

Secondary School Students' Perspectives on Cultural Diversity:

Insights from Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Italy and Spain

Perspetivas dos Alunos do Ensino Secundário sobre a Diversidade Cultural:

Visões da Bulgária, Alemanha, Grécia, Itália e Espanha

Maria Luisa Sierra-Huedo¹

Marina Agualeles²

Ana C. Romea³

Lindsey Bruton⁴

ABSTRACT: This study investigates secondary school students' perceptions of cultural diversity across five European countries: Italy, Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, and Spain. Using a quantitative research approach, the study involved a survey designed to assess students' attitudes towards cultural diversity and critical thinking. The total number of students participating in the study is 352. The findings reveal a generally positive disposition towards cultural diversity, with students demonstrating empathy and support for marginalized individuals, as well as culturally diverse people in familiar scenarios. However, responses to more complex and controversial issues, such as religious practices

¹ Maria Luisa Sierra-Huedo (<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8809-7924>) holds a Ph.D. in International Higher Education by the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, (USA). Master of Arts in Comparative International Development Education from the University of Minnesota. Degree in English Linguistics by Zaragoza University. She is a lecturer and researcher at San Jorge University (Spain) and a member of the research group Migrations, Interculturalism and Human Development (MIDH).

² Marina Agualeles (<https://orcid.org/0009-0005-2649-8761>) is a lecturer and researcher at San Jorge University (Spain) and a member of the research group Migrations, Interculturalism and Human Development (MIDH). She holds a Ph.D. in Translation, Gender and Cultural Studies (University of Vic); a Master's degree in Leadership and Administration (San Jorge University); a Master's degree in Human Resources Management (Camilo José Cela University & IMF Business School) and a Bachelor's degree in Translation and Intercultural Communication. Currently, she is the director of the Business and Administration Degree at San Jorge University. In the past, she also worked for more than 10 years in management positions in the field of international education.

³ Ana C. Romea (<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2653-2182>) holds a Ph.D. in Sociology of Public and Social Policies, by the University of Zaragoza and is a member of the research group Migrations, Interculturalism and Human Development (MIDH) at San Jorge University (Spain). She is a lecturer and a researcher at the Faculty of Communication and Social Sciences of San Jorge University and her main areas of research are focused on Sociology.

⁴ Lindsey Bruton (<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-6569-9788>) holds a BA Hons degree in English and European Literature (University of Warwick, UK), MSc in Applied linguistics (University of Aston, UK) and an MA in Teaching English (Universidad de Alcalá, Spain). She currently teaches Language teaching Pedagogy and English for specific purposes at Universidad San Jorge (Zaragoza, Spain). She has 4 decades experience in TEFL, ESP, TESOL and teacher training in the UK, France, Finland and Spain. Lindsey's research interests centre on innovation in teaching and learning and its use in promoting critical thinking and inclusivity.

and gender identity, were mixed, indicating the need for more structured intercultural learning interventions. The study highlights the importance of intercultural competence development and critical thinking training in schools to better prepare students for life in an intercultural society. These results informed the development of the Reciprocal Maieutic Approach (RMA) under the Erasmus+ REACT project, aimed at enhancing critical thinking and inclusive education practices.

KEYWORDS: Intercultural Competence, Critical Thinking, Interculturality, Sociology of Education, Secondary Education

RESUMO: Este estudo analisa a percepção dos alunos do ensino secundário sobre a diversidade cultural em cinco países europeus: Itália, Bulgária, Alemanha, Grécia e Espanha. Recorrendo a uma abordagem de investigação quantitativa, o estudo consistiu na realização de um inquérito destinado a avaliar as atitudes dos alunos em relação à diversidade cultural e ao pensamento crítico. No total, participaram no estudo 352 estudantes. Os resultados revelam uma disposição geralmente positiva em relação à diversidade cultural, com os alunos a demonstrarem empatia e apoio a indivíduos marginalizados, bem como a pessoas culturalmente diversas no seio familiar. No entanto, as respostas a questões mais complexas e controversas, como as práticas religiosas e a identidade de género, foram mistas, indicando a necessidade de intervenções de aprendizagem intercultural mais estruturadas. O estudo salienta a importância do desenvolvimento de competências interculturais e da formação em pensamento crítico nas escolas, de modo a preparar melhor os alunos para a vida numa sociedade intercultural. Estes resultados serviram de base ao desenvolvimento da Abordagem Maiêutica Recíproca (AMR) no âmbito do projeto Erasmus+ REACT, que visa melhorar o pensamento crítico e as práticas de educação inclusiva.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Competência Intercultural, Pensamento Crítico, Interculturalidade, Sociologia da Educação, Ensino Secundário

1. Introduction

In today's multicultural, globalized, digital, and diverse society, providing an education that enhances intercultural competencies and critical thinking, while fostering tolerance and openness, and mitigating prejudice and stereotypes, is more vital than ever. This article aims to describe and analyze the results of quantitative research conducted with secondary school students across five European countries: Italy, Bulgaria, Germany, Greece and Spain, focusing on participants' attitudes and responses to cultural diversity. This survey serves as a foundational step in the development of the Reciprocal Maieutic Approach (RMA) through the Erasmus+ REACT project (REciprocal maieutic Approach

pathways enhancing Critical Thinking). The REACT project aims to implement an innovative methodology that enhances critical thinking skills and supports inclusive education and values such as tolerance and the acceptance of diversity. The RMA uses dialogic learning to explore and understand the origins of intolerance, prejudices, and stereotypes. It also motivates teachers, students, and parents to learn actively and independently, embracing the Montessori principle of "help me do it myself." The REACT project was piloted in Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Italy and Spain, and has been shown to foster dialogue, reflection, empathy, and critical thinking among secondary school and vocational training center students.

Students often encounter diversity for the first time at school, so this article first discusses the importance of developing intercultural competences and critical thinking in this setting. This provides a comprehensive background for the survey and its findings, specifically relating to the question: "how do secondary school students face cultural diversity in their daily lives and at school?"

2. Theoretical Framework

Cultural diversity is one of the most important characteristics of our globalized context today. Digital connectedness is, of course, another. How we perceive reality is very much related to our own real or virtual experiences. The rapid expansion of fake news promotes stereotypes and prejudices, often but not only among young people. It has never been so easy to access all kinds of information and news. It has never been so difficult to discern what is true from what is false in that information and news. Who wrote what and why, have become very difficult questions to answer. Advances in IT and AI are very fast, faster than our educational systems and reforms can keep pace with. Questioning the who, how, what and why of online texts has become a key competence to develop among young people. Developing critical thinking skills, as well as intercultural competence, is key if young people are to be educated in peace.

