13 Since 2000, 4,500 schools considered isolated have been closed.

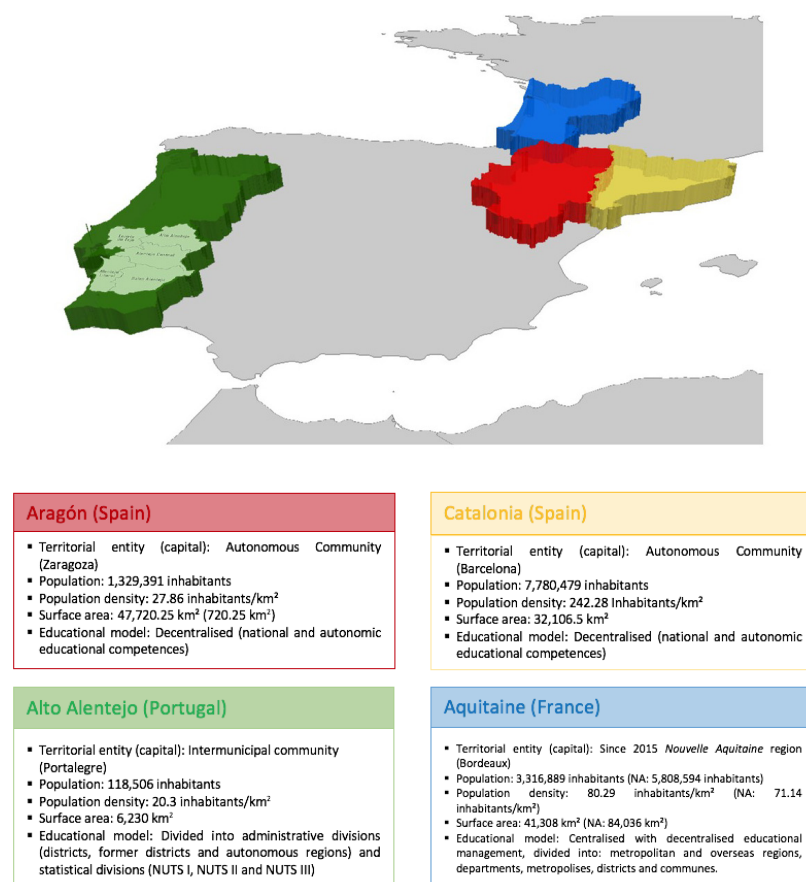
### Alto Alentejo

The former province is today an administrative entity known as an *inter-municipal unit* comprising 15 municipalities and their corresponding parishes, with a population of 104,989 inhabitants.<sup>14</sup> The existence of multi-grade schools in which students from different stages and/or cycles are grouped together is one of its basic characteristics.

Figure 1 shows the geographic location of each of the territories, expanding this information with relevant administrative, demographic and school organisation data.

**Figure 1**

*Geographical location and basic descriptive data of the territories studied*



Source: Own<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Figures for 2021 indicate a population loss of 11% over the last ten years.

<sup>15</sup> The NUTS II region of Alentejo is highlighted, with a different administrative model, which includes the sub-regions of Baixo Alentejo, Alentejo Central, Alentejo Litoral and Alto Alentejo (formed within the district of Portalegre as an intermunicipal community and statistical sub-region, such as Lezíria de Tejo).

In order to establish a comparative framework between the different contexts involved in this study, Figure 2 allows us to contrast the specificities of each region in terms of their different rural spaces, their national policies towards rural areas and their rural teacher training models.

**Figure 2**

*Comparison of the specificities of rural schools in each study area*

Common contextual elements	Spanish specificities	French specificities	Portuguese specificities
Rural areas are undergoing profound changes, especially economic, social, cultural and organisational changes that are opening the way to a new rurality	Progressive decline in enrolment in rural schools. Low attractiveness for new teachers. Linked to accessibility problems.	Progressive decline in enrolment in rural schools. Low attractiveness for new teachers. Linked to accessibility problems.	Rural schools are on the way to disappearing. Process linked to the urbanisation of the country (4,500 school closures since 2000).
National education policies to accompany changes in rural areas	There is a general education framework, but with territorial adaptations for each autonomous region. Organisation according to principles of economic rationalisation, which is not always justified in pedagogical plans. In Catalonia, the problems of schools in rural areas have long been taken into account (support plan accompanied by a decentralisation policy). Definition of Rural School Zone (ZER). In Aragon, low appropriation of rural needs by the autonomous community. This situation leads to a policy of centralisation and school closures.	A national framework with common school organisations, single class, multilevel, inter-municipal pedagogical regrouping (RPI), rural education network (RER), public (RPI), public primary education services (EPEP), but with different pedagogical adaptations.	National policy oscillates between two contradictory movements: concentration of the school population in urban areas, mainly based on the logic of costs, versus the vision of the school as a key element in local development, with an important role for the teacher, who is considered an agent of this local development.
Training plan arrangements for future teachers.	There is the organisation of a Master's Degree in Education and Rural Development organised by the Inter-University Group of Rural Schools (GIER), which brings together public and private universities.	There is no specific training mechanism for rural school teachers. There are guidelines for bridging the digital divide, but no training mechanisms. A university pedagogical network is organised within the framework of conventions on rurality.	There is no specific training, but there are scientific articles that report experiences of participatory, more student-centred educational models.

Source: Own elaboration in FOPROMAR (Fundació del Món Rural, 2019).

## **Towards an understanding of the concept of “teaching competences of the rural teacher”**

In today's knowledge and information society, teachers play a fundamental role in students' learning, consisting of a complex and diverse range of knowledge and skills that enable their personal, social and professional development throughout their lives. The need to rethink the teaching task and competency-based teacher training is a fact highlighted by a wide range of studies (González & Wagenaar, 2006; OECD, 2009; COPE, 2011; Eurydice, 2012) and research (Bolívar, 2008; Perrenaud, 2008; Bernal & Teixidó, 2012; Pérez; Oliver-Trobat et al., 2015; Redecker, 2017; Tahirsylaj et al., 2021).

Based on this theoretical justification, which was obtained from a state-of-the-art review and the collaboration of reviewers and external experts, we have arrived at the following categorisation of the concept of competences:

Professionals, understood as those referring to the planning and development of teaching and educational projects that serve the rural context and that can be included in the technical and adaptation areas indicated by Flück (2001).

Design and development of curricular programmes that take into account the rural context, included in the same area (Flück, 2001).

School-community relations, which are competences of interaction with families and the local community, covering the areas of organisation and personal and social relations (Flück, 2001).

## **Method**

This descriptive study has a non-experimental research design based on a questionnaire survey (McMillan & Shumacher, 2011).

### ***Participants***

The sample comprised 460 teachers working in schools located in rural contexts in Spain, France and Portugal. Taking into account 50% heterogeneity, a margin of error of 5% and a confidence interval of 95%, the representativeness of the sample is set at 248 teachers.

Accordingly, the distribution of the sample for each territory involved in the study is 115 (using as a reference the number of responses obtained in Aquitaine, the region with the lowest number), of which 354 are female (77.0%) and 106 male (33.0%), aged between 22 and 63 ( $M = 43.78$ ,  $SD = 8.83$ ) and with work experience in schools belonging to a rural context between 0 and 40 years ( $M = 14.82$ ,  $SD = 9.19$ ).

**Table 1**

*Participants by country in the Rural School Teacher Competences Questionnaire and distribution of the sample*

Country	Region	n = 460
Spain	Aragón	115
Spain	Catalonia	115
France	Aquitaine	115
Portugal	Alto Alentejo	115

### *Instrument*

The *Rural School Teacher Competences Questionnaire* (CC-PER in Spanish, see Appendix I) sets out 30 competences related to the performance of the territorial dimension in rural schools, grouped into three areas:

Pedagogical or professional field: 6 key competences (items 1–6) in which the teachers show their ability to adapt their personal teaching project to the characteristics and needs of the environment and to get involved and collaborate with the other teaching staff in the same school, and with other rural teachers in the area who may be related to teaching associations, in order to develop shared projects linked to the territory.

Methodological or programme design and development: 17 instrumental competences (items 7–23) in which teachers show their ability to design, manage and assess educational projects, teaching proposals and resources in which the problems and challenges of the territory and the students are integrated.

School-territory relations: 7 systemic competences (items 24–30) in which teachers show their ability to involve the members of the school community and the social and educational agents of the territory and encourage their participation in educational projects and teaching proposals.

The items of the instrument were based on European reports (European Commission, 2005, 2007; González & Wagenaar, 2006) or specific academical literature (Perrenaud, 2007, 2008). Following a preliminary process of theoretical documentation, the final selection of these competences was carried out after checking their relevance with experienced rural teachers and verifying their internal consistency both to assess their importance and the degree of mastery by the respondents ( $\alpha = 0.97$ ).

The questionnaire was previously assessed and translated into Portuguese, Spanish, Catalan and French, and consists of the following sections: 1) a brief description of the research and instructions for completing the questionnaire; 2) personal data and the context in which the teacher carries out their

teaching work; 3) list of competences related to the areas explained above; and 4) a blank section in which the surveyed teacher proposes other competences not included on the list.

### *Procedure*

The questionnaire was sent to the teachers participating in the study in an electronic format through the *Google Forms* application. To this end, the most representative educational agents and/or heads of education in each region were asked to send the questionnaire to the personal and institutional email addresses of all of the principals of the schools included in the study. In addition to answering the questionnaire, members of the management team were asked to send the questionnaire to the teachers in their school so that they could forward it to the study managers once completed.

The respondent had to use two Likert scales to rate both the relevance of each competence to rural school teacher education and the degree to which the respondent considered that they had mastered the particular competence. In both cases, the scores correspond to the following values: 1 (none), 2 (low), 3 (medium) and 4 (high).

The questionnaires were received over the course of almost one calendar year, trying to avoid the end and beginning of the school year, that is, the periods when teachers usually have greater difficulties in answering questionnaires.

### *Data analysis*

First, descriptive statistics (mean, median, standard deviation and variance) were calculated for the variables linked to the context data and for the competence ratings in terms of both relevance and degree of mastery. The difference between the mean obtained when assessing the degree of mastery of each competence highlighted in the questionnaire and the scores referring to their relevance was also calculated.

Second, in order to verify the degree to which the responses obtained for each group of competences are consistent, the internal consistency analysis (Cronbach's alpha) was also calculated.

## **Results**

The presentation of the findings consists of the following three sections: teacher profile, relevance given to the competences defined, and mastery indicated with respect to the degree of performance of these competences.

*What is the profile of the teachers who are performing the competences related to the territorial dimension?*

All of the teachers surveyed teach in a rural context, covering all educational levels: early childhood education (18.7%), primary education (73.7%) and secondary education (7.6%). The low percentage of the last stage of schooling could be explained by the fact that schools in rural contexts, with very specific exceptions, do not usually include secondary education.

The most generalised profile is that of a female teacher (77%) of middle age ( $M = 43.7$  years;  $SD \pm 8.83$ ) with some teaching experience ( $M = 14.8$  years;  $SD \pm 9.19$ ), half of which has been developed in the rural school where she is currently working ( $M = 8.81$  years;  $SD \pm 7.83$ ).

In this regard, the majority of the teachers surveyed expressed having a stable or definitive employment situation (83.9%).

*Which of the professional competences related to the territorial dimension are the most relevant?*

Generally speaking, the teachers surveyed agree in emphasising the need for rural school teachers to acquire and develop a profile of competences closely linked to the territorial aspect (Table 2). This is confirmed by the fact that the average scores for the degree of relevance of the 30 competences identified in the study range from 3.08 points to 3.64 points.

**Table 2**

*Results on the relevance of competences related to the territorial dimension*

Scope	C	M	Med	SD	Var
Pedagogical	1	3.33	3	0.73	0.54
	2	3.43	4	0.68	0.47
	3	3.34	3	0.74	0.55
	4	3.31	3	0.73	0.53
	5	3.46	4	0.70	0.48
	6	3.46	4	0.67	0.45



Scope	C	M	Med	SD	Var
Methodological	7	3.53	4	0.65	0.42
	8	3.54	4	0.62	0.38
	9	3.48	4	0.69	0.47
	10	3.50	4	0.65	0.43
	11	3.47	4	0.67	0.44
	12	3.46	4	0.68	0.46
	13	3.45	4	0.68	0.47
	14	3.53	4	0.63	0.40
	15	3.37	4	0.77	0.59
	16	3.42	4	0.73	0.53
	17	<b>3.64</b>	4	0.57	0.32
	18	3.52	4	0.66	0.43
	19	3.28	3	0.76	0.57
	20	3.32	3	0.76	0.57
	21	3.28	3	0.79	0.63
	22	3.08	3	0.85	0.73
	23	3.22	3	0.79	0.62
School-Community Relations	24	3.17	3	0.84	0.71
	25	3.21	3	0.77	0.60
	26	3.27	3	0.79	0.62
	27	<b>3.43</b>	4	0.73	0.54
	28	3.31	3	0.78	0.61
	29	3.27	3	0.79	0.62
	30	3.21	3	0.85	0.72

Source: Own elaboration based on the tabulated results<sup>16</sup>

Delving more deeply into the evaluations obtained for each of the competency areas highlighted, the following observations can be made.

- *Pedagogical scope*

The confidence analysis carried out in relation to the competences in this area confirms that the responses obtained are relevant and show a high index of internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.90$ ).

<sup>16</sup> The highest average score is shown in bold. The most outstanding results are shaded in grey.

Although all of the competences exceed 3 points on average, competences 5 and 6 are the most outstanding in terms of their relevance. These competences are related to the ability of teachers to involve their colleagues in educational projects related to the characteristics of the territory ( $M = 3.46$ ;  $SD = 0.70$ ) and to include the needs of their rural territory in the design of innovation projects ( $M = 3.46$ ;  $SD = 0.67$ ). The fact that these two competences have relatively low variance ( $\sigma^2 = 0.48$  and  $\sigma^2 = 0.45$ ) could be considered as evidence regarding the existing consensus among the teachers surveyed.

- *Methodological scope*

In the area related to professional competences of a methodological nature, the findings obtained from the confidence analysis also show that the responses referring to their relevance are very consistent ( $\alpha = 0.95$ ).

A more exhaustive examination of this area shows that the following competences were rated as most relevant (listed in order of relevance):

- C17: Use the resources offered by their rural territory (natural, material, social and cultural) ( $M = 3.64$ ;  $SD = 0.57$ ).
- C8: Develop knowledge of the cultural diversity of their rural territory ( $M = 3.54$ ;  $SD = 0.62$ ).
- C7: Raise students' awareness of the needs related to the sustainable development of their rural territory ( $M = 3.53$ ;  $SD = 0.65$ ).
- C14: Develop activities for the knowledge of local culture ( $M = 3.53$ ;  $SD = 0.63$ ).
- C18: Involve local community agents in the centre ( $M = 3.52$ ;  $SD = 0.66$ ).
- C10: Take into account previous knowledge related to the culture of their rural territory ( $M = 3.50$ ;  $SD = 0.65$ ).

As can be seen, the scores for all of these competences are higher than or equal to 3.50 points, while their variance is low ( $\sigma^2 =$  between 0.32 and 0.43). We can therefore say that there is considerable consensus among the teaching staff when it comes to assessing the relevance of these competences.

- *School-community relations*

With regard to the ability of teachers to establish meaningful links with local administrations and agents in the community, the confidence analysis also confirms that the competences that make up this systemic domain are relevant and pertinent ( $\alpha = 0.92$ ).

Although the ratings obtained in all of the competences in this area are fairly similar (with the average score ranging from 3.17 to 3.43), it should be noted that

competence 27 (Establish school-family-community participation processes and vice versa) was the highest rated ( $M = 3.43$ ). As in the previous cases, the fact that the variance has the lowest index ( $\sigma^2 = 0.54$ ) confirms the relevance of this assessment.

### *How do teachers rate their level of performance?*

When analysing the mean scores assessing the degree of mastery of the competences of the territorial dimension, the first thing that we observe is that, unlike in the previous case, the means are clearly in a lower range (Table 3).

**Table 3**

*Results on the mastery of competences related to the territorial dimension*

Scope	C	M	Med	SD	Var
Pedagogical	1	2.83	3	0.77	0.59
	2	<b>2.95</b>	3	0.76	0.58
	3	2.71	3	0.82	0.67
	4	2.56	3	0.86	0.74
	5	<b>2.84</b>	3	0.85	0.73
	6	2.78	3	0.88	0.77
Methodological	7	2.88	3	0.85	0.72
	8	2.97	3	0.78	0.61
	9	2.89	3	0.85	0.72
	10	2.93	3	0.80	0.65
	11	2.89	3	0.79	0.62
	12	2.95	3	0.80	0.64
	13	2.82	3	0.86	0.74
	14	3.02	3	0.77	0.60
	15	2.83	3	0.89	0.80
	16	2.92	3	0.85	0.72
	17	<b>3.08</b>	3	0.80	0.64
	18	2.93	3	0.86	0.74
	19	2.50	2	0.89	0.79
	20	2.70	3	0.89	0.79
	21	2.67	3	0.93	0.86
School-Community Relations	22	2.49	2	0.87	0.76
	23	2.53	3	0.87	0.75
	24	2.51	2	0.90	0.81
	25	2.57	3	0.87	0.76
	26	2.76	3	0.89	0.80
	27	<b>2.91</b>	3	0.89	0.80
	28	2.76	3	0.91	0.83
	29	2.70	3	0.90	0.80
	30	2.63	3	0.93	0.87

Source: Own elaboration based on the tabulated results.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> The highest average score is shown in bold. The most outstanding results are shaded in grey.

- *Pedagogical scope*

In this competency domain, a significant degree of internal consistency was again observed ( $\alpha = 0.90$ ). We found that competence 5 (Involve the teaching team in projects linked to their rural territory,  $M = 2.84$ ;  $SD = 0.85$ ) was again one of the highest rated when the teachers surveyed self-assessed their level of performance. However, unlike the previous case, competence 2 (Include the cultural characteristics of its rural territory in teaching planning,  $M = 2.95$ ,  $SD = 0.76$ ) obtained the highest score.