Already in 1996, Jacques Delors, in his seminal work *Learning: the treasure within*, affirmed that the major challenges our students would face would be: environmental; technological; economic and intercultural. Climate change is a global issue that affects us all, we all live in our only home, planet Earth, and even though natural disasters might be happening far away their causes and consequences affect us directly. The use of artificial intelligence is something that affects us all in ways that are still unfamiliar. The speed with which we can communicate nowadays and with which news travels is a very recent phenomenon. The economic crisis that began in 2008 continues to affect employment and housing mainly among young people. Finally, interculturality: because of the aforementioned challenges and others, many people move to other countries seeking security or a better life for themselves and their families. There is no doubt that our societies are more diverse than ever before.

Education has an important role to play in training young people how to face and tackle all these challenges. We should educate them to live in peaceful intercultural understanding, which is indeed a great challenge (Delors, 1996).

2.1. The REACT Project

The REACT project seeks to promote inclusion in secondary education by integrating the Reciprocal Maieutic Approach (RMA) with elements of the Montessori method. Developed by Danilo Dolci, the RMA promotes active citizenship, critical thinking, and dialogic learning. It uses participants' experiences and intuitions as starting points for a collective exploration of key concepts in inclusive education and stereotype formation. The RMA encourages critical thinking and provides a safe space for participants to engage in meaningful dialogue, aiming to reduce intolerance and stereotypical thinking. This method, adaptable to various school subjects and educational levels, emphasizes the role of teachers in preparing the learning environment, observing, and intervening only when necessary, allowing students to lead their own learning process (Giessen, 2024; Rizzo, 2013).

The results of the student survey, which form the basis of this article, represent the initial phase of the project, gathering information on students' perceptions of the impact of cultural diversity on their daily lives. These findings informed the RMA workshops, ensuring that they addressed the real concerns and experiences of the students.

2.2 Intercultural Competence and Critical Thinking in Education

In an era characterized by rapid globalization and increasing cultural diversity, fostering intercultural competence and critical thinking in educational settings has become essential. Intercultural competence involves the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people of other cultures, and it includes understanding and respecting cultural differences (Deardorff, 2006). According to Nussbaum (1997 & 2012), it can also be called empathy towards the multicultural other. It is a competence that may take a lifetime to mature, and its development affects us cognitively (educational training), behaviorally, and psychologically.

However, there are a number of studies that affirm that this competence does not develop naturally but that specific training is needed to foster intercultural competence (Bennett, 1993; Deardorff, 2006, 2009; Sierra-Huedo & Nevado Llopis, 2022). At the same time, experiential learning is also key to facing cultural differences and to experiencing work and/or study with people who are very different from oneself (Paige, 1993; Bennett, 1993). How do you develop empathy towards someone who is very different from you? How can you do this when you usually relate to people who are similar to you culturally and socially? In order to develop intercultural competence, you need to work on cognitive, behavioral and psychological aspects. For this research, we understand intercultural

competence as the ability to behave and communicate “effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Deardorff, 2006). It involves “knowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and to interact; valuing others' values, beliefs, and behaviors; and relativizing oneself” (Byram, 1997, p.34).

We also understand that the development of intercultural competence can be seen as a developmental process on a continuum, following the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity developed by Milton Bennett (1993), that may start at an early age if subjects are in contact with diversity (Sierra-Huedo & Foucart, 2022). There are few studies that measure the development of intercultural competence among secondary school students and perhaps even fewer that assess intercultural learning interventions in secondary education. Those studies that have been developed conclude that the earlier students begin to work on the development of their intercultural competence, the better (Schwarzenthal, Schachner, Juang & Van De Vijver, 2020).

Schools are regarded as the ideal setting to begin to promote the development of intercultural competence. Diversity in the classroom is a fact, and prejudices and stereotypes can be confronted in schools where the diversity found in classrooms can provide the perfect opportunity to dismantle those stereotypes using appropriate methodologies (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2008; Wells et al., 2016; Tropp and Saxena, 2018). As long ago as 1964, Allport researched and studied how students with diverse cultural backgrounds who are guided in different learning activities (intercultural learning interventions) begin to make contact with people who are very different from them and start getting to know people with different cultural backgrounds on a personal level (Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew, 2008; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2000; Schwarzenthal, Schachner, Juang, & Van De Vijver, 2020). These types of intercultural learning activities, conducted with a teacher’s guidance, can be a positive experience, and may represent the beginning of the development of intercultural competence. Observing as well as reflecting are key to developing intercultural competence. When facing new situations or intercultural conflicts, teachers should help students to be able to analyze what they are seeing and experiencing and to think about how this may affect others.

Critical thinking, in addition to intercultural competence, is also vital for preparing students to navigate and contribute to a multicultural world. Critical thinking entails the ability to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information, leading to more informed and reflective judgments (Paul & Elder, 2014). It has also been defined as “the ability to analyze facts, generate and organize ideas, defend opinions, make comparisons, evaluate arguments, without passively accepting what is read, but learning to rise question on information” (Crosta & Banda, 2021, p.69).

Fifteen abilities directly related to critical thinking have been identified by Crosta & Banda, (2021): Focusing on a question posed in a general way; being able to analyze different arguments; asking questions and/or challenging arguments; questioning the credibility of a source; observing and

judging observation reports; deducing; making generalizations; making and judging values; defining terms and definitions and finally following problem solving steps. Both competencies, intercultural competence and critical thinking, are vital for preparing students to navigate and contribute to a multicultural world; these competencies are interrelated and should be developed together to enhance students' ability to navigate and understand diverse cultural contexts (Miralimovna, 2020; Namsaeng & Ambele, 2023; Soboleva & Lomakina, 2019; Yankina, 2021; Yue & Ning, 2015). It is also relevant to mention that critical thinking is not a universal skill as it is influenced by cultural contexts. Therefore, teaching methods should consider cultural differences to make critical thinking more relevant and effective in intercultural interactions (López-Rocha, 2020; Sobkowiak, 2016; Yershova et al., 2000). Pedagogical approaches such as critical pedagogy, comparative pedagogy and intercultural pedagogy are effective in fostering both critical thinking and intercultural competence (Yue & Ning, 2015).

2.3 The impact of Cultural Diversity on Students

Secondary school students encounter cultural diversity in various aspects of their daily lives and school environments. Understanding how they face and manage this diversity is crucial for fostering inclusive and supportive educational settings. Research indicates that students often encounter cultural diversity for the first time at school, making educational institutions critical sites for developing intercultural competence (Banks, 2015). Students' understanding of cultural diversity is deeply intertwined with their personal, social, and moral experiences. This integration can create dialogical tensions, making it challenging to transform everyday experiences into more structured, objective scientific concepts (Grossen & Mirza, 2019). Critical thinking can be defined as “reasonable and reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do” (Ennis, 2011, p.1), involving a disciplined process of conceptualizing, analyzing and synthesizing any kind of information acquired by observing, experiencing or communicating and it is also a skill in which training is necessary (The Foundation of Critical Thinking, 2024).

A positive cultural diversity climate, characterized by equality, inclusion, and cultural pluralism, is associated with better student outcomes, including academic achievement, self-concept, and life satisfaction. This positive effect is mediated by a sense of belonging at school and is beneficial for both immigrant and non-immigrant students (Schachner et al., 2019, 2021). Thus, schools play a pivotal role in shaping students' attitudes towards cultural diversity. Educators who employ inclusive teaching strategies and encourage open dialogue about cultural differences can significantly influence students' acceptance and respect for diversity (Gay, 2018). Teachers view cultural diversity as both a challenge and an opportunity. Effective inclusion requires teachers to develop a knowledge base about cultural diversity, incorporate diverse content into the curriculum, and create caring, inclusive learning communities (Gay, 2002; Hue & Kennedy, 2014; Semião et al., 2023).

Culturally responsive teaching, which uses students' cultural backgrounds as a foundation for learning, is essential to improve the academic success of ethnically diverse students. This approach includes understanding cultural diversity, integrating it into the curriculum, and adapting teaching methods to meet diverse needs (Gay, 2002; Hue & Kennedy, 2014). School counsellors also play a pivotal role in addressing the needs of immigrant students by implementing culturally sensitive responses and fostering collaboration among all stakeholders. Schools are seen as key environments for celebrating and managing cultural diversity (González-Falcón et al., 2022). Secondary school students' experiences with cultural diversity are multifaceted, involving personal, social, and educational dimensions. A positive cultural diversity climate, supported by inclusive teaching practices and the active involvement of teachers and counsellors, is crucial for fostering a sense of belonging and improving student outcomes. Effective management of cultural diversity in schools requires a comprehensive approach that integrates students' cultural backgrounds into the educational process.

Research therefore shows that training in critical thinking and intercultural competence is necessary at secondary school level. The REACT project represents an attempt to develop these skills. The initial stages of the project involved a questionnaire about attitudes to cultural diversity given to secondary school students aged 10 to 19 as a means of assessing students' existing attitudes with a view to adjusting the REACT project more accurately to their needs.

3. Materials and Methods

The primary aim of this study was to investigate the impact of cultural diversity on young people's experiences both at school and in their everyday lives. A quantitative approach was employed for data collection, by means of online surveys as the primary tool. The findings from the student group surveyed can be generalized to a broader population, allowing for assertions about this demographic. This is achieved through the analysis of data using numerical and statistical methods, consistent with Creswell's (2009) guidelines.

3.1. Tool: Online Survey

An online survey was used for this research. There were 25 questions, divided into 3 sections: demographic data, critical incidents, the others, the world. The survey underwent validation in each participating country. Prior to its final distribution, ten students from each country completed the survey, providing feedback on the complexity of the questions, language adaptation, and any other difficulties encountered. Based on this feedback, the questionnaire was refined, resulting in the final version used in this study.

3.2. Participants

A total of 352 participants completed the survey, 180 female, 168 male and 4 other gender. The age distribution ranged from 10 to 19 years, with a mean value of 14.7 years, a median value of 5.0 years and 1.78 standard deviation. In total, students from 27 different schools participated in the study. Quantitative methodology was considered the best methodology to analyze how secondary students face cultural diversity.

4. Results

4.1. Critical incidents

This section presents a summary of the findings from the analysis of responses to each of six critical incidents which were designed to assess students' attitudes and predispositions towards various situations and subjects related to cultural diversity. The operational definition of this conceptual dimension is based on the storytelling technique, presenting five narratives centered around different cultural diversity episodes. Each scenario consists of a story followed by a series of items that reflect potential emotional or rational reactions to the narrative. These aim to gauge the respondent's stance on specific aspects of cultural diversity illustrated in the story.

Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement with each item on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." For each story, the responses to these items were combined into a composite index to succinctly represent each respondent's position on the specific aspect of cultural diversity being examined. These indices were specifically constructed to measure the degree of acceptance of cultural diversity. A higher score indicates greater respect for the cultures represented in the scenario, with high scores corresponding to "Strongly Agree" or "Agree" responses to all items. Conversely, a low score indicates "Strongly Disagree" or "Disagree" responses. Items with reverse semantic polarity were adjusted accordingly. All the critical incidents were daily life situations that any teenager may encounter.

The first scenario revolves around this story of poverty and marginalization is called "The boy in front of the supermarket". Most respondents demonstrated empathy and understanding for a foreign boy begging in front of a supermarket. When combining 'strongly agree' and 'agree' responses, these items received over 70% approval. The statement expressing a negative emotion towards the boy was disapproved by more than 77% of the students. The analysis of the composite indicators, created by combining respondents' answers to the three items, supports these findings: 83.0% of the students expressed sympathy towards the boy standing in front of the supermarket.

The second critical incident, called "The immigrant center in the neighborhood" is about an immigrant center and addresses a current and potentially contentious topic about its creation in the students' neighborhood. Data analysis indicates that most students are not concerned about the opening

of an immigrant center, viewing integration as a feasible and desirable objective. In fact, the most endorsed statement (with 81.9% either Strongly Agreeing or Agreeing) emphasizes the importance of understanding the perspectives of migrants. Conversely, the first statement, which voices opposition to the center, is not favored by the majority (56.3% Strongly Disagree or Disagree). The combination of 'agree' and 'strongly agree' responses represent 75.9% of respondents who support the opening of an immigrant center, demonstrating a welcoming attitude towards foreigners. Nevertheless, a considerable portion of participants (21.0%) remain ambivalent about the matter, predominantly selecting "Neither agree nor disagree" for most items in the scenario or providing inconsistent responses.