- *Methodological scope*

With regard to the performance of the competences related to this area, the scores collected show the same consistency as that obtained when assessing their relevance ( $\alpha = 0.95$ ).

In this case, however, only two competences are observed that obtain similar scores (above 3 points) to those obtained when assessing their degree of relevance. The competences with a higher degree of mastery are:

C17: Use the resources offered by their rural territory (natural, material, social and cultural) ( $M = 3.08$ ,  $SD = 0.80$ ).

C14: Develop activities for the knowledge of local culture ( $M = 3.02$ ,  $SD = 0.77$ ).

As can be seen, competence 17 again obtains the highest score within this area of competence.

- *Community-school relations*

With regard to the competences linked to this eminently systemic area, its high degree of internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.92$ ) should first of all be highlighted.

The highest score corresponded to the highest rated competence in terms of relevance: competence 27 (Establish school-family-community participation processes and vice versa,  $M = 2.91$ ;  $SD = 0.89$ ).

## Discussion and conclusions

Students, schools and educational communities in rural contexts require specific training and teaching material to deal with their diversity as a distinctive feature (Bustos, 2008; Boix & Buscá, 2020; Lorenzo et al., 2021; Carrete-Marín & Domingo-Peñafiel, 2022). The present study is in line with those of other researchers of the current reality of the European rural school, such as Pešikan, Antić and Ivić, in the case of the Serbian rural school. Based on

Vygotsky and Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, these authors propose seven assumptions to improve rural education and differentiate it from urban education, following from the idea that the former "has a specific model and context, and not the urban deficit model" (2020, p. 160). We consider these assumptions a sustainable agenda and a necessary change to transform our approach to rural schools. We understand that working for place-based education in Europe and local development linked to high-quality rural education and an improvement of teacher training curricula marks the way forward for the future of education policies in Europe with regard to rural schools.

There is a need for training that, as well as addressing aspects of quality teaching in general, responds to the needs and identity of the educational communities of different rural territories, and that is fully in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of UNESCO (Dieste et al., 2019). Specifically, these goals are related to teacher training to ensure inclusive and equitable education, aimed at promoting quality lifelong learning for all (Goal 4). Above all, they are related to the training of teachers in rural schools aimed at minimising and reducing inequalities between the members of their educational communities. In this regard, it is worth noting the importance that the teachers surveyed attribute to raising students' awareness of the sustainable development of the territory.

In addition, and based on the aims of the study presented, the findings indicate that *the competences identified are relevant, significant and organised in the areas considered in a theoretical way*. This fact is deduced from the high internal consistency indexes obtained after analysing the responses of rural teachers in all of the territories studied, thus confirming the relevance of the reference frameworks (González & Wagenaar, 2006; Domingo et al., 2012). These frameworks were taken into account in the preparation of the competences catalogue, as well as their grouping.

All of the competences are valued by rural teachers as necessary and relevant, not only as a theoretical basis of their training, but also as basic elements of their pedagogical practice, as shown by the value given to the competences related to methodological aspects. They should therefore form part of the specific training referred to above, which is in full agreement with the principles expressed by the European Commission (2005, 2007; Symeonidis, 2018) when identifying and defining the competences and processes necessary for quality teacher training enabling teachers to perform their teaching and social function in any educational context.

Adopting a more in-depth approach that takes into account the fact that most of the competences were assessed with lower scores with regard to the degree of mastery, those competences in which the assessment and the degree of

performance obtained similar scores should be prioritised in both initial and ongoing training for rural teachers. This confirms the findings of the European Commission (2007), which considers that training proposals should be adapted to the characteristics of the context, the teachers and the particular training needs.

Finally, when considering the differences between the relevance and mastery of competences, it is necessary to emphasise the need to articulate training plans that take into account the territorial aspect. This fact corroborates what was expressed in the theoretical framework of the FOPROMAR project, when considering the need to take into account the particularities of the ecosystem in which teachers perform their teaching and social function, both in training and in practice.

Thus, the training processes that are designed must be contextualised and must prioritise those areas of competence (professional, programme design and development and/or community relations) in which mastery is lower and which are valued as more necessary by the teachers themselves.

For further investigations, the quantitative data analysis of this study could be complemented with the qualitative data gathered in the case study undertaken in the second phase of this research. The case studies, which aimed to analyse good teaching practices, were performed at rural schools located in the same territories and regions as the present study. If the requirements of a certain competence domain are basic for quality teacher professionalisation (Perrenaud, 2007), the identification and selection of competences carried out in this work contribute in a specific way to the future design of strategies and training content that guarantee quality education in rural territories, so that we can count on teachers who are knowledgeable about the reality of rural schools and endowed with critical thinking that makes improvement processes possible (Abós et al., 2021).

## References

- Abós, P., Boix, R., Domingo, L., Lorenzo, J., & Rubio Terrado, P. (2021). *El reto de la escuela rural: Hacer visible lo invisible* [The challenge of the rural school: Making the invisible visible]. Graó.
- Amiguiño, A. (2008). *A Escola e o Futuro do Mundo Rural* [The school and the future of the rural world]. Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian.
- Bernal, J. L., & Teixidó, J. (2012). *Las competencias docentes en la formación del profesorado* [Teaching competencies in teacher training]. Síntesis.
- Boix, R. (2014). La escuela rural en la dimensión territorial [The rural school in the territorial dimension]. *Innovación educativa*, 24, 89–97.
- Boix, R., & Buscá, F. (2020). Competencias del Profesorado de la Escuela Rural Catalana para Abordar la Dimensión Territorial en el Aula Multigrado [Catalan rural schools teachers' skills to face

- the territorial dimension in the multigrade classroom]. *REICE. Revista Iberoamericana sobre Calidad, Eficacia y Cambio en Educación*, 18(2), 115–133. <https://doi.org/10.15366/reice2020.18.2.006>
- Bolívar, A. (2008). El discurso de las competencias en España: educación básica y educación superior [Competences discourse in Spain: Basic education and superior education]. *Revista de Docencia Universitaria*, 6(2), 1–23.
- Burrial, X., Sala, T., Samper, L., & Torres González, T. (2018). La educación en la sociedad rural. Una evaluación cualitativa de la escuela rural catalana [Education in rural society. A qualitative evaluation of the Catalan rural school]. *Intercambio/Échange*, 2, 145–158.
- Bustos, A. (2008). Docentes de escuela rural. Análisis de su Formación y sus actitudes a través de un Estudio cuantitativo en Andalucía [Rural school teachers. Analysis of their training and attitudes through a quantitative study in Andalusia]. *Revista de Investigación Educativa*, 26(2), 485–519.
- Carrete-Marín, N., & Domingo-Peñafiel, L. (2022). Textbooks and teaching materials in rural schools: A systematic review. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, 12(2), 67–94. <https://doi.org/10.26529/cepsj.1288>
- Champollion, P. (2011). El impacto del territorio en la educación: el caso de la escuela rural en Francia [The impact of the territory on education: The case of rural schools in France]. *Profesorado. Revista de currículum y formación del profesorado*, 15(2), 53–69.
- Comisión Europea. (2005). *Common European principles for teacher competences and qualifications*. Publications Office of the European Union.
- Comisión Europea. (2007). *Improving the quality of teacher education*. Publications Office of the European Union.
- COPE. (2011). *Competences of professional educators in Europe*. Department of Applied Pedagogy and Educational Psychology (UIB).
- Dieste, B., Coma, T., & Blasco-Serrano, A. C. (2019). Inclusión de los objetivos de desarrollo sostenible en el currículum de Educación primaria y secundaria en escuelas rurales de Zaragoza [Inclusion of sustainable development goals in the curriculum of primary and secondary education in rural schools of Zaragoza]. *Revista Internacional de Educación para la Justicia Social (RIEJS)*, 8(1), 97–115. <https://doi.org/10.15366/riejs2019.8.1.006>
- Domingo, L., Boix, R., & Champollion, P. (2012). Estado de la cuestión del Proyecto de Investigación Educativa «La eficacia y la calidad en la adquisición de competencias caracterizan a la escuela rural: ¿es un modelo transferible a otra tipología de escuela?» [The state of the educational research project “The efficacy and the quality of skill acquisition in rural education: Is this model transferable to different types of schools?”]. *Educação*, 37(3), 425–436.
- Eurostat. (2022, October). *Urban-rural Europe – introduction. Statistics Explained*. [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Urban-rural\\_Europe\\_-\\_introduction](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Urban-rural_Europe_-_introduction)
- Eurostat. (2023, January 17). *Predominantly rural regions experience depopulation*. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20230117-2>
- Eurydice. (2012). *Developing key competences at school in Europe: Challenges and opportunities for policy*. Eurydice.

- Fargas-Malet, M., & Bagley, C. (2021). Is small beautiful? A scoping review of 21st-century research on small rural schools in Europe. *European Educational Research Journal*, 1–23.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/14749041211022202>
- Flück, C. (2001). *Compétences et Performance, une alliance réussie* [Skills and performance, a successful alliance]. Editions Demos.
- Fundació del Món Rural (coord.) (2019). *La formación profesional y las competencias del maestro rural como dinamizador de la dimensión territorial de la escuela rural* [The professional training and competences of the rural teacher as a dynamiser of the territorial dimension of the rural school]. (FOPROMAR, E+ KA201-038217). Final report. Fundació del Món Rural.  
<https://fopromar.files.wordpress.com/2019/11/informe-final-proyecto-e-fopromar.pdf>
- González, J. & Wagenaar, R. (Eds.) (2006). *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe II. Universities contribution to the Bologna Process* (Final report). Deusto University Publications.  
[https://tuningacademy.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/TuningEUII\\_Final-Report\\_EN.pdf](https://tuningacademy.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/TuningEUII_Final-Report_EN.pdf)
- Hargreaves, L., Gristy, C., & Kučerová, S. R. (2020). Educational research in rural Europe: State, status, and the road ahead. In C. Gristy, L. Hargreaves, & S. R. Kučerová (Eds.), *Educational Research and Schooling in Rural Europe: An Engagement with Changing Patterns of Education, Space, and Place* (pp. 339–355). Information Age Publishing.
- Ion, G., Díaz-Vicario, A., & Suárez, C. I. (2021). Evidence-informed educational practice in Catalan education: From public agenda to teachers' practice. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, 11(2), 37–57. <https://doi.org/10.26529/cepsj.1062>
- Lorenzo, J., Rubio, P., & Abós, P. (2021). Educación y vertebración del territorio: un estudio de caso en torno a la escuela rural en Teruel [Education and territorial structuring: A case study on the rural school in Teruel]. *Temps d'Educació*, 59, 27–46.
- McMillan, J. H., & Shumacher, S. (2011). *Investigación educativa* [Educational research]. Pearson-Addison Wesley.
- OECD. (2009). *Teaching and Learning International Study* (Spanish Report 2009). Spanish Ministry of Education and Professional Training. <https://www.educacionyfp.gob.es/va/dam/jcr:12358d45-c213-4702-ae53-035c0bc6ff08/xxieccceo4talis2009-pdf.pdf>
- Oliver-Trobat, M. F., Forteza-Forteza, D., & Urbina, S. (2015). Análisis del perfil competencial del profesorado europeo [Analysis of the competence profile of European teachers]. *Profesorado, Revista de Currículum y Formación del Profesorado*, 19(2), 281–301.
- Perrenoud, P. (2007). *Diez nuevas competencias para enseñar* [Ten new teaching competences] (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Graó.
- Perrenoud, P. (2008). Construir las competencias, ¿es darles la espalda a los saberes? [Building competences - Is it to turn away from knowledge?]. *Revista de Docencia Universitaria*, 6(2), 1–8.
- Pešikan, A., Antić, S., & Ivić, I. (2020). Rural education in Serbia. Conflict between rhetoric and reality. In C. Gristy, L. Hargreaves, & S. R. Kučerová (Eds.), *Educational Research and Schooling in Rural Europe: An Engagement with Changing Patterns of Education, Space, and Place* (pp. 147–174). Information Age Publishing.



- Raggl, A. (2019). Small rural schools in Austria: Potentials and challenges. In H. Jahnke, C. Kramer, & P. Meusburger (Eds.), *Geographies of Schooling* (pp. 251–263). Springer.
- Redecker, C. (2017). *European framework for the digital competence of educators: Dig Comp Edu* (JRC Report No. EUR 28775 EN). Publications Office of the European Union. [https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bitstream/JRC107466/pdf\\_digcomedu\\_a4\\_final.pdf](https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bitstream/JRC107466/pdf_digcomedu_a4_final.pdf)
- Reig, E., Goerlich, F. J., & Cantarino, I. (2016). *Delimitación de áreas rurales y urbanas a nivel local. Demografía, coberturas del suelo y accesibilidad* [Delimitation of rural and urban areas at the local level. Demography, land cover and accessibility]. BBVA Foundation.
- Spanish Ministry of Education and Professional Training. (2020). *Organic Law 3/2020 of 29 December 2020, which amends Organic Law 2/2006 of 3 May on Education (Official State Bulletin of 30 December, 2020)*.
- Spanish Network for Rural Development. (2018). *RedPoblar: analizando el medio rural en clave positiva* [RedPoblar: Analysing the rural environment in a positive way]. REDR.
- Symeonidis, V. (2018). Revisiting the European teacher education area: The transformation of teacher education policies and practices in Europe. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, 8(3), 13–34. <https://doi.org/10.26529/cepsj.509>
- Tahirsylaj, A., Smith, W. C., Khan, G., & Wermke, W. (2021). The conceptual and methodological construction of a 'global' teacher identity through TALIS. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, 11(3), 75–95. <https://doi.org/10.26529/cepsj.1090>
- Tahull, J., & Montero, I. (2018). Reflexiones sobre la escuela rural. Un modelo educativo de éxito [Reflections on the rural school. A successful educational model]. *Tendencias Pedagógicas*, 32, 161–176. <https://doi.org/10.15366/tp2018.32.012>

## Appendix I. Items of the teaching competences questionnaire related to the territorial dimension

FIELD	ITEM	COMPETENCE
Pedagogical	1	Consider the needs of your rural area in educational planning.
	2	Include the cultural characteristics of their rural territory in the teaching planning.
	3	Identify the training needs of the school's teaching staff in relation to their rural territory.
	4	Enable professional development actions for the school's teaching staff in relation to the training needs detected.
	5	Involve the teaching staff in projects linked to their rural territory.
	6	Include the needs of their rural territory in the design of innovation projects.
Methodological	7	To make students aware of the needs related to the sustainable development of their rural territory.
	8	To develop knowledge of the cultural diversity of their rural territory.
	9	To develop a critical attitude towards the values of their rural territory.
	10	To take into account previous knowledge related to the culture of their rural territory.
	11	Establish relations between previous experiences related to their rural territory and new learning
	12	Relate the content to the immediate territorial reality.
	13	Propose research situations related to the immediate rural environment.
	14	Develop activities for the knowledge of local culture.
	15	To carry out complementary activities based on the rural territory.
	16	Consider the characteristics of their rural territory in the organisation of school spaces and times.
	17	Use the resources offered by their rural territory (natural, material, social and cultural).
	18	Involve local community agents in the school.
	19	Develop curricular materials with the participation of agents from their rural area.
	20	Incorporate the use of ICT for the knowledge of the surrounding rural territory.
	21	To use ICT as an element of communication with the agents of their rural territory.
	22	Consider knowledge about local culture in the assessment of learning.
	23	To consider content related to the sustainable development of their rural territory in the assessment of learning.

FIELD	ITEM	COMPETENCE
School-Community Relations	24	Involve the local community in the design, development and evaluation of the school's educational project, incorporating their expectations.
	25	Include in the school's objectives the service to the cultural development of its rural territory.
	26	To commit to socio-cultural initiatives in the community.
	27	Establish processes of school-family-community participation and vice versa.
	28	Involve the family in extracurricular activities.
	29	Involve the local community in extracurricular activities.
	30	Use the school as a cultural space for the local community.

Source: Own elaboration based on the validation of the questionnaire.

## Biographical note

**JUAN LORENZO LACRUZ**, PhD, is a lecturer in the field of Educational Sciences at the Faculty of Education, University of Zaragoza (Spain). His main lines of research are the educational innovation from the initial teacher training, the study of the Pedagogical Renewal Movements, active methodologies and education in rural contexts.

**FRANCESC BUSCÀ DONET**, PhD, is a full professor in the field of Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy at the Faculty of Education, University of Barcelona (Spain). His main areas of research are in didactics and rural education.

**PILAR ABÓS OLIVARES**, PhD, is a full professor in the field of education in rural territories and initial teacher training at the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences of Teruel, University of Zaragoza (Spain). Her research interests are focused on the analysis of the quality of education in multigrade classrooms, as well as on the relationship between school and territory in rural areas.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26529/cepsj.1554>

## What is the Role of Science in Post-Socialist Education and Society? Insights from a Survey of Preschool Teachers from Croatia, Serbia and Slovenia

ŽELJKA IVKOVIĆ HODŽIĆ<sup>\*1</sup>, LIDIJA VUJIČIĆ<sup>2</sup> AND ŽELJKO BONETA<sup>2</sup>

∞ The paper presents the results of a survey conducted among preschool teachers in Croatia, Serbia and Slovenia, the aim of which was to investigate the attitudes of the participants towards the role of science in education and society. Recent global trends in economic development have introduced new educational concepts in national curricula worldwide, one of which is scientific literacy. Preschool teachers have been encouraged to introduce scientific activities with children into their practice and adopt a new outlook on the role of the natural sciences in education. Social change within the post-socialist context implied that adopting the new outlook required a value shift for all members of the education community. We therefore wanted to explore whether this process was actually taking place, and whether it was impacting the perception of science amongst preschool teachers. We applied Inglehart's modernisation theory of materialist and postmaterialist values. The results showed that preschool teachers in all three countries were inclined to a postmaterialist view of science, but that it was possible to distinguish between two value-orientations, which we named "post-materialism" and the "materialist image of the child". Older teachers accepted the "materialist image of the child" more than younger teachers, confirming a certain intergenerational value change, which we have interpreted as a shift from a collectivist to an individualistic approach to education.