Religious convictions form the foundation of the assumptions in the third critical incident, called "A 'different' girl": a Muslim girl is new in the school, and she wears a veil. The analysis of responses to the items developed for this incident reveals intriguing insights. Although students generally appear to respect cultural diversity concerning religious beliefs, item number 3, "Wearing a veil for a girl is a limitation to her freedom as a woman," received mixed reactions. In fact, the students' opinions are nearly evenly divided among those who disagree, those who are undecided, and those who agree. A composite view of results reflects the same, with 50.9% of students demonstrating a clear disposition to respect and accept cultural diversity concerning religious beliefs, while 39.4% hold a more neutral or lukewarm stance on the matter.

The "A *different* girl?" incident deals explicitly with a very sensitive issue that is, at the same time, very close to students' daily life experiences: acts of bullying toward a schoolmate who expresses a non-normative sexual and gender identity. This incident, therefore, directly addresses the issue of cultural diversity related to sexual orientation and gender identity. According to the replies there is a high level of cultural awareness regarding this type of difference. In fact, almost all respondents (Strongly agree + Agree = 89.3%) agreed with the statement "it's not fair to make fun of a mate just because they have a different sexual orientation". Moreover, two items stating positions against the freedom to express one's identity (item 1) and the fact that the school is a discussion ground for these topics (item 4) are disapproved by the majority of respondents (Strongly disagree + Disagree is equal to 67.1% for the former, and 68.8% for the latter). However, as in the previous scenario, one item split the students almost equally between those who are against (34.6%), those who are undecided (36.2%) and those who are for (29.2%), namely: "These are things that should remain private, not shared publicly." It is very likely that the choice to disclose one's sexual orientation or, on the contrary, to consider it a purely private matter is considered a matter that goes beyond the acceptance of cultural diversity in this case.

An analysis of the overall scores shows that 63.0% of the students falls into the "high" modality, this means that our sample is characterized by a relatively high level of awareness of the existence of

different gender identities and sexual orientations that should be accepted and respected. Only 6.0% of the respondents could be considered as being against differences in sexual orientation

The fifth critical incident called “Other cultures”, explores the differences and challenges encountered when interacting with young people from different cultural backgrounds, specifically focusing on the Roma culture. The Roma boy has poor results in certain subjects. The results indicate that most students are comfortable interacting with and engaging in dialogue with cultures perceived as very different from their own. This is evidenced by strong agreement with item 3 (Strongly agree + Agree = 88.6%) and item 2 (Strongly agree + Agree = 85.2%). Additionally, many students believe that Dario could be integrated into the group (item 1, Strongly disagree + Disagree = 60.6%) with support from educational institutions (item 4, Strongly disagree + Disagree = 69.5%). While most respondents do not take a selfish stance on Dario’s issue (item 5, Strongly disagree + Disagree = 56.3%), a significant proportion of students remain neutral (Neither agree nor disagree = 29.5%).

Composite results can be summarized as follows: 67.7% of students are classified as “high,” indicating they care about integrating and respecting people from other cultures. However, a significant portion of respondents (25.4%) fall into an intermediate category, suggesting that their awareness of cultural diversity is still developing.

The last critical incident called “Heavy jokes” addresses the issue of school bullying, vividly describing an episode that may occur in the normal daily routine of school activities. The majority of the respondents think that school should be a respectful setting where everyone can express their identity (item 3, Strongly agree + Agree = 91.5%), a safe and proactive environment (item 2, Strongly agree + Agree = 84.9%). This view is reinforced by the fact that the majority of respondents disapproved of the two sentences stating that the School should not deal with students' personal problems (item 4, Strongly disagree + Disagree = 76.5%) and that it is a place where shy and sensitive people are hopelessly doomed to be bullied by the others (item 1, Strongly disagree + Disagree = 61.0%).

Bullying is undoubtedly a problem with respect to which students' awareness is very high: the results of the combined result analysis show that 79.7% of respondents fall into the "High" modality which means they strongly affirm that school should be an inclusive place, a welcoming place where all young people can freely share their ideas, passions and express their mood and their personal nature without fear.

4.2. Myself, the others, the world

The final section of the students' questionnaire aimed to gather data on psychological aspects related to their self-concept. Self-concept refers to the set of knowledge that an individual consciously processes about themselves, including their physical appearance, attitudes, interpersonal relationships,

how they believe others perceive them, their view of the world, their expectations, and their perceived feelings (Palmonari, 1993). This dimension was operationalized through a set of seven items focusing on personal traits such as emotions, openness to cultural diversity, empathy, conflict management, and listening skills. Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement with each item on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 'Strongly disagree' to 'Strongly agree' (Table 1).

Table 1. “Myself, the others, the world”, dimension

| Myself, the others, the world | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither agree nor disagree | Agree | Strongly agree | Total |
|---|--------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------|--------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| I always try to put myself in the shoes of others. | 5,4 | 5,8 | 11,0 | 50,1 | 22,7 | 100 |
| I know what my friends feel, even when they don't tell me | 0,8 | 6,1 | 18,2 | 53,3 | 21,6 | 100 |
| I am interested in listening to the points of view and experiences of others even if they are different from mine | 2,0 | 2,9 | 9,5 | 43,5 | 42,1 | 100 |
| In a conflict I almost always try to mediate, to find a positive solution for everyone | 2,6 | 6,6 | 22,2 | 41,8 | 26,8 | 100 |
| Getting to know the social and environmental problems of the world, and the possible solutions, is something that involves me emotionally | 2,9 | 9,5 | 35,2 | 35,4 | 17,0 | 100 |
| When I read some news on the Internet, or when my friends tell me something, it comes naturally to me to reflect on the different sides of the story, on the different motivations that the people involved could have | 2,9 | 5,8 | 20,7 | 46,7 | 23,9 | 100 |
| I am passionate about knowing more about other cultures and what happens in the world | 2,9 | 3,7 | 17,0 | 33,7 | 42,7 | 100 |

Source: Giessen (2024)

The analysis of Table 1 reveals that most students consider themselves as possessing high levels of empathy and perspective-taking, with 72.8% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they try to put themselves in others' shoes. Emotional awareness also appears to be strong, as 74.9% of students say they can sense their friends' feelings without being told. There is a significant interest in diverse perspectives, with 85.6% of students showing a willingness to listen to viewpoints different from their own. Additionally, 68.6% of students prefer to mediate conflicts to find positive solutions for everyone involved.

However, there is more variation in responses related to emotional involvement in social and environmental issues, where only 52.4% express strong engagement. This contrasts with the 76.4% who are passionate about learning about other cultures and global events. Furthermore, 70.6% of students claim to reflect critically on information from the internet and friends, showing a propensity for critical thinking. Overall, the data suggests that students are empathetic, reflective, and curious about the world, although their engagement with global issues varies.

The final step of the data analysis involved conducting an exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

⁵ to synthesize the information gathered from this set of items. EFA is particularly useful for identifying one or more underlying latent factors within a set of measured variables, allowing for the representation of this information using a smaller number of variables (indices).

Table 2. Factor Analysis results: Myself, the others, the world dimension

| Items | Factor loadings |
|---|------------------------|
| I always try to put myself in the shoes of others. | 0,692 |
| I know what my friends feel, even when they don't tell me | 0,566 |
| I am interested in listening to the points of view and experiences of others even if they are different from mine | 0,674 |
| In a conflict I almost always try to mediate, to find a positive solution for everyone | 0,612 |
| Getting to know the social and environmental problems of the world, and the possible solutions, is something that involves me emotionally | 0,611 |
| When I read some news on the Internet, or when my friends tell me something, it comes naturally to me to reflect on the different sides of the story, on the different motivations that the people involved could have | 0,711 |
| I am passionate about knowing more about other cultures and what happens in the world | 0,615 |

Source: Giessen (2024)

The EFA results suggest the extraction of only one factor explaining 41.2% of the variance. All the items have a high factor loading, meaning that all of them contribute to define the factor (Table 14). The KMO test was over 0.8, and Bartlett's test of significance was lower than 0.05, indicating that all

⁵ The factor analysis adopted the principal component method. The Kaiser criterion (1960) suggests extracting only those factors with an eigenvalue above 1. Two statistical tests were used to verify the data quality: KMO, to test the adequacy of the sample size, and the Bartlett test of sphericity, to test the identity matrix hypothesis. Finally, Cronbach's alpha was performed to assess the internal reliability of the scales. Variance explained = 41.2%; Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) test = .819; Bartlett's test, $p < .000$; Cronbach's alpha = .760.

the conditions to perform an EFA were satisfied. Moreover, Cronbach's alpha value higher than 0.750 confirms the high reliability of the tool (that is, the set of items intended as a scale). From a purely content-based point of view, this means that all the items represent a unique conceptual dimension, that we can name "Openness Towards Others" (OTO). All the variables were then combined using the "save as variable" function in SPSS and using the regression method to create the OTO index. Finally, the index scores were transformed to a range from 0 to 100 to simplify its interpretation. Results showed a mean value of 68.3, a median value of 68.5 and standard deviation at 16.7.

These data show that the mean score on the OTO index is quite high (68.3), that is our sample is characterized by a relatively high level of openness to others. However, the value of the standard deviation (17.7) suggests an appreciable variance between scores on the index, this means that there are both students who are wide open to diversity, but also students who do not share this receptivity. The last step of this analysis was to apply the same procedure discussed above, the EFA, on the six indices constructed to synthesize respondents' answers to each critical incident into one variable measuring "Openness to Cultural Diversity" (OCD).

Table 3. Factor Analysis results: scenario section

| Items | Factor loadings |
|---|------------------------|
| The boy in front of the supermarket Index | 0,668 |
| The immigrant center in the neighborhood Index | 0,737 |
| Does a veil make a difference? Index | 0,534 |
| A 'different' girl? Index | 0,642 |
| Other Cultures Index | 0,798 |
| Heavy Jokes Index | 0,811 |

Source: Giessen (2024)

Note: Variance explained = 41.2%; Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) test = .819; Bartlett's test, $p < .000$; Cronbach's alpha = .760.

In Table 3, the EFA results show that the first extracted factor is the one that best represents the data collected with 49.6% variance explained. Moreover, all the statistical tests have been fulfilled (KMO, Bartlett's test and Cronbach's alpha), certifying that all the conditions to perform an EFA were satisfied (tab. 21b). Considering that all the indices show good factor loadings, they were combined

using the same process carried out with the OTO index. This procedure has generated an index called “Openness to Cultural Diversity” (OCD).

To make the OCD interpretation easier, its scores were converted to a scale from 0 to 100. As for the OTO index, findings suggest a good level of openness to cultural diversity as the mean score is 63.4, with a standard deviation value around 19 that suggests a certain heterogeneity in the sample: while some students are more open towards cultural diversity, others may find it more difficult to relate to. And it is the latter students that the innovative actions implemented by the REACT project through critical thinking can help to develop or improve those skills that will help them to accept and to respect cultural differences.

5. Discussion

Our findings indicate that most of the secondary school students in this study show a generally positive attitude toward cultural diversity, particularly in scenarios they recognize from their school settings (for instance, incidents involving bullying or marginalization). This supports previous research suggesting that adolescents can demonstrate empathy and openness when they have direct or close experiences with cultural differences (Allport, 1964; Barrett, 2018).

5.1. Students’ Perceptions of Cultural Diversity

The results show that the secondary students who participated in the survey are beginning to develop certain essential competencies for intercultural competence, notably respect for others and empathy toward the “multicultural other” (Nussbaum, 2012). This is particularly evident in their responses to the scenario “The Boy in Front of the Supermarket,” in which most students expressed compassion for a marginalized individual, and in their strong reactions to bullying in the scenario “A Different Girl?,” where almost all respondents rejected discriminatory behavior—this time based on sexual orientation rather than cultural differences—revealing a broader understanding of diversity. The use of critical incidents to gather feelings, impressions, and potential reactions from students is related to the experiential development required to foster intercultural competence (cognitive, behavioral, and psychological) (Deardorff, 2006 & 2009; Sierra-Huedo & Foucart, 2022).

The presence of empathy and respect among participants is also evident in their answers to the survey’s final section, “Myself, Others, the World,” in which over 70% of students claim that they always try to put themselves in others’ shoes and that they know how their friends feel without being told. Here, participants demonstrate a certain degree of observation and reflection toward “the other” and the world, which is key to the development of intercultural competence and to mitigating stereotypes and prejudices (Bennett, 2013; Byram, 1997). It is important to understand that these experiences are probably the beginning of their intercultural encounters and that, if positive, they

represent the first step in the ongoing future development of intercultural competence throughout their lives (Bennett, 1993).