**Keywords:** natural sciences, post-socialist education, preschool teachers, social development

1 <sup>\*</sup>Corresponding Author. Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Rijeka, Rijeka, Croatia; [zeljka.ivkovic1@gmail.com](mailto:zeljka.ivkovic1@gmail.com).

2 Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Rijeka, Rijeka, Croatia.

## Kakšna je vloga znanosti v postsocialističnem izobraževanju in družbi? Spoznanja iz raziskave med vzgojitelji predšolskih otrok iz Hrvaške, Srbije in iz Slovenije

ŽELJKA IVKOVIĆ HODŽIĆ, LIDIJA VUJIČIĆ IN ŽELJKO BONETA

☞ V prispevku so predstavljeni izsledki ankete, izvedene med vzgojitelji predšolskih otrok na Hrvaškem, v Srbiji in Sloveniji, katere namen je bil raziskati odnos sodelujočih do vloge znanosti v izobraževanju in družbi. Nedavne globalne smernice gospodarskega razvoja so v nacionalne učne načrte po vsem svetu uvedle nove izobraževalne koncepte, med katerimi je tudi znanstvena pismenost. Vzgojitelje se spodbuja, da v svojo prakso uvedejo znanstvene dejavnosti z otroki in sprejmejo nov pogled na vlogo naravoslovja v izobraževanju. Družbene spremembe v postsocialističnem kontekstu so pomenile, da je sprejetje novega pogleda zahtevalo spremembo vrednot vseh članov izobraževalne skupnosti. Tako smo želeli raziskati, ali ta proces dejansko poteka in ali vpliva na dojemanje znanosti med vzgojitelji. Uporabili smo Inglehartovo teorijo modernizacije materialističnih in postmaterialističnih vrednot. Izsledki so pokazali, da so se vzgojitelji v vseh treh državah nagibali k postmaterialističnemu pogledu na znanost, vendar je bilo mogoče razlikovati med dvema vrednostnima usmeritvama, ki smo ju poimenovali »postmaterializem« in »materialistična podoba otroka«. Starejši učitelji so bolj kot mlajši sprejemali »materialistično podobo otroka«, kar potrjuje določeno medgeneracijsko spremembo vrednot, ki smo jo interpretirali kot premik od kolektivističnega k individualističnemu pristopu k izobraževanju.

**Ključne besede:** naravoslovje, postsocialistično izobraževanje, vzgojitelji predšolskih otrok, socialni razvoj

## Introduction

Educational concepts such as scientific literacy or STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) have been globally popularised during the last decade. This is a consequence of the global advocacy for an educational paradigm that focuses on preparation for the labour market as the main outcome of the education system. The main narrative of this paradigm is that the economic future of the world is uncertain, and that people can no longer expect to be engaged in the same profession all their lives. Education should therefore prepare children to be flexible, which means that the focus in the educational process should be shifted from the acquisition of content to the acquisition of practical and transferable skills. In this sense, the field of the natural sciences seems particularly suitable, given that, on the one hand, it enables the acquisition of skills, and on the other hand, it enables the acquisition of qualifications relevant to propulsive occupations.

Although this approach to education has been widely criticised (e.g., Ball, 2016; Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021; Sardoč, 2021), it currently remains the dominant educational perspective implemented in national curricula around the world, as it represents the educational dimension of the dominant neoliberal paradigm of social development. Practitioners of the entire educational vertical are required to adopt principles and values of this educational paradigm and to introduce new (“innovative”) practices into the educational process. The present paper represents an attempt to determine whether these values have been accepted among educational workers. Specifically, we present part of an interdisciplinary study of preschool teachers conducted in Croatia, Serbia and Slovenia in 2016. The main goal of the research was to examine the attitudes of the respondents towards the relationship between the natural sciences and education in the context of social development.

### *The role of education in development paradigms*

The idea that education policies can promote national development has been globally present since the end of the Second World War. There are two main approaches to education policies in the context of social development: education as an investment in human capital and education as a human right (Chabott & Ramirez, 2000). Investment in human capital should increase labour productivity at the individual level and consequently contribute to economic growth and development at the societal level. This is closely related to global norms about science, progress, material wellbeing and economic development (Chabott & Ramirez, 2000). On the other hand, education is seen as

the basic mechanism by which people can improve themselves and participate in the economy, culture and politics of their societies. We can connect this understanding with the concepts of social justice, equality and human rights (Chabott & Ramirez, 2000). Chabott and Ramirez (2000) state that the positive relationship between education and economic, political and cultural development in the modern and modernising world is self-evident; however, they point out that research shows that this relationship is problematic, because although there is a positive relationship between education and development at the individual level, the effects of education at the collective level are ambiguous.

In the twenty-first century, international economic organisations such as the OECD and the World Bank have nevertheless intensified activities to promote their educational concepts and programmes. There are two basic reasons for the intensification of such activities: new geopolitical relations and the global hegemony of the neoliberal economic doctrine. New geopolitical relations entered the scene after “9/11”, when, as Novelli (2013) claims, a turn from the “Cold War” to the “Holy War” took place. The new US security agenda influenced development policy and practice, and education became its central component (Novelli, 2013). On the other hand, China emerged as a new global force offering an alternative development model to the American one (Nordveit, 2009). Although the Chinese development discourse based on sustainable growth and autonomy seems different, Nordveit (2009) notes that the education models it promotes through cooperation activities in Africa are very similar to the Western development paradigm based on economic growth.

The implementation of the global neoliberal economic doctrine can be traced back to the beginning of the 2000s in many Western industrialised countries (Mannion et al., 2011). National curricula emphasise that children should acquire knowledge, skills and dispositions that will make them more aware of and involved in global issues and phenomena. Mannion et al. (2011) call this convergence the “curricular global turn”, and it is usually formulated as “the challenge of preparing students for life in a global society and work in a global economy” (Mannion et al., 2011, p. 449). Today, educational theorists deal with neoliberalism as the dominant discourse in global education (e.g., Ball & Olmeda, 2013; Mead & Silova, 2013; Ball, 2016; Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021). Neoliberalism can be defined as a specific form of rationality that reshapes the state, society and the human subject (Brown, 2015). It is about the “economisation” of political life and other non-economic spheres and activities (Brown, 2015). Neoliberal rationality disseminates the market model to all domains of human activity, including education (Hart & Boyden, 2019). Martha Nussbaum calls the period of the 2000s in global education a period of silent



crisis (Nussbaum, 2012). Radical changes are taking place in what democratic societies teach young people. In the pursuit of economic growth and national profit, states and their education systems are removing the humanities and arts from the entire educational vertical and promoting the natural sciences, technology and engineering (Nussbaum, 2012). In other words, the natural sciences and STEM occupy the first place in the social development model that promotes “education for profit” (Nussbaum, 2012). However, it should be noted that the natural sciences had a special place in former hegemonic development paradigms as well, only the framework of the development model was industrialisation, not economisation (financialisation). Apple (2012) states that teaching about science in schools always boils down to the same characteristic: emphasising methodological and value consensus and avoiding the topic of scientific conflict. Science is thus an important link in the school’s hidden curriculum that serves to maintain the social and class status quo (Apple, 2012).

### *Education and social development in post-socialist countries*

Although different in many aspects, post-socialist countries share commonalities such as a socialist past, the transition to market economies, and the aspiration to embrace so-called Western values. This process of political, economic and social transformation affected the educational realm as well. The positive aspects of the socialist educational heritage include solid infrastructures for educational provision and administration, fee-free education for all children, nearly universal general education enrolments, and high literacy rates, while the negative aspects include rigid bureaucracy, uniform conceptions of pedagogy, authoritarian and teacher-centred learning, overloaded and centrally mandated curricula, and insufficient attention to individual student learning (Silova, 2009). During the transformation processes, educational discourse has been remarkably similar across all post-socialist countries. All countries have adopted “learning from elsewhere” as the central principle of their educational transformation (Silova, 2009). This is a consequence of post-socialist countries being developmentally in a position of the world semi-periphery, which had to “catch-up” with the developed countries, meaning that the knowledge is transferred from the world centre to them, not the other way around (Zgaga, 2013; Domazet & Marinović Jerolimov, 2014; Hughson, 2015).

Thus, education policies in post-socialist countries consist of similar elements: extension of the curriculum to 11 or 12 years of schooling, introduction of new subjects, student-centred learning, electives in upper-secondary schools, introduction of standards and/or outcome-based education, decentralisation of educational finance and governance, reorganisation of schools

(“rationalisation” of staff), privatisation of higher education, standardisation of student assessment, liberalisation of textbook publishing, and the establishment of education management and information systems (Silova, 2009). Less attention in education policy has been devoted to teacher education, rural education and inclusive education targeting students with special needs (Silova, 2009). Ideologically, the educational transformation encompassed a value-shift represented in official discourses, from the “new socialist man” (Duda, 2015) and the “happy child” (Erdei, 2004), to the neoliberal “homo economicus” (Hart & Boyden, 2019) and the “competent child” (Pechtelidis & Stamou, 2017). The process of educational transformation was accelerated with the aid of international donors such as Council of Europe, World Bank, USAID and UN organisations, but the EU has been probably the most influential in affecting educational discourse, introducing concepts of “globalisation” and the “knowledge society” (Silova, 2009), as well as “lifelong learning”, “vocational training”, “educational cooperation”, “language learning” and “mobility” (Arriazu Muñoz, 2015). Some of the concepts promoted through EU funding and similar aid programmes have been “scientific literacy” and “STEM”, usually translated into education practice as the “natural sciences” and/or “hard science”.

Development in socialism rested, among other things, on the so-called paleo-industries (Rogić, 1996), so the natural sciences had an important social status, as did the engineering professions associated with them. It was considered that only the best students could continue their education in technical and natural sciences, and that it was important to encourage their personal development in this area for the purpose of social progress. The nationalist period of the 1990s, which was marked by wars, political and economic transformation, and privatisation, brought about the irreversible destruction of industry and production in many post-socialist countries. The economy subsequently underwent a process of tertiarisation (Peračković, 2007), during which new principal economic branches emerged, such as trade, tourism, financial and creative industries. Although the natural sciences no longer have the same role in social development as in socialism, they have maintained their high status in education field thanks to both socialist heritage and the new global economic agenda. Since the last world economic crisis in 2008, international and supra-national organisations such as the OECD and the European Union have begun to encourage the previously described “education for profit” as part of the neoliberal perspective on social development (Nussbaum, 2012). The countries of the former Yugoslavia, whether they were already part of the EU or just in the process of joining the EU, implemented the terminology and goals of that concept in their education policies by inertia. Given that EU funds have become

a significant source of financing for educational institutions, concepts such as STEM and (natural) scientific literacy have been popularised.

### *Theoretical framework*

Previous research on scientific literacy and teachers' attitudes towards the natural sciences has primarily been undertaken from a pedagogical or psychological perspective (e.g., Belova & Eilks, 2014; Jarvis et al., 2021; Kapsala et al., 2022; Novljan & Pavlin, 2022; Timur & Fatih Tasar, 2011; Walan & Chang Rundgren, 2014). Several sociological studies have linked the natural sciences in education with socioeconomic indicators (Gregurović & Kuti, 2010; Turmo, 2004), religiosity (Sherkat, 2011) and gender (Crowley et al., 2001), but not social values. Social values are usually investigated as part of the cultural modernisation theories of social development, which have been widely applied in sociological research in the countries of the former Yugoslavia (e.g., Rogić, 1994; Županov, 1995; Štulhofer & Kufrin, 1996; Adam et al., 2005; Lažnjak, 2011; Sekulić, 2014; Tomić-Koludrović, 2015; Pavlović, 2018; Burić & Štulhofer, 2020), although, interestingly, they have not been applied in the field of education and scientific literacy. The cultural modernisation theory assumes that there is a certain cultural norm or a set of cultural values that enable faster socioeconomic development and progress, and that any deviation from that ideal therefore represents a developmental limitation (e.g., Županov, 1995; Hofstede, 2001; Inglehart & Welzel, 2007). For example, Županov (1995) claimed that for historical reasons, some of the dominant social values in the countries of the former Yugoslavia were redistributive ethics, anti-professionalism and a negative attitude towards private entrepreneurship, which slowed down the modernisation processes. Similarly, Hofstede (2001) theorised that countries that value individualism over collectivism are more likely to develop a culture of innovation. Empirical research of social values in post-socialist countries has shown mixed results, and some authors argue that the whole perspective of cultural modernisation is orientalist or self-racist, since progressive values always seem to be the so-called Western values, and post-socialist countries must always "catch-up" with them, thus undermining the semi-peripheral structural position of these countries within the world system (Domazet & Marinović Jerolimov, 2014; Hughson, 2015). If the values, skills and knowledge should flow only from the world centre to the semi-periphery and never vice-versa, what does this mean for the education at the semi-periphery in the long term? Does this assumption serve the education at the semi-periphery and what could post-socialist countries bring to the global educational table?

The main goal of the present research was to examine the attitudes of preschool teachers towards the relationship between the natural sciences and

education in the context of social development. Specifically, we were interested in whether there were any differences between the post-socialist countries involved in our research (Croatia, Slovenia and Serbia), and whether a value shift had occurred between older and younger teachers. To examine this, we applied Inglehart's theory of materialist and post-materialist values (Inglehart & Welzel, 2007), a cultural theory of modernisation that stands out from other similar theories by bringing the perspective of intergenerational change into the cross-cultural perspective. The presence of intergenerational differences depends on whether society has achieved high levels of socioeconomic development (Inglehart & Welzel, 2007). Inglehart based intergenerational change in values on two hypotheses: the scarcity hypothesis and the socialisation hypothesis. In conditions of material scarcity, people's priorities are physical and economic security (materialist values), while with social progress, priorities shift to post-materialist values (self-actualisation and quality of life). A person's fundamental values are not a reflection of his or her immediate environment, but of the circumstances in which he or she lived during his or her formative years (Inglehart & Welzel, 2007). Given that our sample will include generations of preschool teachers born in the 1950s and 1960s and socialised in the first part of socialism, marked by a recovery from material scarcity through the process of mass industrialisation, we expect that the oldest respondents will be more accepting of materialist values, while younger generations, socialised in a time of generally better living standards and socialist and capitalist mass consumption, will be more accepting of post-materialist values. The materialist value-type views the natural sciences as part of mass industrialisation and production in an economically prosperous society, where engineering is a highly valued profession and gifted children are encouraged to pursue an education in areas dealing with mathematics or physics. For the post-materialist value-type, the natural sciences still have an important socio-educational role. However, this role is no longer in the context of economic growth and industrial development, but rather in the context of environmental protection and human rights.

These types do, of course, represent artificial constructs, and the reality is much more complex, but we believe that the perception of science in post-socialist countries is guided by these dominant stereotypes and that preschool teachers and other stakeholders in the education system are guided by them in their daily practice. We believe that the scarcity and the socialisation hypotheses allow this theory to move from the orientalist perspective of other theories of cultural modernisation and to open a discussion with critical perspectives on the global knowledge dissemination.

### *Research aims*

The aim of the research was to examine the attitudes of preschool teachers towards the relationship between the natural sciences and education in the context of social development. The main sub-goals were:

- to determine whether there are two main value orientations among preschool teachers: materialism and post-materialism;
- to examine whether there has been an intergenerational shift among preschool teachers in the acceptance of value orientations;
- to examine whether there are regional differences among preschool teachers in the acceptance of value orientations.

### *Hypotheses*

Several basic hypotheses based on Inglehart's theory of modernisation were put forward.

- H1: There are two value-types: a materialist and a post-materialist type. Considering the socio-educational changes in post-socialist countries described above, we assumed there would be two value-orientations.
- H2a: Older respondents (with more work experience) accept materialist values more than younger respondents (with less work experience).
- H2b: Younger respondents (with less work experience) accept post-materialist values more than older respondents (with more work experience).

Hypothesis H2 (a and b) refers to the intergenerational change in values described in the theoretical framework (Inglehart & Welzel, 2007), by which we assume that older generations of preschool teachers born in the 1950s and 1960s and socialised in the first part of socialism, marked by a recovery from material scarcity through the process of mass industrialisation, will be more accepting of materialist values, while younger generations, socialised in a time of generally better living standards and socialist and capitalist mass consumption, will be more accepting of post-materialist values.

- H3a: Preschool teachers in Slovenia (Ljubljana and Koper) and Croatia (Zagreb and Rijeka) accept post-materialist values more than preschool teachers in Serbia (Belgrade and Subotica).
- H3b: Preschool teachers in Serbia (Belgrade and Subotica) accept materialist values more than preschool teachers in Slovenia (Ljubljana and Koper) and Croatia (Zagreb and Rijeka).

The assumption is that earlier access to supranational organisations is an indicator of earlier adoption of post-materialist values and abandonment of materialist values. The counterargument is that all of these countries and cities are part of the same post-socialist entity that has the same developmental (Hughson, 2015) and educational (Silova, 2009) characteristics, so there will be no differences. Given that we derive the hypothesis based on Inglehart's theory, we follow the former argumentation.

## Method

### *Participants*

The research was conducted in 2016 using the survey method on a sample of  $N = 680$  preschool teachers from six cities in three countries: Zagreb and Rijeka in Croatia, Belgrade and Subotica in Serbia, and Ljubljana and Koper in Slovenia. The survey was anonymous and voluntary. Preschool teachers in Croatia and Serbia filled out questionnaires at vocational conventions in the presence of researchers (paper and pencil method), while the research in Slovenia was conducted online.

Table 1 shows the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants. As expected, most of the participants were women (94.6%). The average age of the participants was 41 years (the youngest participant was 21 and the oldest was 62), while the average length of service was 17 years. Most of the participants had completed college (50.9%), while 29.0% had completed university education (five years) and 15.6% had completed secondary education. This corresponds to the professionalisation trends in early childhood teacher education, in which higher education is given a significant place. About half of the participants grew up in small towns (43.7%), while the other half grew up in larger towns and cities (45.9%), and, surprisingly, 10.4% of the participants did not give any answer to this question. The largest number of preschool teachers was surveyed in Serbia (40.4%), and the smallest in Slovenia (24.6%), which corresponds to the population ratio between the countries. As for cities, slightly more of the participants were surveyed in Rijeka (20.3%), while the distribution of percentages in other cities was as expected (the highest number of participants was in Belgrade 21.9%, and the lowest number of participants was in Koper, 11.3%).