Paul and Elder's (2014) framework of critical thinking is also relevant in analysing responses such as those to the critical incident "Does a Veil Make a Difference?" where the diversity of student responses highlights the complexity they face when engaging critically with situations that could conflict with social norms or their previous beliefs. The implied confusion in these varied responses suggests the need to focus more explicitly on developing students' ability to objectively analyse and evaluate information, through more nuanced discussions and deeper reflection. This is reinforced by the apparent contradictions in the final section of the survey, in which 76.4% said they were enthusiastic about learning more about other cultures, yet only 52.4% indicated that learning about the social and environmental problems of the world involved them emotionally. The presence of these mixed responses suggests that, although it seems students possess a basic level of intercultural competence, their understanding may be superficial, and therefore there remains a need for intercultural learning interventions specifically aimed at addressing cultural tensions and misunderstandings (Paige & Vande Berg, 2012). Gay (2018), in his work on culturally responsive teaching, proposes integrating students' cultural backgrounds into the learning process to make it more effective.

5.2. Experience in School Regarding Cultural Diversity and Its Role in Fostering Cultural Understanding

Results show that schools are particularly influential settings in shaping and modifying students' perceptions. In several of our scenarios, tolerance and inclusion were more evident in contexts more specifically related to the school community, for example, bullying. Students appear to recognize the school's role in creating a respectful environment with their support of statements such as "It's not right to make fun of someone just because they have a different orientation or background." This finding is supported by research indicating that school climate, especially when it promotes inclusion and open dialogue, is a solid predictor of acceptance of diversity (Schachner et al., 2021). Moreover, teachers' attitudes and approaches can make a substantial difference in reinforcing students' openness or, conversely, leaving them with underdeveloped or negative attitudes (Gay, 2018).

Intercultural competence and critical thinking require the capacity to consider multiple perspectives and analyze preconceived ideas (Bennett, 2013; Ennis, 2011). When planning intercultural interventions in the classroom, one recommendation is to use scenarios with which students can identify. After analysing these scenarios, it is useful to help students reflect on their own experiences in similar circumstances (Barrett, 2018). Observation and reflection foster the ability to critically assess cultural events and/or practices, as well as cultural narratives, thereby enhancing students' ability to interact effectively in intercultural and diverse contexts. Critical observation and reflection encourage

students to open and shift their perspectives, as well as to adapt to new circumstances—essential components in developing intercultural competence (Bennett, 2013). They also strengthen the capacity to analyse and reflect on certain evidence, which is fundamental for the formation of critical thinking (Byram, 1997; Fantini, 2009). Students' reflection on their responses to scenarios and their own experience in similar situations is also related to the process of modification of prejudices and stereotypes into generalizations.

Students' most positive attitudes toward cultural diversity appear in the critical incidents that reflect everyday life, experiences they may already have encountered firsthand at school. This underscores the importance of an inclusive and supportive school environment, as noted by Schachner et al. (2019, 2021), which promotes optimal learning conditions and a sense of belonging for both immigrant and non-immigrant students.

Our findings confirm the key role of schools in the fostering of intercultural competence. Schools can help students to progress from superficial acceptance towards a deeper understanding of cultural diversity by means of structured learning activities such as guided discussions of critical incidents, class debates, exchange programs or multicultural projects. It has long been argued, Bennett (1993) and Byram (1997), that intercultural competence does not occur naturally but must be intentionally and systematically taught and reflected upon. This need for explicit pedagogy that aims to foster empathetic dialogue, critical analysis and the dismantling of stereotypes is made clear in participants' confusion over more complex cultural issues.

5.3. Possible Differences Among Countries

The five countries involved in the project, (Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Italy, and Spain), reveal an overall positive attitude towards cultural diversity yet there are of course nuances related to each country's different historical and sociocultural background.

In Greece, for example, the number of migrants and refugees arriving in the country via the Mediterranean has given rise to the implementation of certain cultural and linguistic initiatives in schools which, although not implemented uniformly across the country, may explain why Greek students seem notably receptive to diversity. Montessori and RMA type approaches tend to be implemented more at Primary school level. (Alexandropoulou, 2023).

Germany too has a long history of immigration with specific integration programs implemented within its school system, which no doubt facilitates a more normalized view of cultural diversity. However, there are still tensions surrounding issues like wearing the veil, and there is regional variation (Länder) in the adoption of Montessori and RMA approaches (Giessen, 2023).

Bulgaria's situation is different in that integration primarily concerns the Roma community and individuals transiting toward Western Europe. There are sporadic RMA and Montessori initiatives in

rural areas with high dropout rates. This would seem to explain the ‘neutral’, undecided attitudes of Bulgarian students in the face of less familiar diversity scenarios. (Tsvetkov, 2023).

Italy, however, has significant migration flows in Southern regions, and strong pedagogical traditions incorporating the Montessori approach. In addition, the legacy of Danilo Dolci and his maieutic workshops is especially relevant in regions such as Sicily, where pilot projects integrate RMA with local cultural elements (Boldrini; Bracchini & Puletti, 2023). Italian students show empathy towards marginalized groups but tend to have stereotypical views with regards to religious practices very different from their own.

Spain experiences considerable multicultural variation in different autonomous communities. While linguistic proximity to Latin American migrants accounts for more favorable responses, cultural practices that students perceived as very different from their own can produce more mixed reactions. Although a gradual introduction of Montessori and RMA methodologies is present in some public schools, there is no uniform nationwide application. (Sierra-Huedo, 2023).

Although our study combined data from these five countries into a single aggregate sample, it is important to consider how migration patterns, national identity and cultural heritage may mold students’ perspectives. For instance, Germany’s more systematic approach to integration stems from a longer history of immigration from Turkey and other regions. In contrast, Spain, Italy, and Greece, all historically diverse countries, have experienced recent increases in migration flows, which often generate new debates on the integration of immigrant and refugee students. Bulgaria faces somewhat different and specific challenges relating to minority groups and transit migration to Western Europe.