**Table 1***Sociodemographic characteristics of the participants*

<i>Gender</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>		<i>M</i>	<i>s.d.</i>	<i>min-max</i>
Male	14	2.1	<i>Age</i>	40.92	10.26	21-62
Female	643	94.6	<i>Length of service</i>	17.62	11.48	0.5-42.5
n/a	23	3.4	<i>City</i>	<i>f</i>		<i>%</i>
Total	680	100.0	Rijeka	138		20.3
			Zagreb	100		14.7
			Subotica	126		18.5
			Belgrade	149		21.9
			Koper	90		13.2
			Ljubljana	77		11.3
			n/a	-		-
			Total	680		100.0
<i>Level of education</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>f</i>		<i>%</i>
Secondary school	106	15.6	Croatia	238		35.0
College	346	50.9	Serbia	275		40.4
University	197	29.0	Slovenia	167		24.6
n/a	31	4.6	n/a	-		-
Total	680	100.0	Total	680		100.0
<i>Size of the settlement of growing up</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>				
Less than 1,000 inhabitants	112	16.5				
from 1,001 to 10,000	185	27.2				
from 10,001 to 100,000	138	20.3				
More than 100,000 inhabitants	174	25.6				
n/a	71	10.4				
Total	680	100.0				

### *Instruments*

#### *Dependent variables*

*Preschool teachers' attitudes towards the role of the natural sciences in society and education*

This instrument was designed specifically for the purpose of measuring attitudes towards science and education in the context of social development, and it had already been applied in a research with kindergarten parents (Ivković et al., 2014). The Likert-type scale contains 12 items to which a five-point assessment scale is attached (from 1 – I do not agree at all, to 5 – I completely agree). The items are arranged into two subscales, each containing six items: the first measures materialism, the second post-materialism.

The items of the materialism subscale are:

- *Society is built on the foundation of natural science studies.*
- *Only a child who knows the natural sciences has a chance to succeed in life.*
- *If more children knew the natural sciences, we would start production*

*faster in the future.*

- *The natural sciences provide fundamental knowledge about the world.*
- *If a child likes to learn, he or she should be guided into the natural sciences.*
- *The natural sciences help economic development.*

The items of the post-materialism subscale are:

- *The basic task of the study of the natural sciences should be the preservation of planet Earth for future generations.*
- *The goal of studying the natural sciences is the enrichment of human culture.*
- *Preventing the misuse of the natural sciences is more important than social progress.*
- *The natural sciences should primarily develop creativity in children.*
- *The natural sciences teach children that all parts of the universe are interconnected and intertwined.*
- *By knowing the natural sciences, modern man can preserve some skills that are slowly being forgotten today.*

#### Independent variables

*Socio-demographic variables:* Gender was measured as a dichotomous variable (*male/female*), level of education in three categories (*secondary school, college and university*), size of the settlement of upbringing in four categories (*less than 1,000 inhabitants, from 1,000 to 10,000, from 10,001 to 100,000, and more than 100,000 inhabitants*), country in three categories (*Croatia, Serbia and Slovenia*), city in six categories (*Rijeka, Zagreb, Subotica, Belgrade, Koper and Ljubljana*), and the age and length of service of the participants were open questions in which the respondent entered a numerical value.

The collected data were processed using IBM SPSS software. The scales of materialism and post-materialism were subjected to component factor analysis, while parametric tests, t-test for independent samples and one-way analysis of variance were used to test differences in averages between individual groups.

## Results and discussion

In this section, the results of the research are presented along with a factor analysis of preschool teachers' attitudes towards the role of the natural sciences in education and society, and the differences between preschool teachers in accepting the factors regarding their age and the country and city in which they live. Only the statistically significant data are shown in the tables.



*Preschool teachers' attitudes towards the role of the natural sciences in society and education*

Table 2 shows the distribution of percentages of the teachers' responses on the scales of materialism and post-materialism. From the distribution of the percentages of the respondents' answers, we can see that the only left-asymmetric variable, meaning the variable that the respondents rejected, is variable v2: "Only a child who knows the natural sciences has a chance to succeed in life." This is a variable that we assumed belongs to the materialism factor. The rejection of this variable is not surprising if we consider the contemporary educational context, in which it is emphasised that each child should be approached individually, and that each child is "rich" in terms of Reggio pedagogy.

The right-asymmetric variables, meaning the variables that the respondents accepted more strongly, are the following: v4, v5, v6, v9, v10, v11 and v12. The content of these variables refers to the role of the natural sciences in preserving the planet and old skills for future generations, as well as awakening creativity in children. The natural sciences are understood here as fundamental human knowledge in the sense that they enrich human culture. These variables relate to what we assume will be the post-materialism factor.

It should be noted that most of the responses to all of the variables are clustered around the middle degree (verbal label: "I do not agree or disagree"), which may mean that the subject of science was not interesting to the respondents, or that they are not sufficiently familiar with it. On the other hand, it may also mean and that the wording of the claims is unclear and not sufficiently close to the surveyed population. This is most true for variables v3 (If more children knew the natural sciences, we would start production faster in the future) and v7 (Preventing the misuse of the natural sciences is more important than social progress). These are statements that speak more explicitly about the relationship between science and economics, and not so much about the relationship between science and education, which is most likely why there were more undecided respondents. A contribution to this interpretation is provided by the research of Rogišić et al. (2020), according to which Zagreb preschool teachers have a lower level of belief in the idea that the main tasks of education are to serve political and economic goals.

**Table 2**

*Distribution of response percentages (%) on the scales of materialism and post-materialism (1 – I do not agree at all, 2 – I mostly do not agree, 3 – I do not agree or disagree, 4 – I mostly agree, 5 – I completely agree)*

Label	Item	1	2	3	4	5	<i>M</i>	s.d.
V <sub>1</sub>	Society is built on the foundation of the natural science studies.	4.9	14.3	46.7	26.1	8.0	3.18	.942
V <sub>2</sub>	Only a child who knows the natural sciences has a chance to succeed in life.	19.6	35.2	36.5	7.0	1.6	2.36	.929
V <sub>3</sub>	If more children knew the natural sciences, we would start production faster in the future.	7.9	22.3	50.6	16.6	2.5	2.84	.885
V <sub>4</sub>	The basic task of the study of the natural sciences should be the preservation of planet Earth for future generations.	.9	5.4	34.1	41.9	17.8	3.70	.853
V <sub>5</sub>	The natural sciences provide fundamental knowledge about the world.	.9	6.8	33.9	47.7	10.6	3.60	.802
V <sub>6</sub>	The goal of studying the natural sciences is the enrichment of human culture.	1.4	7.2	34.4	45.0	12.1	3.59	.843
V <sub>7</sub>	Preventing the misuse of the natural sciences is more important than social progress.	3.7	15.7	54.2	19.7	6.8	3.10	.874
V <sub>8</sub>	If a child likes to learn, he or she should be guided into the natural sciences.	8.5	26.1	44.1	17.1	4.2	2.83	.955
V <sub>9</sub>	The natural sciences should primarily develop creativity in children.	3.2	10.7	40.5	38.2	7.5	3.36	.887
V <sub>10</sub>	The natural sciences help economic development.	1.5	6.4	37.4	45.2	9.4	3.55	.810
V <sub>11</sub>	The natural sciences teach children that all parts of the universe are interconnected and intertwined.	1.4	5.8	40.2	42.0	10.7	3.55	.812
V <sub>12</sub>	By knowing the natural sciences, modern man can preserve some skills that are slowly being forgotten today.	.9	4.4	37.7	44.8	12.2	3.63	.788

Factor analysis under the component model with the GK criterion and varimax rotation of the basic solution extracted two factors that explain 51.64% of the total variance (Table 3).

**Table 3**

*Varimax transformation of preschool teachers' attitudes towards the role of the natural sciences in society and education*

Label	Item	Saturation with factor	
		F1 – Post-materialism	F2 – Materialist image of the child
V <sub>11</sub>	The natural sciences teach children that all parts of the universe are interconnected and intertwined.	.762	
V <sub>12</sub>	By knowing the natural sciences, modern man can preserve some skills that are slowly being forgotten today.	.744	.167
V <sub>6</sub>	The goal of studying the natural sciences is the enrichment of human culture.	.704	.243
V <sub>10</sub>	The natural sciences help economic development.	.683	.268
V <sub>5</sub>	The natural sciences provide fundamental knowledge about the world.	.664	.305
V <sub>4</sub>	The basic task of the study of the natural sciences should be the preservation of planet Earth for future generations.	.624	.228
V <sub>9</sub>	The natural sciences should primarily develop creativity in children.	.546	.376
V <sub>7</sub>	Preventing the misuse of the natural sciences is more important than social progress.	.458	.274
V <sub>2</sub>	Only a child who knows the natural sciences has a chance to succeed in life.		.853
V <sub>3</sub>	If more children knew the natural sciences, we would start production faster in the future.	.286	.759
V <sub>8</sub>	If a child likes to learn, he or she should be guided into the natural sciences.	.277	.581
V <sub>1</sub>	Society is built on the foundation of natural science studies.	.300	.579

Cronbach's alpha is 0.872. The first factor is highly saturated by a total of eight variables (30.77% of the total variance). These are six variables that we assumed would make up the Post-materialism factor. They were joined by two "materialist" variables: v10 (The natural sciences help economic development) and v5 (The natural sciences provide fundamental knowledge about the world). These are two statements that highlight the role of science in social development.

The second factor is highly saturated by four variables (20.87% of the total variance) related to materialism. These are three variables that speak specifically about the need for children to focus on the natural sciences for their own and social wellbeing. The last statement about social development deviates somewhat from the other three, and at the same time significantly saturates

the first factor. Although this factor is materialist, it is primarily reduced to children and the meaning of education and science in their lives. If we connect this with the descriptive analysis of the percentage of responses, we can state that these are the items about which the preschool teachers had the most pronounced negative opinion. It seems that the image of the child guided the preschool teachers in filling out the questionnaire and was the main criterion for the distribution of items by factors, which is why the second factor was named Materialist image of the child. The image of the child is considered the starting point of every educational practice, whether at the individual or institutional level, and therefore every practitioner and every education policy should determine what the child is for them.

**Table 4**

*Factor scores*

	<i>F1</i>	<i>F2</i>
<b>Skewness</b>	-.192	-.059
Std. error skewness	.098	.098
<b>Kurtosis</b>	.854	.080
Std. error kurtosis	.196	.196

Considering the percentage distribution of the respondents' answers, as well as the distribution of factor scores (Table 4), it is evident that preschool teachers accept the Post-materialism factor somewhat more than the factor Materialist image of the child, although there is a clustering of answers in the middle, i.e., the distribution is pointed, which again tells us that there are a lot of undecided respondents. In the end, we can conclude that we have obtained the two assumed value types – materialist and post-materialist – and although they are slightly modified, hypothesis H1 is confirmed.

*The factors Post-materialism and Materialist image of the child in relation to age and length of service of the preschool teachers*

In Table 5, we can see that both factors are positively correlated with length of service; however, only the factor Materialist image of the child is statistically significantly correlated with the age of the preschool teachers, also positively. It should also be noted that the correlation coefficients are low. While the positive correlation of the preschool teacher's age with Materialism is expected, the relationship between the factors and length of service is unclear. The correlation coefficient between age and length of service is 0.516 ( $p < 0.01$ ),

which is not a high correlation. It seems that there is some discontinuity in the time of entry and/or exit from the teaching profession, which is why, unexpectedly, both factors are more accepted by preschool teachers with more work experience.

**Table 5**

*Bivariate correlation of factors with age and length of service*

		<i>N</i>	Pearson's correlation coefficient ( <i>r</i> )	<i>p</i>
Post-materialism	Teacher's age	555	0.053	0.209
	Length of service	555	0.112	0.008*
Materialist image of the child	Teacher's age	555	0.148	0.001*
	Length of service	555	0.138	0.001*

\* $p < .01$

We can conclude that the intergenerational value-shift hypothesis (H2 a and b) is only partially confirmed: while older preschool teachers accept materialist values more than younger ones, post-materialist values are not statistically significantly related to age.

*The factors Post-materialism and Materialist image of the child in relation to the country and city where the preschool teachers live*

The results in Table 6 show that the factor Materialist image of the child is accepted more by Croatian preschool teachers than Slovenian and Serbian ones, while there are no statistically significant differences in the factor Post-materialism.

**Table 6**

*One-way analysis of variance of factors with countries*

		<i>M</i>	Levene's statistic	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Bonferroni's test of multiple comparison	
							<i>M</i> (I-J)	<i>p</i>
Materialist image of the child	Croatia (I)	.19					Cro (I)	
	Serbia (J)	-.09	.144	.866	6.031	.003	Ser (J)	.27 .009*
	Slovenia (J)	-.13					Slo (J)	.32 .009*

\* $p < .01$

As expected, the situation is similar with cities (Table 7). While there are no statistically significant differences in the factor Post-materialism, the factor Materialist image of the child is more accepted by preschool teachers from Rijeka and Zagreb than preschool teachers from Belgrade. Differences between other combinations of cities are not statistically significant.

**Table 7**

*One-way analysis of variance of factors with countries*

	<i>M</i>	Levene's statistic	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Bonferroni's test of multiple comparison	
						<i>M</i> (I-J)	<i>p</i>
Materialist image of the child	Rijeka (J)	.18	.220	3.648	.003	Belg (I)	
	Zagreb (J)	.21				Rijeka (J)	-.39 .024*
	Subotica (J)	.07				Zagreb (J)	-.42 .025*
	Belgrade (I)	-.21				Subotica (J)	-.28 .353
	Koper (J)	-.05				Koper (J)	-.16 1.000
	Ljubljana (J)	-.21				Ljubljana (J)	-.01 1.000

\* $p < .05$

The post-materialist perception of the role of science in society and education is generally accepted by the educational population in the observed countries, which means that the sociocultural, postmodern and neoliberal discourse on science and scientific literacy has taken root in the education systems of the semi-periphery of South-Eastern Europe. This is in accordance with analyses that view the entire post-socialist educational space as a single unit, in the sense that all post-socialist countries strive to adopt global educational values and practices, uncritically looking at the West as an educational and developmental ideal and ignoring local (regional) knowledge, practice and experience (Silova, 2009; Štremfel, 2021).

The second factor is confusing. How is it that it is more accepted in Croatia than in the other two countries, especially in Belgrade? Before engaging in speculations related to the socio-educational context, we verified whether there is a difference in the age and length of service of preschool teachers between countries. A simple analysis of variance showed that the respondents from Serbia ( $M = 37.5$ ) were statistically significantly younger than the respondents from Croatia ( $M = 42.64$ ) and Slovenia ( $M = 46.7$ ;  $F = 13.969$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This is especially true for the respondents from Belgrade, where the average age is 36.12, while the range of arithmetic means in other cities are from 40 to

48 years. It should be emphasised that everywhere the minimum age is in the early twenties, and the maximum age is in the early sixties, except in Belgrade where the maximum age is 55. The same statistically significant results were obtained for length of service: the average length of service in Serbia is 12.95 years, while in Croatia the length of service is 19.61 years, and in Slovenia 22.48 years ( $F = 40.748, p < 0.01$ ). Given that the intergenerational hypothesis was confirmed in the previous section, we can state that the unexpected rejection of the second factor in Serbia/Belgrade reflects age differences in the sample. We can conclude that in our research, the third hypothesis (H<sub>3</sub> a and b) was not confirmed.

Corresponding statistical tests were also conducted with the variables “level of education” and “size of the settlement of upbringing”, but there were no statistically significant differences between the respondents.

## Conclusion

Considering the initial theoretical implications described in the paper, we can conclude that the importance of the natural sciences and education in the context of social development is unquestionable in the population of pre-school teachers. Considering that post-materialist and materialist views on social development are combined, we see that traditional understandings about the role of the natural sciences overlap with current global trends. Given that post-materialist values were accepted in unison, in all three countries and in all generations, we can state that the present research shows that, regardless of certain political and educational differences, there is a common post-socialist space that shares the same developmental (Hughson, 2015) and educational (Silova, 2009) features. The main point of contention that emerged was neither the natural sciences nor the concept of social development, but the approach to education. Emphasis on the freedom of individual choice, that is, on the individual approach to the child, is the mantra of contemporary educational sciences, but also the spirit of neoliberal times (Ball & Olmeda, 2013; Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021). That is why, in our view, it appeared as more significant among younger respondents. In other words, we conclude that the results of the research reflect an intergenerational change in the approach to education: from a collectivist to an individualistic one.

The implications of the research findings for educational practice are twofold. Firstly, the research showed that preschool teachers, especially younger teachers, refuse to base their practice on the traditional image of the child, i.e., to make choices for them according to certain social norms. According to them, teaching science is about educating for creativity and individuality

in accordance with the world we live in, which is in line with the literature on contemporary science education and literacy.

Secondly, the research also showed that preschool teachers make no clear distinctions between ecology, economic growth and pseudo-science, which is typical of the postmodern “anything-goes” thinking. This calls for the implementation of a critical-transformative perspective in early childhood and preschool education (kindergartens, faculties, vocational training) of the researched countries, which would allow for more awareness of the importance of the natural sciences and scientific literacy regarding issues such as Anthropocene, global climate and social crisis, and local knowledges and practices. A child must have the freedom to choose and develop according to his or her own individual needs and interests, but one cannot forget that children live in their local communities and a global society intersected with power relations of various kinds. This demands an activist role of the teacher, who should foster solidarity, not only individuality.

We should also refer to the limitations of the research. The first limitation is the sample. Data collection was not carried out using the same method: while field research was conducted in Serbia and Croatia, an online data collection method was used in Slovenia. In addition, surveying at vocational conventions did not allow for control of the selection of respondents by age and other socio-demographic characteristics, which is why the Serbian sample is statistically significantly younger than the Slovenian and Croatian ones. This affected the results of the research. Although, in the text, we talk about the post-socialist context, the research was conducted in only three such countries. Regardless of these limitations, we believe that the research provides new insights into the preschool teacher profession, and that broader social and political contexts should be applied to more empirical educational research in the future.

## Acknowledgments

The research was part of a project entitled “The Culture of an Educational Institution as a Factor in the Co-construction of Knowledge” (13.10.2.2.01) funded by the University of Rijeka, Croatia.

## References

- Adam, F., Makarovič, M., Rončević, B., & Tomšič, M. (2005). *The challenges of sustained development: The role of socio-cultural factors in East-Central Europe*. Central European University Press.
- Apple, W. M. (2012). *Ideologija i kurikulum* [Ideology and curriculum]. Fabrika knjiga, Edicija Reč.



- Arriazu Muñoz, R. (2015). European education policy: A historical and critical approach to understanding the impact of neoliberalism in Europe. *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, 13(1), 19–42.
- Ball, S. J. (2016). Neoliberal education? Confronting the slouching beast. *Policy Futures in Education*, 14(8), 1046–1059. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210316664259>
- Ball, S. J., & Olmeda, A. (2013). Care of the self, resistance and subjectivity under neoliberal governmentalities. *Critical Studies in Education*, 54(1), 85–96. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2013.740678>
- Belova, N., & Eilks, I. (2014). Promoting societal-oriented communication and decision making skills by learning about advertising in science education. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, 4(1), 31–49.
- Brown, W. (2015). *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's stealth revolution*. Zone Books, Near Futures Series.
- Burić, I., & Štulhofer, A. (2020). *Egalitarni sindrom - sučeljenost kulture i društvenog razvoja?* [Egalitarian syndrome - confrontation between culture and social development?]. Jesenski i Turk.
- Chabott, C., & Ramirez, F. O. (2000). Development and education. In M. T. Hallinan (Ed.), *Handbook of the sociology of education* (pp. 163–188). Springer.
- Crowley, K., Callanan, M. A., Tenenbaum, H. R., & Allen, E. (2001). Parents explain more often to boys than to girls during shared scientific thinking. *Psychological Science*, 12(3), 258–261. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9280.00347>
- Domazet, M., & Marinović Jerolimov, D. (2014). Sustainability on the semi-periphery: An impossible topic in a non-existent place? In M. Domazet, & D. Marinović Jerolimov (Eds.), *Sustainability perspectives from the European semi-periphery* (pp. 19–49). Institute for Social Research & Heinrich Böll Stiftung Croatia.
- Duda, I. (2015). *Danas kada postajem pionir. Djetinjstvo i ideologija jugoslavenskoga socijalizma* [Today as I become a pioneer. Childhood and ideology in Yugoslavian socialism]. Srednja Europa, Sveučilište Jurja Dobrile u Puli.
- Erdei, I. (2004). “The happy child” as the icon of socialist transformation: Yugoslavia's Pioneer Organisation. In J. R. Lampe, & M. Mazower (Eds.), *Ideologies and national identities – the case of twentieth-century Southeastern Europe* (pp. 154–179). Ceu Press.
- Gregurović, M., & Kut, S. (2010). Učinak socioekonomskog statusa na obrazovno postignuće učenika: Primjer PISA istraživanja, Hrvatska 2006 [The effect of socioeconomic status on students' educational achievement: The example of the PISA study, Croatia 2006]. *Revija za socijalnu politiku*, 17(2), 179–196. <https://doi.org/10.3935/rspv17i2.918>
- Hart, J., & Boyden, J. (2019). Childhood (re)materialized: Bringing political economy into the field. In S. Spyrou, R. Rosen, & D. T. Cook (Eds.), *Reimagining childhood studies* (pp. 75– 89). Bloomsbury Academic.
- Henchoz, C. (2016). Sociological perspective on financial literacy. A critical examination of three assumptions underlying financial literacy programmes. In C. Aprea, E. Wuttke, K. Breuer, N. K. Koh,

- P. Davies, B. Greimel-Fuhrmann, & J. S. Lopus (Eds.), *International handbook of financial literacy* (pp. 97–112). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-0360-8\\_8](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-0360-8_8)
- Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations*. Sage Publications.
- Hughson, M. (2015). *Poluperiferija i rod: pobuna konteksta* [The semiperiphery and gender: The rebellion of the context]. Institut za kriminološka i sociološka istraživanja.
- Inglehart, R., & Welzel, C. (2007). *Modernizacija, kulturna promjena i demokracija: slijed ljudskog razvitka* [Modernisation, cultural change and democracy: The human development sequence]. Politička kultura.
- Ivković, Ž., Vujičić, L., & Boneta, Ž. (2014). Encouraging scientific literacy for the future: Parents' attitudes. In D. Hozjan (Ed.), *Izobraževanje za 21. stoljeće - ustvarjalnost v vzgoji in izobraževanju* (pp. 439–450). Univerza na Primorskem, Znanstveno raziskovalno središče, Univerzitetna založba Annales.
- Jarvis, T., Pell, A., & Hingley, P. (2011). Variations in primary teachers' responses and development during three major science in-service programmes. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, 1(1), 67–92.
- Kapsala, N., Galani, A., & Mavrikaki, E. (2022). Nature of science in Greek secondary school biology textbooks. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, 12(2), 143–168. <https://doi.org/10.26529/j.1309>
- Lažnjak, J. (2011). Dimensions of national innovation culture in Croatia: Content validity of Hofstede's dimensions. *Društvena istraživanja*, 20(4/114), 1015–1038. <https://doi.org/10.5559/di.20.4.05>
- Mannion, G., Biesta, G., Priestley, M., & Ross, H. (2011). The global dimension in education and education for global citizenship: Genealogy and critique. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 9(3–4), 443–456. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2011.605327>
- Mead, M. A., & Silova, I. (2013). Literacies of (post)socialist childhood: Alternative readings of socialist upbringings and neoliberal futures. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 11(2), 194–222. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2013.783314>
- Novljan, M., & Pavlin, J. (2022). Experiences of Slovenian in-service primary school teachers and students of grades 4 and 5 with outdoor lessons in the subject Science and technology. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, 12(1), 189–215. <https://doi.org/10.26529/cepsj.919>
- Nordveit, B. H. (2009). Western and Chinese development discourses: Education, growth and sustainability. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 29(2), 157–165. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2008.09.010>
- Nussbaum, M. C. (2012). *Ne profitu. Zašto demokracija treba humanistiku* [They don't profit. Why democracy needs the humanities]. AGM.
- Pavlović, N. (2018). Ispitivanje struktura dimenzija tradicionalnih/sekularno-racionalnih vrednosti i vrednosti preživljavanja/samoekspresije u modelu Ronalda Ingleharta: slučaj Srbije [Examination of the structure of the traditional/secular-rational and survival/self-expression value dimensions in the model of Ronald Inglehart: The case of Serbia]. *Sociologija*, 60(2), 481–496. <https://doi.org/10.2298/SOC1802481P>

- Pechtelidis, Y., & Stamou, A. G. (2017). The “competent child” in times of crisis: A synthesis of Foucauldian with critical discourse analysis in Greek pre-school curricula. *Palgrave Communication*, 3(17065). <https://doi.org/10.1057/palcomms.2017.65>
- Peračković, K. (2007). Promjene u strukturi zanimanja u Hrvatskoj od 1971. do 2001. – Od ratara do konobara [Changes in the occupational structure of Croatia from 1971 to 2001. From farmers to waiters]. *Sociologija i prostor*, 45(3/4), 377–398.
- Roberts-Holmes, G., & Moss, P. (2021). *Neoliberalism and early childhood education. Markets, imaginaries and governance*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Rogić, I. (1996). *Rijeka – baština za budućnost* [Rijeka – heritage for the future]. Grad Rijeka.
- Rogošić, S., Maskalan, A., & Jurki, A. (2020). What are the key roles of education? *Jahr: Europski časopis za bioetiku*, 11(2), 445–465.
- Sardoč, M. (2021). *The impacts of neoliberal discourse and language in education. Critical perspectives on a rhetoric of equality, well-being, and justice*. Routledge.
- Sekulić, D. (2014). *Identitet i vrijednosti: sociološka studija o hrvatskom društvu* [Identity and values: A sociological study of Croatian society]. Politička kultura.
- Sherkat, D. E. (2011). Religion and scientific literacy in the United States. *Social Science Quarterly*, 92(5), 1134–1150. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6237.2011.00811.x>
- Silova, I. (2009). Varieties of educational transformation: The post-socialist states of Central/Southeastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. In R. Cown, & A. Kazamias (Eds.), *International handbook of comparative education*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-6403-6>
- Štremfel, U. (2021). European neoliberal discourse and Slovenian educational space. In M. Sardoč (Ed.), *The impacts of neoliberal discourse and language in education. Critical perspectives on a rhetoric of equality, well-being, and justice* (pp. 206–222). Routledge.
- Štulhofer, A. & Kufrin, K. (1996). Od obilja do altruizma i druge ekološke priče. Postmaterijalistički sindrom i ekološke vrijednosti u Hrvatskoj [From affluence do altruism, and other environmental stories: Postmaterialist syndrome and environmental values in Croatia]. *Socijalna ekologija*, 5(2), 171–184.
- Timur, B., & Tasar, M. F. (2011). In-service science teachers’ technological pedagogical content knowledge confidences and views about technology-rich environments. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, 1(4), 11–25.
- Tomić-Koludrović, I. (2015). *Pomak prema modernosti. Žene u razdoblju zrele tradicije* [The shift towards modernity. Women in the age of mature transition]. Jesenski i Turk.
- Turmo, A. (2004). Scientific literacy and socio-economic background among 15-year-olds - A Nordic perspective. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 48(3), 287–305. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313830410001695745>
- Walan, S., & Chang Rundgren, S. (2014). Investigating preschool and primary school teachers’ self-efficacy and needs in teaching science: A pilot study. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, 4(1), 51–67.
- Zgaga, P. (2013). Higher education research and higher education policy in South-East Europe. *European Journal of Higher Education*, 3(3), 280–294. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21568235.2013.819671>
- Županov, J. (1995). *Poslije potopa* [After the flood]. Nakladni zavod Globus.

## Biographical note

**ŽELJKA IVKOVIĆ HODŽIĆ** is a lecturer in the field of sociology at the Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Rijeka, Croatia. Her main research interests include social development and education, economic socialization, ideology and curriculum, discourses on children and childhoods, intercultural education, social status of teacher profession, and parenthood.

**LIDIJA VUJIČIĆ**, PhD, is a full professor in the field of pedagogy at the Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Rijeka, Croatia. Her main areas of research are early and preschool education; new paradigm of the child and childhood, the culture of educational institutions; (co)construction of curriculum, initial education of preschool teachers; professional development of teachers/ preschool educators; action research.

**ŽELJKO BONETA**, PhD, is an associate professor in the field of sociology at the Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Rijeka, Croatia. His research interests include sociology of religion, sociology of childhood, modernization theories and processes, ethnic relations, and intercultural education.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26529/cepsj.1571>

## Laboratory Use Self-Efficacy of Turkish Pre-Service Science Teachers Trained in Different Teacher Education Programmes

OKTAY KIZKAPAN<sup>\*1</sup>, NAGIHAN TANIK ÖNAL <sup>2</sup> AND ASLI SAYLAN KIRMIZIGÜL<sup>3</sup>

☞ In Türkiye, the science teacher education programme changed in 2018. While physics, chemistry and biology courses were taught through theoretical and laboratory applications in the previous programme (Programme-I), the course hours of these courses were reduced and laboratory hours were abolished in the new programme (Programme-II). The present research, which adopts a causal-comparative design of quantitative research, aims to compare the laboratory self-efficacy of pre-service science teachers who attended these two science teacher education programmes. The research data was collected from 289 pre-service science teachers educated in Programme-I and II through the science laboratory use self-efficacy scale and then analysed using the independent samples t-test. The results show that the total scores of laboratory use self-efficacy of pre-service science teachers trained in Programme-I is significantly higher. The scores of the pre-service science teachers from Programme-I were also found to be significantly higher than those from Programme-II in terms of the sub-dimensions using the physical environment and equipment, working independently, and crisis management. On the other hand, there was no significant difference between the two programmes in the sub-dimension applying scientific process skills. These results and their implications are discussed in the light of current literature.

**Keywords:** self-efficacy, science laboratory, teacher education, pre-service science teachers

1 <sup>\*</sup>Corresponding Author. Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University, Nevşehir, Türkiye; [okizkapan@nevsehir.edu.tr](mailto:okizkapan@nevsehir.edu.tr).

2 Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University, Niğde, Türkiye.

3 Faculty of Education, Erciyes University, Kayseri, Türkiye.

## Samoučinkovitost uporabe laboratorija pri turških študentih, bodočih učiteljih naravoslovja, ki so se usposabljali v različnih programih izobraževanja učiteljev

OKTAY KIZKAPAN, NAGIHAN TANIK ÖNAL IN ASLI SAYLAN KIRMIZIGÜL

☞ V Turčiji se je program izobraževanja učiteljev naravoslovja leta 2018 spremenil. Medtem ko smo v prejšnjem programu (Program-I) predmete s področij fizike, kemije in biologije poučevali s teoretično in z laboratorijsko uporabo, so se v novem programu (Program-II) ure teh predmetov skrajšale, laboratorijske ure pa so bile ukinjene. Namen te raziskave, ki uporablja vzročno-primerjalno zasnovano kvantitativne raziskave, je primerjati laboratorijsko samoučinkovitost študentov, bodočih učiteljev naravoslovja, ki so se udeležili teh programov izobraževanja učiteljev naravoslovja. Raziskovalni podatki so bili zbrani na vzorcu 289 študentov, bodočih učiteljev naravoslovja, ki so se izobraževali v programih I in II, s pomočjo lestvice samoučinkovitosti uporabe naravoslovnega laboratorija, nato pa so bili analizirani s t-testom za neodvisne vzorce. Rezultati kažejo, da je skupni rezultat samoučinkovitosti uporabe laboratorija pri študentih, bodočih učiteljih naravoslovja, ki so se izobraževali v Programu-I, bistveno višji. Ugotovljeno je bilo tudi, da so rezultati študentov, bodočih učiteljev naravoslovja, ki so se usposabljali v programu I, bistveno višji od tistih iz programa II glede naslednjih poddimenzij: uporaba fizičnega okolja in opreme, samostojno delo in obvladovanje kriznih situacij. Po drugi strani pa med obema programoma ni bilo pomembnih razlik pri poddimenziji rabe zmožnosti znanstvenega procesa. Ti rezultati in njihove posledice so obravnavani v luči aktualne literature.

**Ključne besede:** samoučinkovitost; naravoslovni laboratorij; izobraževanje učiteljev; študentje, bodoči učitelji naravoslovja

## Introduction

Recognition of the significance of a thorough science education is widespread in the contemporary world. The information presented in research concerning the methods, locations and timing for implementing a high-quality science education has resulted in a fundamental shift in the comprehension of science education. In this framework, science is no longer simply embraced as a mere repository of knowledge; instead, proficiencies, experiments and practical work in laboratories are acknowledged as essential components of science (Al-Naqbi & Tairab, 2005). Within Türkiye, a developing economy, science education is held in high esteem and it is obligatory to teach science as an integrated course at the secondary school level, where physics, chemistry and biology are taught as a unified subject.

Research underscores the need for school science to closely mirror authentic scientific practices (Woolnough, 1999). Consequently, laboratories, which are a prevalent aspect of various scientific disciplines, hold immense significance for both the field of science and science education. Essentially, the execution of experiments within a laboratory is just as crucial for a comprehensive science education as grasping concepts and theories (Heradio et al. 2016; Kolil et al., 2020). Science lessons enriched with laboratory engagement provide learners with an opportunity to acquire an array of skills, including the ability to formulate inquiries, identify and resolve problems, collaborate effectively, engage in research and inquiry, and make observations (Chiapetta, 2007). These competencies are integral 21st-century skills that every individual should possess in today's world. Moreover, laboratory activities function as intermediaries that enable learners to achieve multiple objectives, such as honing scientific process skills, fostering positive attitudes towards science, and augmenting student motivation and participation (Fraser & Lee, 2009). Kipnis and Hofstein (2007) elucidate the significance of laboratories in science education by asserting that students can learn both within and from the laboratory environment. Laboratories that introduce learners to scientific concepts facilitate learning by providing opportunities to concretise abstract ideas and allowing students to learn through personal experience. In essence, students' hands-on experimentation within the laboratory contributes significantly to a more profound comprehension of scientific concepts (Snetinová et al. 2018). Additionally, laboratory experiments have a positive impact on students' performance in science lessons, as well as on their overall interest in science (Vinko et al., 2020). Viewed from this perspective, laboratories designed for scientific experimentation, demonstration and inquiry take centre stage in the realm of science

education (Kwok, 2015). In line with this, the science curriculum devised by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) in Türkiye underscores the importance of middle school students cultivating higher-order cognitive skills such as problem-solving, creative and analytical thinking, and the application of scientific knowledge through laboratory activities or daily life situations while learning science (MoNE, 2018).

Laboratory activities play a pivotal role in the realm of science education. Nevertheless, the utilisation of laboratories in science education within Türkiye and educators' viewpoints on their usage are generally limited (Güneş et al., 2013). Although a substantial number of studies carried out in Türkiye converge on the necessity and significance of incorporating laboratory activities into science teaching, there have been accounts of various issues, obstacles and disruptions in practice (Böyük et al., 2010; Çelik et al., 2021; Kaymak & Karademir, 2019; Soğukpınar & Gündoğdu, 2020). This suggests that teachers' competencies should be enhanced, as it is teachers who are responsible for translating curriculum recommendations into practical implementation. In this context, Pešková et al. (2019) contend that educators exhibiting high self-efficacy are more inclined to embrace reforms. Nevertheless, mandating teachers to incorporate laboratories into their teaching methods falls short of ensuring the effective integration of laboratories in science education. Thus, the initial step towards enhancing the quality of science education is to provide comprehensive teacher training, thereby reinforcing the foundation of undergraduate education. Hernawati et al. (2018) accentuate the crucial importance of undergraduate education by asserting that educators constitute a fundamental driving force for elevating the educational standards of a nation.