In some schools, students’ positive attitudes may simply reflect that teachers have addressed these issues directly in some way, introducing lessons on tolerance or implementing peer-mentoring programs, for example. However, a lack of direct experience with specific cultural or religious groups may account for a more superficial acceptance based on a limited understanding of deeper cultural traditions. Future studies comparing quantitative results across countries (and regions within each country) could, for example, explore whether Spanish students show greater empathy toward Latin

American migrants due to linguistic and historical ties, or whether German students’ attitudes toward Muslim practices differ from those of other countries because of local or national integration policies.

All in all, national identity and cultural heritage clearly influence students’ responses to diversity. Countries such as Germany with a lengthy history of immigration tend to show higher levels of familiarity with diversity, while countries with unique pedagogical traditions such as Italy or Bulgaria, or more recent migration flows (Greece and Spain) show more heterogeneous responses. Each context provides distinct and unique insights: Bulgaria’s experience with the Roma population, or Germany’s historically embedded integration of diverse groups, for example.

In conclusion, although secondary students generally display empathy and openness toward cultural diversity, their intercultural competencies call for more guided development, particularly in areas that challenge preconceived notions, so that they can better appreciate the complexity of our globalized world. Additional intercultural learning interventions are needed in secondary education to train young people in the formation and deconstruction of stereotypes and prejudices. As previously noted, community-wide and school-wide support is also vital for the success of educational programs intended to foster a constructive attitude toward cultural diversity. Further research focusing specifically on secondary education would help clarify how these attitudes evolve over time. Ultimately, while our findings suggest a promising baseline of respect, empathy, and openness among students, there remains a pressing need to ensure they have the necessary conceptual tools, experiential opportunities, and supportive environments to thrive in an increasingly diverse society.

6. Conclusions

This study shows both the promise and the complexity of secondary school students' perceptions of cultural diversity in five European countries (Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Italy, and Spain). Quantitative findings reveal consistent empathy toward individuals from marginalized backgrounds and an openness to cultural differences in familiar or school-based scenarios. On the other hand, scenarios involving more sensitive issues or issues far removed from students' direct experience elicit more mixed or contradictory reactions. This would suggest that acceptance may often be superficial and coexist with deeper uncertainties.

A key finding is the important role of school environments in fostering, or for that matter inhibiting, intercultural competence. Student responses were most unequivocally empathetic in situations directly connected to classroom life. This would seem to imply that educational intercultural interventions, if linked to real-life context, can effectively reduce prejudice and foster mutual understanding. However, our results also show that not all schools have the same capacity, resources or perhaps inclination to address cultural complexity, particularly in those areas involving controversial or less familiar customs. Thus, differing levels of exposure and teacher training may perpetuate inconsistent attitudes both between and within countries.

There are several issues to be resolved. First, the range of responses signals that although basic empathy may be present, deeper understanding of cultural differences and the structural inequities behind them remains limited. Second, longitudinal changes such as whether attitudes and intercultural competencies evolve over time, or whether specific interventions like the Reciprocal Maieutic Approach (RMA) in the REACT project may affect this evolution, have yet to be studied. Third, while our data offers a cross-national perspective, further qualitative work is required to make sense of

students' contradictory views, especially in the case of tension between personal beliefs and broader societal norms.

These findings point to future research priorities. First, longitudinal studies could show if and how students' cultural perspectives change as they progress through secondary school, especially when exposed to structured intercultural programs. Second, comparative analyses within each country, for example in schools with or without intercultural curricula or differences between urban and rural schools, could help to define circumstances in which diversity is most effectively embraced. Third, mixed-method approaches involving focus groups, surveys and classroom observation would provide insights into students' ambivalent responses to questions relating to religion and gender differences. Finally, there is a need to continue developing and evaluating pedagogical approaches such as RMA and other culturally responsive educational interventions to identify the most effective strategies for fostering in adolescents the critical thinking skills and intercultural competences essential for today's diverse societies.

In conclusion, while our data uncovers promising levels of empathy and openness among secondary students, it also reveals areas that require attention from educators, policymakers, and researchers. Schools need to integrate structured intercultural learning initiatives with an emphasis on critical thinking into the curricula to enable students to navigate the complexities of cultural diversity in greater depth and with greater confidence.

These initiatives will of course require ongoing institutional support and research into which interventions are most successful, steps that must be taken to ensure that the next generation is more prepared to thrive in an interconnected, globalized and pluralistic world.

REFERENCES

- Allport, G.W. (1964). *The Nature of Prejudice*. Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc.: Cambridge.
- Alexandropoulou, M. (2023). Greece. In F. Boldrini (Ed.), *REACT Model Manual: An Innovative Reciprocal Maieutic Approach for a Critical Thinking Skills Acquisition in Secondary Schools* (pp. 44-50). Project n. 621522-EPP-1-2020-1-IT-EPPKA3-IPI-Soc-IN.
- Banks, J. A. (2015). *Cultural diversity and education*. Routledge.
- Barrett, M. (2018). How schools can promote the intercultural competence of young people. *European Psychologist*, 23, (1) <https://doi.org/10.1027/1016-9040/a000308>
- Bennett, M. J. (2013). Intercultural practices: International/multicultural education. In M. J. Bennett (Ed.), *Basic concepts of intercultural communication: Paradigms, principles and practices* (2nd ed.; pp. 105-136). Boston, MA: Intercultural Press
- Bennett, M. (1993). Towards ethnorelativism: A developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. In R. M. Paige (Ed.), *Education for intercultural experience* (pp. 21-71). Yarmouth: Intercultural Press.
- Boldrini, F; Bracchini, M. R. & Puletti V. (2023). The heritage of Maria Montessori. In F. Boldrini (Ed.), *REACT Model Manual: An Innovative Reciprocal Maieutic Approach for a Critical Thinking Skills Acquisition in Secondary Schools* (pp. 5-21). Project n. 621522-EPP-1-2020-1-IT-EPPKA3IPI-Soc-IN
- Byram, M. (1997). Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence (Multilingual Matters). Multilingual Matters.
- Converse J. M. & Presser, S. (1986) *Survey Questions: Handcrafting the Standardized Questionnaire*. Sage.
- Converse, J. M., & Presser, S. (1986). *Survey questions: Handcrafting the standardized questionnaire* (Vol. 63). Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*, 3rd ed (pp. xxix, 260). Sage Publications, Inc. Crosta, I., & Banda, V. (2021). Critical Thinking. In K. Nemejc & M. E. Bakay (Eds.), *CATCH 21st Century Skills: Teaching Materials*. (pp. 69-95). Czech University of Life Sciences Prague.
- Deardorff, D. K. (2006). Identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 10(3), 241-266.
- Deardorff, D. K. (2009). *The SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Delors, J. (1996). *Education: The treasure within*. Mexico City: Ediciones de la UNESCO.