### **Science teacher training in Türkiye**

The primary objective of a comprehensive undergraduate education is to cultivate teachers who have mastered the necessary teaching competencies and are well prepared to deliver effective science education. In Türkiye, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) has periodically reformed the science curriculum to ensure that individuals are equipped to stay aligned with the demands of the times. Additionally, teachers are required to possess the requisite skills to implement the MoNE curriculum. Furthermore, the programmes offered by education faculties at the undergraduate level have been revamped by the Higher Education Council (YÖK) since 2018, with the aim of addressing existing problems and shortcomings in the existing undergraduate programmes (YÖK, 2018). The updated curriculum was introduced to incoming first-year



undergraduate students during the 2018–2019 academic year, while returning students continued under the previous programme.

A comparison of the science education undergraduate programme that was revised in 2018 (Programme-II) and its predecessor (Programme-I) reveals the removal or consolidation of certain science subject area courses and laboratory components in the new programme. Programme-I was implemented in Türkiye from 2007 to 2018. Pre-service science teachers trained according to Programme-I had taken the courses Physics-I lab, Physics-II lab, Physics-III lab, Chemistry-I lab, Chemistry-II lab, Biology-I lab, Biology-II lab, Science Teaching Lab Applications-I and Science Teaching Lab Applications-II, with two hours per week being allocated to each course. Thus, there were a total of 18 hours per week of laboratory courses in Programme-I. On the other hand, in Programme-II, which has been implemented since 2018, laboratory courses were largely removed. Physics, chemistry and biology courses were planned as two hours of theory and two hours of practice per week, while laboratory courses are limited to two courses (Science Teaching Laboratory Practices-I and Science Teaching Laboratory Practices-II), with a total of four hours per week. In the curriculum, the practical and theoretical courses were also merged. Notably, the new curriculum saw a reduction in the number of subject area courses and classroom hours, along with an augmentation in the quantity of pedagogical courses. Nonetheless, it is important to note that content knowledge significantly influences science teachers' self-efficacy beliefs in their teaching endeavours (Posnanski, 2002; Rubeck & Enochs, 1991).

The limited allocation of laboratory hours in the updated programme raises the need for research to assess its efficacy. The reluctance of science teachers to engage in laboratory activities throughout their careers is attributed to the inadequate emphasis on laboratory applications during their pre-service education (Böyük et al., 2010). Despite the criticisms directed towards the programme in place before 2018, it is thought-provoking that the new programmes have led to a decrease, rather than an increase, in the number of laboratory course hours and courses focused on laboratory-related topics.

## **Teacher self-efficacy**

Bandura (1986) emphasises the significance of mastery experiences, vicarious learning, verbal persuasion and physiological-affective states as the primary foundations of self-efficacy. Consequently, the experiential opportunities offered during undergraduate education directly impact the self-efficacy of pre-service teachers. In relation to this, Usta Gezer (2014) asserts the need

to enhance teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy. Teachers with elevated self-efficacy beliefs exhibit improved performance and accomplishments, leading to heightened student achievement (Bandura, 1997; Saracaloğlu & Yenice, 2009; Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008). Conversely, educators possessing low self-efficacy perceptions tend to avoid adopting novel teaching methods, resulting in ineffective instruction (Berg & Smith, 2016; Karabatak & Turhan, 2017). To elucidate further, classrooms led by science teachers with strong self-efficacy beliefs foster elevated questioning, exploration, problem-solving abilities and favourable attitudes towards science among students (Shahzad & Naureen, 2017).

Specifically concerning science education, in addition to general pedagogical self-efficacy, the self-efficacy of teachers in utilising science laboratories stands out. The focus of the present research can be defined as individuals' confidence in their competence to effectively employ laboratories and their belief in their ability to conduct laboratory activities successfully, in accordance with Bandura's conceptualisation of self-efficacy. Teachers' perceptions and behaviours within the laboratory are interlinked. Put differently, teachers' viewpoints about the laboratory environment influence their actions, while their past experiences play a part in shaping these viewpoints (Levitt, 2001). As a result, the attitudes and past encounters of science educators mould their self-efficacy perceptions. Therefore, to enhance the self-efficacy of science teachers and ensure proficient laboratory practices, it is essential for science teachers to possess hands-on laboratory experience. In essence, the experiences encountered by pre-service teachers will influence their self-efficacy beliefs, and these beliefs, in turn, will influence their future laboratory performances (Kılıç et al., 2015; Kızılkapan & Saylan Kırmızıgül, 2021). Pajares (2002) highlights the pivotal role of experience in fostering self-efficacy. Simply possessing laboratory competencies is insufficient for science teachers; concurrently, they must exhibit high self-efficacy to effectively translate these competencies into their teaching methodologies.

There are studies in the literature on the effects of different teaching methods on the self-efficacy beliefs of pre-service science teachers (Afacan & Gürel, 2019; González-Gómez et al. 2022; Kaya et al., 2020), teachers' self-efficacy levels (DeCoito & Myszkal, 2018; Stepp & Brown, 2021; Süzer, 2019) and the relationship between pre-service science teachers' science self-efficacy beliefs and science content knowledge (Leader-Janssen & Rankin-Erickson, 2013; Menon & Sadler, 2016; Thomson et al., 2017). Moreover, studies have been conducted on the effect of the teaching practice course on the personal self-efficacy of pre-service teachers (Plourde, 2002), the effect of reflective inquiry-based activities carried out in the general biology laboratory on laboratory use

self-efficacy (Usta Gezer, 2014), the effect of constructivism-based activities on science teaching self-efficacy belief levels (Bleicher & Lingren, 2005), the effects of animation and simulation applications in the general physics laboratory on the physics self-efficacy of pre-service teachers (Yener et al., 2012), the effect of virtual laboratory applications in the chemistry laboratory on experiment self-efficacy (Kolil et al., 2020), and the effect of gender on science self-efficacy (Sezgintürk & Sungur, 2020).

## **Research problem and research questions**

To the best of our knowledge, there is no research focusing on a comparison of the laboratory self-efficacy of pre-service teachers studying in the old (implemented until 2018) and new (implemented since 2018) undergraduate teacher education programmes in Türkiye. Therefore, there is a need for original and up-to-date research studies to evaluate whether the changes made in the revised programme are appropriate. The present research is an attempt to test the effectiveness of the revision in the context of the science laboratory self-efficacy beliefs of pre-service science teachers. The research is significant because its results have the potential to inform teacher education policies and may serve as a guide for the possible revision of undergraduate programmes. Based on these considerations, the current research aimed to determine and compare the laboratory self-efficacy of pre-service science teachers who were educated with the programme enacted in 2018 (Programme-II) and the former programme implemented before 2018 (Programme-I). In line with this aim, the research questions are formulated as follows:

1. What are the laboratory self-efficacy levels of pre-service science teachers who were educated in Programmes I and II?
2. Is there a significant difference between the laboratory self-efficacy levels of pre-service teachers who were educated in Programmes I and II?

## **Method**

### *Participants*

In this research, the accessible population is pre-service science teachers in two universities in the Central Anatolia Region of Türkiye. The sample consisted of 305 pre-service science teachers. However, 16 of them were excluded since they were outliers based on the outlier test of SPSS. Thus, analysis was conducted on the data of 289 pre-service science teachers, constituting more than 10% of the accessible population. The sampling unit of the research was the

universities in the Central Anatolia Region, and the observation unit was the pre-service science teachers studying in these universities. Therefore, cluster sampling was used in the research (Büyüköztürk et al., 2011). The reason for carrying out the research with these groups of pre-service science teachers is that the participating pre-service science teachers had been included in two teacher training programmes that differ in terms of laboratory practices, thus making it possible to compare the programmes (Programme-I and II) in terms of the competencies of the pre-service science teachers with regard to laboratory self-efficacy. Descriptive data regarding the sample are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive data on the pre-service science teachers in the sample*

Programme Type		Grade		Gender	
		3	4	Male	Female
Programme-I	N	81	105	24	162
	%	43.5	56.5	12.9	87.1
Programme-II	N	63	40	11	92
	%	61.2	38.8	10.7	89.3

#### *Data collection instrument and process*

The research data were collected through the Science Laboratory Use Self-Efficacy Scale (SLUSES), developed by Kızıkan and Saylan Kırmızıgül (2021). The scale was developed as a five-point Likert type. The sub-dimensions of the scale are “self-efficacy in using the physical environment and equipment in the science laboratory (SE\_PEE)” (7 items), “self-efficacy in applying scientific process skills (SE\_SPS)” (6 items), “self-efficacy in working independently in the science laboratory (SE\_WI)” (9 items), and “crisis management self-efficacy in the science laboratory (SE\_CM)” (5 items). Thus, the scale consists of four dimensions and 27 items. Higher scores from the scale correspond to high self-efficacy. The lowest score that can be obtained from the scale is 27 and the highest score is 135. The researchers calculated the Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient of the scale as .78 for the first sub-dimension, .73 for the second sub-dimension, .68 for the third sub-dimension, and .59 for the fourth sub-dimension. In the current research, the Cronbach’s Alpha reliability coefficient was calculated as .86 for the first sub-dimension, .78 for the second sub-dimension, .77 for the third sub-dimension, and .74 for the fourth sub-dimension. The data of the pre-service teachers in Programme-I were obtained from data collected during the development of the scale in the autumn semester of the

2019–2020 academic year, while the data of the pre-service science teachers in Programme-II were collected in the autumn and spring terms of the 2021–2022 academic year.

### *Data analysis*

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 26 was used for data analysis. First, descriptive statistics were conducted to evaluate the pre-service science teachers' laboratory use self-efficacy in line with the first research question. Secondly, the assumptions of variable type, normality, extreme value and homogeneity of variances were checked to determine the tests to be used in the comparison of the groups. In the research, the dependent variable (laboratory use self-efficacy) is continuous, while the independent variable (two different teacher training programmes) is discrete. The normality of the scores was checked by means of the kurtosis and skewness values. The kurtosis values were calculated as .056, .511, .020, .353 and -.005 for the sub-dimensions and the total of the scale, respectively. Similarly, the skewness values were calculated as -.083, -.249, -.236, -.071, and -.149 for the sub-dimensions and the total of the scale, respectively. Since these values are between (-1) and (+1), it is accepted that the scores obtained from the sub-dimensions and the overall scale show a normal distribution (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). Finally, the independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the science laboratory self-efficacy of the teachers trained in the two different teacher training programmes in order to answer the second research question.

### *Research design*

In this research, a causal-comparative design is utilised as a quantitative research method design. A causal-comparative design is used to determine the cause or consequences of differences that already exist between groups of individuals (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). A causal-comparative design is adopted in the research because the aim is to determine and compare the laboratory self-efficacy of student teachers who are involved in two different teacher training programmes.

## **Results**

### *Results regarding the first research question*

Descriptive statistical analyses of pre-service science teachers' self-efficacy in using the science laboratory were conducted based on two groups of pre-service science teachers trained according to two different teacher training

programmes. Table 2 presents the pre-service science teachers’ levels of laboratory self-efficacy on each subscale and the total grades from SLUSES.

**Table 2**  
*Descriptive results regarding the scores from SLUSES*

	Programme	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
SE_PEE	Programme-I	193	27.87	2.974	.214
	Programme-II	96	26.09	3.792	.387
SE_SPS	Programme-I	193	23.63	2.493	.179
	Programme-II	96	23.13	3.407	.348
SE_WI	Programme-I	193	33.48	3.237	.233
	Programme-II	96	31.18	4.377	.447
SE_CM	Programme-I	193	19.76	2.128	.153
	Programme-II	96	18.72	2.516	.257
Total	Programme-I	193	104.73	8.441	.608
	Programme-II	96	99.11	11.595	1.183

N: Number of participants

The pre-service science teachers’ scores can range from 7 to 35 for SE\_PEE, from 6 to 30 for SE\_SPS, from 9 to 45 for SE\_WI, from 5 to 25 for SE\_CM, and from 27 to 135 for the whole scale. According to the results given in Table 2, the mean scores of the pre-service science teachers are closer to the higher end of the scale in each sub-dimension and in total. In addition, while the mean scores of the students in Programme-I and Programme-II are close to each other in each sub-dimension and the overall scale, the averages of the students in Programme-I are higher.

*Results regarding the second research question*

Within the scope of the research, inferential statistics were conducted to decide whether the differences between the scores of the students in Programme-I and II were significant or not. In line with this, the scores of the groups were compared using the independent samples t-test. The results are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3***Independent samples t-test results for the groups' laboratory use self-efficacy*

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Effect Size
SE_PEE	Equal variances assumed	9.138	.003	4.34	287	.000	.52
	Equal variances not assumed			4.01	154.86	.000	
SE_SPS	Equal variances assumed	11.992	.001	1.42	287	.156	.17
	Equal variances not assumed			1.28	147.18	.202	
SE_WI	Equal variances assumed	10.783	.001	5.05	287	.000	.60
	Equal variances not assumed			4.57	148.30	.000	
SE_CM	Equal variances assumed	3.190	.075	3.67	287	.000	.45
	Equal variances not assumed			3.47	164.34	.001	
Total	Equal variances assumed	13.181	.000	4.68	287	.000	.67
	Equal variances not assumed			4.22	146.65	.000	

Sig: Significance, df: Degree of freedom

When Table 3 is examined, a statistically significant difference is found between the total scores of laboratory use self-efficacy of the pre-service science teachers who were trained in Programme-I and Programme-II ( $p < .05$ ,  $t(146.65) = 4.24$ ). This difference is in favour of Programme-I. Likewise, in the sub-dimensions SE\_PEE ( $p < .05$ ,  $t(154.86) = 4.01$ ), SE\_WI ( $p < .05$ ,  $t(148.30) = 4.57$ ), and SE\_CM ( $p < .05$ ,  $t(164.34) = 3.47$ ), the scores of the pre-service science teachers from Programme-I were found to be significantly higher than those from Programme-II. Besides statistical significance, the effect size ( $d$ ) value for the total score of laboratory self-efficacy and the sub-dimensions SE\_PEE, SE\_WI, and SE\_CM was calculated to vary between .45 and .67. According to this result, the difference between the laboratory use self-efficacy mean scores of the pre-service teachers trained in Programme I and Programme II is at a moderate level (Cohen, 1988). On the other hand, in the sub-dimension SE\_SPS, there is no significant difference between the pre-service science teachers from Programme-I and Programme-II ( $p > .05$ ,  $t(147.17) = 1.28$ ).

## Discussion

The research aimed to determine and compare the laboratory self-efficacy of pre-service science teachers educated with Programme-I, including 18 hours of laboratory per week, and Programme-II, including only four hours of laboratory per week. According to the results, the self-efficacy mean scores of all of the pre-service science teachers are closer to the higher end of the scale in each sub-dimension and in total. In parallel with this result, Kaya and Büyük (2011) found in their research that science teachers' laboratory self-efficacy levels were high. A number of studies have pointed out that the teacher's self-efficacy belief affects the students' achievement, motivation, self-esteem and attitude towards school (Caprara et al., 2006; Engin, 2020; Mojavezi & Tamiz, 2012; Shahzad & Naureen, 2017; Vlah et al., 2021). In order for teachers to be successful in their professions, they must have a high level of laboratory self-efficacy belief. It is thought that pre-service teachers with a high level of laboratory self-efficacy are more likely to have a positive attitude towards experiments and general laboratory applications later in their career. By increasing the quantity and calibre of experiments, meaningful and diverse learning environments can be developed (Ince Aka, 2016). Thus, this result of the present research is promising.

The results revealed a significant difference between the total scores of the laboratory use self-efficacy of pre-service science teachers trained in Programme-I and Programme-II, with the difference being in favour of Programme-I. Since Programme-I has more hours of laboratory applications, pre-service science teachers completing this programme may have higher levels of laboratory self-efficacy. Laboratories are vital learning environments for science education (Singer et al., 2005), especially for future science teachers. When pre-service science teachers are given the opportunity to learn about and use the laboratory equipment and to conduct experiments, their self-efficacy beliefs in using the laboratory are enhanced. Concordantly, the research of Kılıç et al. (2015) also revealed that laboratory use positively affects science teachers' self-efficacy beliefs regarding laboratory use. Therefore, this result obtained in the present research is meaningful.

According to the results, no significant difference was found between the pre-service teachers from Programme-I and Programme-II in the sub-dimension SE\_SPS. In other words, regardless of whether the pre-service science teachers took 18-hour or 4-hour laboratory, their self-efficacy in applying scientific process skills is almost the same. The probable reason for this is that in both of the science teacher training programmes suggested by the Higher Education



Council (2009, 2018), the content of laboratory courses equally and explicitly mentions the importance of science process skills in experiments. The analyses revealed that in the sub-dimensions SE\_CM, SE\_WI and SE\_PEE, the scores of the pre-service science teachers from Programme-I are significantly higher than those from Programme-II. Accordingly, the pre-service teachers who took more hours of laboratory courses have higher crisis management self-efficacy as well as higher self-efficacy in working independently in the science laboratory and in using the physical environment and equipment in the science laboratory. Undoubtedly, the more experiments are performed in the laboratory, the more knowledge is acquired about laboratory safety and accidents. Moreover, the pre-service teachers from Programme-I had an opportunity to spend more time in laboratories and conduct experiments individually in addition to doing group work. As Yener et al. (2012) states, when individuals are given an opportunity to learn about and use laboratory equipment, their self-efficacy beliefs in using the laboratory are enhanced. Thus, this result is in agreement with the literature.

## Conclusion

As stated above, the Turkish science teacher training programme underwent modifications in 2018. The previous programme, Programme-I, was implemented before 2018 in Türkiye, and included 18 hours per week of laboratory courses in total, with two hours being allocated to each of the courses Physics-I lab, Physics-II lab, Physics-III lab, Chemistry-I lab, Chemistry-II lab, Biology-I lab, Biology-II lab, Science Teaching Lab Applications-I and Science Teaching Lab Applications-II. On the other hand, in the new programme, Programme-II, which has been implemented since 2018, laboratory courses were largely removed. Physics, chemistry and biology courses were planned as two hours of theory and two hours of practice per week. Laboratory courses in Programme-II are limited to two courses (Science Teaching Laboratory Practices-I and Science Teaching Laboratory Practices-II), with a total of four hours per week. The present research has shown that students in Programme-II have lower laboratory self-efficacy than those in Programme-I. Therefore, we conclude that reducing laboratory hours in the science teacher training programme in Türkiye in 2018 was not an appropriate change. However, the research is limited to comparing pre-service teachers trained through Programme-I and II only in terms of their self-efficacy. There is a need for new studies examining the strengths and weaknesses of the new programme in terms of different variables. Based on this conclusion and the limitations of the research, the following implications

can be drawn for researchers and practitioners:

- The number of laboratory class hours needs to be extended by the Higher Education Council. In this way, more applications can be added to improve pre-service science teachers' self-efficacy beliefs in laboratory use when the critical impact of direct experiences on self-efficacy beliefs is taken into account.
- In order to increase the effectiveness of laboratory courses, faculty members need to be able to restructure syllabuses and diversify the activities by allocating space for more details.
- The two-hour practice courses in Programme-II should be devoted not only to problem solving, but also to laboratory activities.
- The laboratory self-efficacy views of science teachers or primary school students should be the subject of future research. To increase the laboratory self-efficacy of primary school students, in-service teachers and pre-service teachers, in-service or pre-service training can be organised by identifying which dimensions are lacking.
- In future studies, the relationships between laboratory self-efficacy and some other variables, such as attitude and motivation, can be examined.

## Limitations

The present research had certain limitations that must be considered. First, the sample size of the research ( $N = 289$ ) was relatively small. Although more suitable design and methods were available for the research, it was not possible to obtain additional data, since the last pre-service teachers trained according to Programme I had graduated about two years earlier. Therefore, we cannot make causal inferences based on the results of our current research. Secondly, we adopted the concept of self-efficacy included in Bandura's (1997) social-cognitive theory. Although Bandura's theory is widely used, it has been subject to certain criticisms (e.g., Williams & Rhodes, 2016). According to Williams and Rhodes (2016), the reason why self-efficacy predicts behaviour to a large extent is because people tend to do what they are behaviourally motivated to do (self-efficacy as motivation). Considering this argument, new research to be conducted may reveal different results from the current research. Finally, we adopted Bandura's four-dimensional self-efficacy model in our research, but the four dimensions put forward by Bandura may not be the only factors affecting teacher self-efficacy. Palmer (2006), who criticises Bandura's model in this regard, states that teachers' self-efficacy is not only affected by mastery experience, but can also be affected by teachers' competences in content knowledge

and pedagogical knowledge. Therefore, different results may be obtained in studies based on new models to be developed in line with Palmer's (2006) suggestions. These constraints suggest that the outcomes of the present research should be considered as initial and investigative. It is necessary to conduct more extensive studies involving a wider range of student teacher groups to validate the results before asserting definitive conclusions.

## References

- Afacan, Ö., & Gürel, İ. (2019). The effect of quantum learning model on science teacher candidates' self-efficacy and communication skills. *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, 7(4), 86–95.
- Al-Naqbi, A. K., & Tairab, H. H. (2005). Practical laboratory work. *Journal of Faculty of Education*, 18(22), 33–39.
- Bandura, A. (1986). The explanatory and predictive scope of self-efficacy theory. *Journal of social and clinical psychology*, 4(3), 359–373.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. W. H. Freeman and Company.
- Berg, D. A. G., & Smith, L. F. (2016). Preservice teacher self-efficacy beliefs: An opportunity to generate “good research” in the Asia-Pacific region. In S. Garvis, & D. Pendergast (Eds.), *Asia-Pacific perspectives on teacher self-efficacy* (pp. 1–17). Sense Publishers.
- Bleicher, R. E., & Lindgren, J. (2005). Success in science learning and preservice science teaching self-efficacy. *Journal of science teacher education*, 16(3), 205–225.
- Böyük, U., Demir, S., & Erol, M. (2010). Analyzing the proficiency views of science and technology teachers on laboratory studies in terms of different variables. *TÜBAV Journal of Science*, 3(4), 342–349.
- Büyükköztürk, Ş., Kılıç Çakmak, E., Akgün, Ö. E., Karadeniz, Ş., & Demirel, F. (2011). *Scientific research methodology*. Pegem Academy.
- Caprara, G. V., Barbaranelli, C., Steca, P., & Malone, P. S. (2006). Teachers' self-efficacy beliefs as determinants of job satisfaction and students' academic achievement: A study at the school level. *Journal of School Psychology*, 44(6), 473–490.
- Chiapetta E. L. (2007). Inquiry-based science. Strategies and techniques for encouraging inquiry in the classroom. *The Science Teacher*, 64, 22–26.
- Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Çelik, H., Köken, O., & Kanat, H. (2021). Science teachers' competences in using laboratory appropriate inquiry approach and problems encountered. *Gazi Journal of Education Sciences*, 7(2), 196–223.
- DeCoito, I., & Myszkal, P. (2018). Connecting science instruction and teachers' self-efficacy and beliefs in STEM education. *Journal of Science Teacher Education*, 29(6), 485–503.
- Engin, G. (2020). An Examination of primary school students' academic achievements and motivation in terms of parents' attitudes, teacher motivation, teacher self-efficacy and leadership

- approach. *International Journal of Progressive Education*, 16(1), 257–276.
- Fraenkel R. J., & Wallen E. N. (2006) *How to design and evaluate research in education*. McGraw-Hill, New York.
- Fraser, B. J., & Lee, S. S. (2009). Science laboratory classroom environments in Korean high schools. *Learning Environments Research*, 12(1), 67–84.
- González-Gómez, D., Jeong, J. S., & Cañada-Cañada, F. (2022). Enhancing science self-efficacy and attitudes of pre-service teachers (PST) through a flipped classroom learning environment. *Interactive Learning Environments*, 30(5), 896–907.
- Güneş, M. H., Dilek, N. Ş., Topal, N., & Can, N. (2013). Teacher and student assessments regarding to use of science and technology laboratory. *Dicle University Journal of Ziya Gökalp Education Faculty*, 20, 1–11.
- Heradio, R., de la Torre, L., Galan, D., Cabrerizo, F. J., Herrera-Viedma, E., & Dormido, S. (2016). Virtual and remote labs in education: A bibliometric analysis. *Computers & Education*, 98, 14–38.
- Hernawati, D., Amin, M., Irawati, M., Indriwati, S., & Aziz, M. (2018). Integration of project activity to enhance the scientific process skill and self-efficacy in zoology of vertebrate teaching and learning. *EURASIA Journal of Mathematics, Science and Technology Education*, 14(6), 2475–2485.
- Higher Education Council. (2009). *Undergraduate science teacher education program*. Higher Education Council.
- Higher Education Council. (2018). *Undergraduate science teacher education program*. Higher Education Council. [https://www.yok.gov.tr/Documents/Kurumsal/egitim\\_ogretim\\_dairesi/Yeni-Ogretmen-Yetistirme-Lisans-Programlari/Fen\\_Bilgisi\\_Ogretmenligi\\_Lisans\\_Programi.pdf](https://www.yok.gov.tr/Documents/Kurumsal/egitim_ogretim_dairesi/Yeni-Ogretmen-Yetistirme-Lisans-Programlari/Fen_Bilgisi_Ogretmenligi_Lisans_Programi.pdf)
- İnce Aka, E. (2016). An investigation into prospective science teachers' attitudes towards laboratory course and self-efficacy beliefs in laboratory use. *International Journal of Environmental and Science Education*, 11(10), 3319–3331.
- Karabatak, S., & Turhan, M. (2017). Effect of web-based problem learning on school administrators' self-efficacy beliefs and attitudes towards principalship profession. *Education and Science*, 42(191), 1–29.
- Kaya, F., Borgerding, L. A., & Ferdous, T. (2020). Secondary science teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and implementation of inquiry. *Journal of Science Teacher Education*, 1–15.
- Kaymak, A. F., & Karademir, E. (2019). Preservice science teachers' views on digitalization of science laboratories. *ESTUDAM Journal of Education*, 4(1), 54–66.
- Kılıç, D., Keleş, Ö., & Uzun, N. (2015). Science teachers' self-efficacy beliefs regarding to use of laboratory: Effect of laboratory applications program. *Erzincan University Journal of Education Faculty*, 17(1), 218–236.
- Kipnis, M., & Hofstein, A. (2007). Inquiring the inquiry laboratory in high school. In R. Pinto, & D. Couso (Eds.), *Contributions from science education research*. Springer Netherlands.
- Kızıkan, O., & Saylan Kırmızıgöl, A. (2021). Science laboratory use self-efficacy scale: Validity and reliability study. *Trakya Journal of Education*, 11(1), 425–438.
- Kolil, V. K., Muthupalani, S., & Achuthan, K. (2020). Virtual experimental platforms in chemistry

- laboratory education and its impact on experimental self-efficacy. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 17(1), 1–22.
- Kwok, P.W. (2015). Science laboratory learning environments in junior secondary schools. *Asia-Pacific Forum on Science Learning and Teaching*, 16(1), 1–28.
- Leader-Janssen, E. M., & Rankin-Erickson, J. L. (2013). Preservice teachers' content knowledge and self-efficacy for teaching reading. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 52(3), 204–229.
- Levitt, K. (2001). An analysis of elementary teachers' beliefs regarding the teaching and learning of science. *Science Education*, 86, 1–2.
- Menon, D., & Sadler, T. D. (2016). Preservice elementary teachers' science self-efficacy beliefs and science content knowledge. *Journal of Science Teacher Education*, 27(6), 649–673.
- Ministry of National Education, (2018). *Elementary 3-8th grades science education curriculum*. Ministry of National Education Publications.
- Mojavezi, A., & Tamiz, M. P. (2012). The impact of teacher self-efficacy on the students' motivation and achievement. *Theory & Practice in Language Studies*, 2(3), 483–491.
- Pajares, F. (2002). Gender and perceived self-efficacy in self-regulated learning. *Theory into Practice*, 41(2), 116–125. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tipr.2003.07.001>
- Palmer, D. H. (2006). Sources of self-efficacy in a science methods course for primary teacher education students. *Research in Science Education*, 36(4), 337–353.
- Pešková, K., Spurná, M., & Knecht, P. (2019). Teachers' acceptance of curriculum reform in the Czech Republic: One decade later. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, 9(2), 73–97.
- Plourde, L. A. (2002). The influence of student teaching on preservice elementary teachers science self-efficacy and outcome expectancy beliefs. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 29(4), 245.
- Posnanski, T. J. (2002). Professional development programs for elementary science teachers: An analysis of teacher self-efficacy and professional development model. *Journal of Science Teacher Education*, 13(2), 189–220.
- Rubeck, M., & Enochs, L. (1991, April 7–10). *A path analytic model of variables that influence science and chemistry teaching self-efficacy and outcome expectancy in middle school science teachers*. [Paper presentation]. National Association for Research in Science Teaching Annual Meeting, Lake Geneva, WI, United States.
- Saracaloğlu, A. S., & Yenice, N. (2009). Investigating the self-efficacy beliefs of science and elementary teachers with respect to some variables. *Journal of Theory and Practice in Education*, 5(2), 244–260.
- Schwarzer, R., & Hallum, S. (2008). Perceived teacher self-efficacy as a predictor of job stress and burnout: Mediation analyses. *Applied Psychology*, 57(1), 152–171.
- Sezgintürk, M., & Sungur, S. (2020). A multidimensional investigation of students' science self-efficacy: The role of gender. *İlkogretim Online-Elementary Education Online*, 19(1), 208–218.
- Shahzad, K., & Naureen, S. (2017). Impact of teacher self-efficacy on secondary school students' academic achievement. *Journal of Education and Educational Development*, 4(1), 48–72.
- Singer S. R., Hilton M. L., & Schweingruber, H. A. (2005). *America's lab report: Investigations in high*

*school science*. National Academy Press.

Snetinová, M., Káčovský, P., & Machalická, J. (2018). Hands-on experiments in the interactive physics laboratory: Students' intrinsic motivation and understanding. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, 8(1), 55–75.

Soğukpınar, R., & Gündoğdu, K. (2020). Students' and teachers' views on science lesson and laboratory practices: A case study. *IBAD Journal of Social Sciences*, 8, 275–294.

Stepp, Z. A., & Brown, J. C. (2021). The (lack of) relationship between secondary science teachers' self-efficacy for culturally responsive instruction and their observed practices. *International Journal of Science Education*, 43(9), 1504–1523.

Süzer, B. (2019). *Investigation of the relationship between science teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and sources of their self-efficacy: Tokat sample*. [Master's thesis, Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University, Institute of Education Sciences].

Thomson, M. M., DiFrancesca, D., Carrier, S., & Lee, C. (2017). Teaching efficacy: Exploring relationships between mathematics and science self-efficacy beliefs, PCK and domain knowledge among preservice teachers from the United States. *Teacher Development*, 21(1), 1–20.

Usta Gezer, S. (2014). *The effects of reflective inquiry based general biology laboratory activities' on preservice science teachers' laboratory self-efficacy perceptions, critical thinking tendencies and scientific process skills*. Marmara University Institute of Education Sciences.

Vinko, L., Delaney, S., & Devetak, I. (2020). Teachers' opinions about the effect of chemistry demonstrations on students' interest and chemistry knowledge. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, 10(2), 9–25.

Vlah, N., Velki, T., & Kovacic, E. (2021). Teachers' self-efficacy based on symptoms of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder in primary school pupils. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, 11(3), 141–161.

Williams, D. M., & Rhodes, R. E. (2016). The confounded self-efficacy construct: Conceptual analysis and recommendations for future research. *Health Psychology Review*, 10(2), 113–128.

Woolnough, B. E. (1999). School science – real science? Personal knowledge, authentic science and student research projects. In M. Bandiera, S. Caravita, E. Torracca, & M. Vicentini (Eds.), *Research in science education in Europe* (pp. 245–251). Kluwer Academic Publisher.

Yener, D., Aydın, F., & Köklü, N. (2012). The effect of animation and simulation on physics self-efficacy of students in the general physics lab. *Abant İzzet Baysal University Journal of Education*, 17(2), 121–136.

## Biographical note

**OKTAY KIZKAPAN**, PhD, is an associate professor in the field of science education. He currently works at Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University, Türkiye. He has conducted various studies in the fields of teaching methods in science education and teacher education. He has published widely in national and international journals on science education and teacher education as well as gifted education.

**NAGİHAN TANIK ÖNAL**, PhD, is an associate professor of primary education at Nigde Omer Halisdemir University, Turkey. In 2009, she graduated from Erciyes University at Science Education. She completed her master's and doctoral studies at the same university. Her current research interests include science education, environmental education, science education for gifted children, and technology integration.

**ASLI SAYLAN KIRMIZIGÜL**, PhD, is an associate professor of science education at the Faculty of Education, Erciyes University, Turkey. Her research interests include epistemological belief, socio-scientific issues, STEM education, and technology-aided learning.





DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26529/cepsj.2042>

Sara Ahmed, *Complaint!*, Duke University Press, 2021,  
359 pp.: ISBN: 978-1-4780-1771-4

Reviewed by NINA PERGER<sup>1</sup>

When Bourdieu embarks on objectifying and analysing a world that tends to objectify and analyse others while refraining from and being resistant to objectifying itself – the academic field, the institution of the university – he immediately states that the title of his work *Homo academicus* might just as well be *A Book for Burning* (1988, p. 5). Delving into “native sorcery” rather than engaging in the usual objectification of distant others – with the increasing distance often being accompanied by an increasing (but sometimes false) intellectual revolutionary spirit, which exposes all of the other’s wrongs in the name of “intellectual rights” – one “must expect to see turned against him the violence he has unleashed” (Bourdieu, 1988, p. 5). Even if Sara Ahmed’s latest work, *Complaint!*, has not unleashed a counter-reaction to the degree of Bourdieu’s *Homo academicus*, it does speak about the violence unleashed against those who dare to question and expose the “native sorcery” of the field of higher education. It achieves this by focusing on harassment and bullying within the field and exposing higher educational institutions, their well-oiled machinery of reproduction and their institutional failure to address harassment and bullying effectively.

Bourdieu highlights the kind of reading he encourages when readers pick up *Homo academicus*, a reading that does not explain away all of the institutional wrongs as belonging strictly to *homo academicus gallicus*, but which is capable of identifying and taking seriously the invariants and homologies of the field that transcend the particularities of national contexts. The very same kind of reading should be encouraged when approaching *Complaint!*. Although the data on which Ahmed grounds her analysis are mostly from the UK context, its reach is broader. Additionally, it would be too narrow to limit the scope of



<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia; [nina.perger@fdv.uni-lj.si](mailto:nina.perger@fdv.uni-lj.si).

*Complaint!* to a study of *homo academicus masculinus*, not only because the work encompasses broader (including racialised) power dynamics within the field, but also because, as with Bourdieu's analysis, *Complaint!* speaks of the field of higher education as embedded in the social universe as such.

Despite the agents of higher education having a tendency to perceive themselves as above and beyond the mundaneness and mess of the social and its many struggles, the field of higher education is – whether acknowledged and addressed or not – placed at the heart of many contemporary socio-political struggles. Contemporary challenges come not only from the forces of neoliberalisation, but also in the shape of anti-democratic forces, as thematised by, for example, Brown (2023), with these forces tending to take a new form of the old issue of (state) anti-intellectualism (see, for example, Scott 2019; Fassin 2024). However, *Complaint!* also testifies to the fact that higher education is far from being invulnerable to challenges from within the field.

Throughout her work – not only in her focus on harassment and bullying as evident in *Complaint!*, but also in her previous work on diversity and its institutional life (2012), and on the uses of use (2019, see particularly the chapter on use and the university) – Ahmed shows how the notion of “institutional as usual” (2019, p. 170) itself presents a threat in relation to the free “university spirit, the spirit of inquiry and expression of truth”, as put forward by Dewey at the beginning of twentieth century (1902, p. 14). Dewey bets on the scientific community, albeit within the context of protecting academic freedom: “No fact is more significant than the growing inclination on the part of scientific associations to assume a right and duty to inquire into what affects the welfare of its own line of inquiry, however and wherever it takes place” (1902, p. 12). If we take seriously the “institutional as usual” as discussed by Ahmed, this appears to be overly optimistic.

In *Complaint!*, Ahmed continues the work developed in her discussion on diversity in *On Being Included* (2012) and extends her discussion of *complaint* and the figure of the *complainer* presented in *What's the Use?* (2019). With *Complaint!*, she continues to work on the figure of the complainer and extends its reach by putting it to use in the context of harassment within the field of higher education. Yet, *Complaint!* is not a work on harassment and bullying as much as a work on institutional failures to take complaints and complainers seriously; it is a work on how complainers become a problem for the “institutional as usual” (2019, p. 170).

Grounding her work on interviews with forty students, academics, researchers and administrators – those who have complained, those who have been involved in formal complaint procedures, and those who have thought

about complaining but refrained from doing so – Ahmed’s main question in *Complaint!* is “what happens to those who complain and what happens to a complaint” (p. 8). In order to gain insight into the fate of complaints and complainers, Ahmed relies on the concept of “institutional mechanics”, tracing how institutions work, a concept that she had already started to develop in her previous work (see 2012 and 2019) and that she briefly refers to in the first part of *Complaint!*. In this part, she turns her attention to “non-performativity” (p. 28), the gap between what the institution should (formally) do when faced with a complaint and what it actually does (or fails to do). In this sense, “the world of non-performative” is, as Ahmed states, “the world of the *as if*: papers keep circulating as if they matter in a certain way, even when they do not” (2021, p. 52), failing to bring into being what they claim to.

This part of the analysis is especially relevant, considering that institutions, including those of higher education, have a particular investment in reaping the benefits of appearing inclusive, diverse and attentive to abuses of power, as these appearances represent a particular kind of institutional symbolic capital. However, as Ahmed shows by approaching this kind of institutional “tick-ing the boxes” as non-performatives, the papers, procedures and institutional obligations to address abuses of power can coexist with “institutional as usual”, that is, without fundamentally altering the institution’s existing and normalised power dynamics, while promising to do so in the very same gesture. Institutions have ways of securing the ways of thinking and doing (see, for example, Douglas 1986); these have been thoroughly discussed in the field of sociology, including by Bourdieu. Ahmed tackles this issue in the second chapter, *On Being Stopped*, where she accounts for how complaints are stopped, either with the help of *warnings* (think about your career!), *nods* (saying yes at the very same moment as saying no), *venting* and *blanking* (saying neither yes or no) or *strategic inefficiency*. The latter stands not only for how things fail to work, but also for how things work precisely in the way they *should*, that is, with inefficiency being a key institutional reason for *not* taking up complaints.

In the second part, Ahmed turns her attention to the immanence of complaint, grounding the analysis in the aspect of temporality, emphasising the presence – the *now* – of the complaint as being a matter of the past (p. 102). In this sense, she frames the making of a complaint as a matter of a snap, a break from the institutional as usual, which enables the complainer to acknowledge the usual doings of the institution as *wrongdoings*. Put differently, and as already thematised by Mary Douglas in her seminal work on *how institutions think* (1986, pp. 112–113), a break with the naturalised “categories of [institutional] thought”, institutional fixing of identities and institutional terms for agents’

self-knowledge is needed for the possibility of a complaint to even emerge. The forming of complaints – problematising how institutions “think and do” – exposes the way complainers are framed as a *problem*, as a case of institutional “sacrilege”. This act of “sacrilege” rouses institutional forces – the very same ones that the complaint is about – into their defence against those who dare to expose the naturalised ways of institutional doing and thinking: “institutions will be institutions!”, “procedures will be procedures” (Ahmed 2021, p. 73; see also Douglas, 1986, p. 113).

This takes us back to Ahmed’s well-known previous discussions of wilful subjects (2014), particularly the figure of a (feminist) killjoy, showing once again how identifying with “the rod” (2021, p. 208) might hold the (institutional) doors open, and how the doors might be (and are) closed for rocking the institutional boat (2021, p. 239). Similar to other injunctions that seek to be fatalistic (“boys will be boys”, etc.), the slogan “institutions will be institutions!” tends to induce habituation and resignation to the ways *things just are*, the very same habituation for *things to remain just as they are*.

Yet, Ahmed’s *Complaint!* – as already evident in her previous work, in which killjoys stubbornly exist and persist – does not stop at analysing what happens to the complainers and complaints. In this context, we can follow how her conceptual tools, figures and metaphors continue to travel around in her oeuvre, from one setting to another. In her previous work, readers have already met the figures and metaphors of killjoys, the rod, and the stubborn arms and hands reaching out of the ground. As Ahmed concludes in her work on wilful subjects: “Willful parts: hands which are not hand. This book has been full of such parts, wayward parts: parts that will not budge, that refuse to participate, parts that keep coming up, when they are not even supposed to be” (2014, p. 194). Throughout *Complaint!*, these parts continue to persist and come up in Ahmed’s explicit discussion on the role of *complaint collectives*, treating the complaint itself as another arm “still rising, still coming out of the ground, not yet done, not yet beaten” (2021, p. 276). In this sense, *Complaint!* also calls for transforming institutions and resisting their naturalised and normalised inheritance by demanding that they and their agents put into practice what they are promising on paper.

From the perspective of delving into the “native sorcery” of higher education institutions (Bourdieu 1988, p. 5), which should be kept hidden in order to remain normalised and naturalised, as well as from the perspective of the “sacrilege” of speaking of the unspeakable – of power dynamics and their abuses within a field that puts immense effort into appearing *disinterested* in power – *Complaint!* represents a tool for potential liberty, as Bourdieu also proposes

in relation to his work on *homo academicus* (1988, p. 5). As overly optimistic as Dewey's bet on scientific community appears to be, it is – in the sense of university institutions doings and thinking *differently* – also a necessary wager. However, this wager can only be waged, as Ahmed (2021) emphasises, *collectively*.

## References

- Ahmed, S. (2010). *The promise of happiness*. Duke University Press.
- Ahmed, S. (2012). *On being included: Racism and diversity in institutional life*. Duke University Press.
- Ahmed, S. (2014). *Willful subjects*. Duke University Press.
- Ahmed, S. (2019). *What's the use? On the uses of use*. Duke University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1988). *Homo academicus*. Stanford University Press.
- Brown, W. (2023). *Nihilistic times: Thinking with Max Weber*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Dewey, J. (1902). Academic freedom. *Educational review*, 23(14), 1–14.
- Douglas, M. (1986). *How institutions think. The Frank W. Abrams Lectures*. Syracuse University Press.
- Fassin, É. (2024). *State anti-intellectualism & the politics of gender and race: Illiberal France and beyond*. Central European University Press.
- Scott, J. W. (2019). *Knowledge, power, and academic freedom*. Columbia University Press.



## List of Referees in Year 2024

The members of the editorial board would like to thank the reviewers for their professional reviews of the contributions.

Venus M. Avenido	Mojca Jevšnik
Blaženka Bačlija Sušić	Katja Jeznik
Nikola Baketa	Brigita Kacjan
Darlin Jane T. Balbastro	Marko Kalan
Branka Baranović	Maja Kerneža
Sanja Berčnik	Myint Swe Khine
Mari Bergroth	Manja Klemenčič
Romana Bešter	Mija Marija Klemenčič Rozman
Radmila Bodrič	Zdenka Kolar-Begović
Silva Bratož	Milena Košak Babuder
Lara Burazer	Katja Košir
Ladislav Cabada	Bojan Kovačič
Colin Calleja	Janez Krek
Kristina Cergol	Zora Krnjaić
Chiou-hui Chou	Boštjan Kuzman
Ivana Cindrić	Meta Lah
Marija Cvijetić	Louise Lehane
Mateja Dagarin Fojkar	Narelle Lemon
Bojana Dimitrijević	Melita Lemut Bajec
Snježana Dobrota	Irena Lesar
Rajka Đević	Vesna Leskošek
Farhi Faycal	Beate Lindemann
Slavko Gaber	Sabine Little
Danuta Gajewska	Birgitte Lund Nielsen
Luciane Goes	Jasna Maksimović
Nikolaja Golob	Frane Malenica
Annmarie Gorenc Zoran	Jasna Mažgon
Milena Grmek Ivanuš	Patricie Mertova
Katarina Habe	Marinela Velikova Mihova
Elisabeth Hofer	Vesna Milanović
Nataša Hoić Božić	Željka Milin Šipuš
Saša Horvat	Ivana Milković
Georgeta Ion	Irena Nančovska Šerbec
Saša Jazbec	Jerneja Novšak Brce

Ana Pešikan-Avramović

Danijela Petrović

Barbora Petrů Puhrová

Anja Pirih

Karmen Pižorn

Romina Plešec Gasparič

Uršula Podobnik

Mojca Poredoš

Saša Puzić

Željko Rački

Špela Razpotnik

Andreja Retelj

Ksenija Romstein

Laura Rožman Krivec

Blerim Saqipi

Matej Sardoč

Nataša Simić

Zrinjka Stančić

Jelena Starčević

Vesna Svalina

Mohamad Syarif Sumantri

Vasileios Symeonidis

Marjana Šifrar Kalan

Marjan Šimenc

Jelena Teodorović

Jelisaveta Todorović

Zlata Tomljenović

Bea Tomšič Amon

Gregor Torkar

Gurkan Tuna

Daniela Tuparova

Matej Tušak

Janja Usenik

Sylvia Atanasova Velikova

Matej Vošnjak

Natalija Vovk Ornik

Tina Vršnik Perše

Milja Vujačić

Jelena Vujić

Elsa Westergard

Christian Wiesner

Ronald Yaros

Konstanca Zalar

Darja Zorc Maver

Mojca Žefran

Urška Žerak

Erik Žovinec

Marijana Županić Benić



**Instructions for Authors for publishing in CEPS Journal** (<https://www.cepsj.si/index.php/cepsj/about/submissions>)

---

#### **Submissions**

Manuscript should be from 5,000 to 7,000 words long, including abstract and reference list. Manuscript should be not more than 20 pages in length, and should be original and unpublished work not currently under review by another journal or publisher.

---

#### **Review Process**

Manuscripts are reviewed initially by the Editors and only those meeting the aims and scope of the journal will be sent for blind review. Each manuscript is reviewed by at least two referees. All manuscripts are reviewed as rapidly as possible, but the review process usually takes at least 3 months. The ceps Journal has an online-based review system via the Open Journal System. All submissions should be made via the ojs – <http://cepsj.si/>.

For more information visit our web page <http://cepsj.si/>.

---

#### **Abstracting and indexing**

Scopus | EBSCO - Education Source Publications | Cooperative Online Bibliographic System and Services (COBISS) | Digital Library of Slovenia - dLib | DOAJ - Directory for Open Access Journals | Academic Journals Database | ERIH PLUS | ERIC | Elektronische Zeitschriftenbibliothek EZB (Electronic Journals Library) | Base-Search | DRJI - The Directory of Research Journal Indexing | GSU - Georgia State University Library | MLibrary - University of Michigan | NewJour | NYU Libraries | OHIO LINK | Open Access Journals Search Engine (OAJSE) | PEDOCs: open access to educational science literature | ResearchBib | Scirus | Ulrich's International Periodicals Directory; New Providence, USA

---

Annual Subscription (4 issues). Individuals 45 €; Institutions 90 €. Order by e-mail: [info@cepsj.si](mailto:info@cepsj.si); postal address: CEPS Journal, Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana, Kardeljeva ploščad 16, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia.

---

Online edition at <http://cepsj.si/>.

Number of copies printed: 150

**Navodila za avtorje prispevkov v reviji** (<https://www.cepsj.si/index.php/cepsj/about/submissions>)

---

#### **Prispevek**

Prispevek lahko obsega od 5.000 do 7.000 besed, vključno s povzetkom in viri. Ne sme biti daljši od 20 strani, mora biti izvirno, še ne objavljeno delo, ki ni v recenzijemskem postopku pri drugi reviji ali založniku.

---

#### **Recenzijski postopek**

Prispevki, ki na podlagi presoje urednikov ustrezajo ciljem in namenu revije, gredo v postopek anonimnega recenziranja. Vsak prispevek recenzirata najmanj dva recenzenta. Recenzije so pridobljene, kolikor hitro je mogoče, a postopek lahko traja do 3 mesece. Revija vodi recenzijski postopek preko Open Journal System (OJS). Postopek oddaje prispevka poteka preko OJS na strani: <http://cepsj.si/>.

Več informacij lahko preberete na spletni strani <http://cepsj.si/>.

---

#### **Povzetki in indeksiranje**

Scopus | EBSCO - Education Source Publications | Cooperative Online Bibliographic System and Services (COBISS) | Digital Library of Slovenia - dLib | DOAJ - Directory for Open Access Journals | Academic Journals Database | ERIH PLUS | ERIC | Elektronische Zeitschriftenbibliothek EZB (Electronic Journals Library) | Base-Search | DRJI - The Directory of Research Journal Indexing | GSU - Georgia State University Library | MLibrary - University of Michigan | NewJour | NYU Libraries | OHIO LINK | Open Access Journals Search Engine (OAJSE) | PEDOCs: open access to educational science literature | ResearchBib | Scirus | Ulrich's International Periodicals Directory; New Providence, USA

---

Letna naročnina (4 številke). Posamezniki 45 €; pravne osebe 90 €. Naročila po e-pošti: [info@cepsj.si](mailto:info@cepsj.si); pošti: Revija CEPS, Pedagoška fakulteta, Univerza v Ljubljani, Kardeljeva ploščad 16, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia.

---

Spletna izdaja na <http://cepsj.si/>.

Naklada tiskane izdaja: 150 izvodov



UNIVERZA  
V LJUBLJANI

PEF

Pedagoška  
fakulteta

## C O N T E N T S

### C•E•P•S Journal

Center for Educational  
Policy Studies Journal

Revija Centra za študij  
edukacijskih strategij

Vol.14 | N°4 | 2024

<http://cepsj.si>

#### EDITORIAL

Discrimination of Children in Vulnerable Situations in Education:

The Current State of Affairs and Strategies for Overcoming It

SUNČICA MACURA and MOJCA PEČEK

#### FOCUS

The Approach of Schools to Ethnic Diversity: The Perspective of Majority  
and Minority Pupils

*Pristop šol k etnični raznolikosti: pogledi učenk in učencev večinske in manjšinskih  
etničnih skupin*

— KARMEN MLINAR and MOJCA PEČEK

Young People with Complex Needs as a Particular Challenge for the Education System

*Mladi s kompleksnimi potrebami kot poseben izziv za vzgojno-izobraževalni sistem*

— ŠPELA RAZPOTNIK, MATEJ SANDE, BOJAN DEKLEVA, DARJA TADIČ,

MIJA MARIJA KLEMENČIČ ROZMAN and JANA RAPUŠ PAVEL

The Uncertainty of School in a Time of Uncertainty: Perspectives of Different

Coalitions in the Aftermath of the School Mass Shooting in Serbia

*Negotovost šole v času negotovosti: perspektive različnih koalicij po množičnem streljanju  
na šoli v Srbiji*

— SANJA STOJILJKOVIČ and BARBARA BLAŽANIN

Challenging Divisions Through Teacher Education and History Teaching:

The Case of Bosnia and Herzegovina

*Problemiziranje razdeljenosti skozi izobraževanje učiteljev in poučevanje zgodovine:  
primer Bosne in Hercegovine*

— LARISA KASUMAGIĆ-KAFEDŽIĆ and LEJLA MULALIĆ

Dropout From the Primary Education System of Roma Children from Substandard  
Settlements in Serbia: The View of Pedagogical Assistants

*Osip romskih otrok iz podstandardnih naselij v Srbiji iz sistema osnovnošolskega  
izobraževanja: pogled pedagoških pomočnikov*

— STEFAN MILUTINOVIĆ and VOJIN SIMUNOVIĆ

#### VARIA

The Role and Effect of Profanity in Children's Literature

*Vloga in učinek preklinjanja v otroški literaturi*

— SABINA VIŠČEK

Rural Teacher Competencies: An International Comparative Study on the Territorial

Dimension of Rural Schools

*Kompetence učiteljev na podeželskih šolah: mednarodna primerjalna študija o ozemelski  
dimenziji podeželskih šol*

— JUAN LORENZO LACRUZ, FRANCESC BUSCÀ DONET and PILAR ABÓS OLIVARES

What is the Role of Science in Post-Socialist Education and Society?

Insights from a Survey of Preschool Teachers from Croatia, Serbia and Slovenia

*Kakšna je vloga znanosti v postsocialističnem izobraževanju in družbi?*

*Spoznanja iz raziskave med vzgojitelji predšolskih otrok iz Hrvaške, Srbije in iz Slovenije*

— ŽELJKA IVKOVIĆ HODŽIĆ, LIDIJA VUJIČIĆ and ŽELJKO BONETA

Laboratory Use Self-Efficacy of Turkish Pre-Service Science Teachers Trained  
in Different Teacher Education Programmes

*Samoučinkovitost uporabe laboratorija pri turških študentih, bodočih učiteljih  
naravoslovja, ki so se usposabljali v različnih programih izobraževanja učiteljev*

— OKTAY KIZKAPAN, NAGIHAN TANIK ÖNAL and ASLI SAYLAN KIRMIZIGÜL

#### REVIEW

Sara Ahmed, *Complaint!*, Duke University Press, 2021; 359 pp.:

ISBN 978-1-4780-1771-4

— NINA PERGER

ISSN 1855-9719