Dolci, D. (2004). The reciprocal maieutic approach. Centro per lo Sviluppo Creativo "Danilo Dolci".

Ennis, R. (2011). Critical thinking: Reflection and perspective Part II. Inquiry: Critical thinking across the Disciplines, 26(2), 5-19. <https://doi.org/10.5840/inquiryctnews201126215>

Fantini, A. E. (2009). Assessing intercultural competence: Issues and tools. In D. K. Deardorff (Ed.), *The SAGE Intercultural Competence* (pp. 456-476). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

Gay, G. (2002). Preparing for Culturally Responsive Teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53, 106–116. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487102053002003>
Gay, G. (2018). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice*. Teachers College Press

Giessen, H. (2023). Germany. In F. Boldrini (Ed.), *REACT Model Manual: An Innovative Reciprocal Maieutic Approach for a Critical Thinking Skills Acquisition in Secondary Schools* (pp. 45-50). Project n. 621522-EPP-1-2020-1-IT-EPPKA3-IPI-Soc-IN.

Giessen, H. (2024). Diversität in Europa: erste Resultate aus einer empirischen Befragung in fünf europäischen Ländern. In M. Stumpf (Ed.), *Diversity in der Wirtschaftskommunikation*. 53-87. Springer.

González-Falcón, I., Coronel-Llamas, J. M., Dusi, P., & Toscano-Cruz, M. D. L. O. (2022). Cultural diversity in secondary school: The response to immigrant students in Spain from a counselling perspective. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 51, 804–819. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2022.2080804>

Grossen, M., & Mirza, N. M. (2019). Talking about cultural diversity at school: Dialogical tensions and obstacles to secondarisation. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 35, 243–264. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10212-019-00442-8>

Hue, M., & Kennedy, K. (2014). Creating culturally responsive environments: Ethnic minority teachers' constructs of cultural diversity in Hong Kong secondary schools. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 34, 273–287. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2013.823379>

Kaiser, H. F. (1960). The application of electronic computers to factor analysis. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 20, 141–151. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/001316446002000116>

López-Rocha, S. (2020). Refocusing the development of critical intercultural competence in higher education: Challenges and opportunities. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 21, 118–131. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2020.1833900>

Marradi A. (2005) *Raccontar storie*. Carocci.

Miralimovna, Y. M. (2020). The Features Of Critical Thinking In Improving Students' Intercultural Competence. *International Journal of Research*, 7, 349

Montessori, M. (1964). *The Montessori method*. Schocken Books.

Namsaeng, P., & Ambele, E. A. (2023). Potentials of intercultural competence in promoting critical thinking in thai tertiary education. *European Journal of Education Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.46827/ejes.v10i12.5099>

Nussbaum, M. C. (1997). *Cultivating humanity: A classical defense of reform in liberal education*. Harvard University.

Nussbaum, M. (2012). *Crear capacidades: Propuesta para el desarrollo humano*. Barcelona: Paidós. Nussbaum, M. C. (1997). *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*. Harvard University Press.

Paige, R. M. (1993). *Education for the intercultural experience*. Portland: Intercultural Communication Institute.

Paige, R. M., & Vande Berg, M. (2012). Why students are and are not learning abroad. In M. Vande Berg, R. M. Paige, & K. H. Lou (Eds.), *Student learning abroad: What our students are learning, what they're not, and what we can do about it* (pp. 29- 58). Stylus Publishing.

Paul, R., & Elder, L. (2014). *Critical thinking: Tools for taking charge of your professional and personal life*. Pearson Education.

Palmonari, A. (1993) *Psicologia dell'adolescenza*. Il Mulino.

Pettigrew T. F. (1998). Intergroup contact theory. *Annual Review Psychology*, 49, 65-85.

Pettigrew, T. F. (2008). Future directions for intergroup contact theory and research. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 32(3), 187-199. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2007.12.002>

Pettigrew, T. F., & Tropp, L. R. (2000). Does intergroup contact reduce prejudice? Recent metaanalytic findings. In S. Oskamp (Ed.), *Reducing prejudice and discrimination* (pp. 93-114). Lawrence Erlbaum.

Pettigrew, T. F. & Tropp, L.R. (2008) "How Does Intergroup Contact Reduce Prejudice? MetaAnalytic Tests of Three Mediators," *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 38 (6), 922–934.

Rizzo, I. (2013). *Danilo Dolci: Speaking and doing. A sociological biography*. Mimesis International. Schachner, M., Schwarzenhal, M., Moffitt, U., Civitillo, S., & Juang, L. P. (2021). Capturing a nuanced picture of classroom cultural diversity climate: Multigroup and multilevel analyses among secondary school students in Germany. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 101971. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.CEDPSYCH.2021.101971>

Schachner, M., Schwarzenhal, M., Vijver, F. J. R. van de, & Noack, P. (2019). How All Students Can Belong and Achieve: Effects of the Cultural Diversity Climate Amongst Students of Immigrant and Nonimmigrant Background in Germany. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 111, 703. <https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000303>

Schachner, M. K., Schwarzenhal, M., & Noack, P. (2021). Individuals, groups, and classrooms: Conceptual and methodological considerations on studying approaches to cultural diversity in schools. *Methods and assessment in culture and psychology*, 123-143

Semião, D., Mogarro, M. J., Pinto, F. B., Martins, M. J. D., Santos, N., Otilia Sousa, Amélia Marchão, Isabel Pimenta Freire, Lucio Lord, & Luís Tinoca. (2023). Teachers' Perspectives on Students' Cultural Diversity: A Systematic Literature Review. *Education Sciences*. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13121215>

Sierra-Huedo, M. L., & Foucart, J. (2022). Intercultural And Professional Skills in Student Mobility to Boost Employability. *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, 22(3), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.36923/jicc.v22i3.68>

Sierra-Huedo, M. L. & Nevado- Llopis, A. (2022) Promoting the Development of Intercultural Competence in Higher Education Through Intercultural Learning Interventions *Revista Electrónica Educare*, 26(2), 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.15359/ree.26-2.28>

Sierra-Huedo, M. L. (2023). Spain. In F. Boldrini (Ed.), *REACT Model Manual: An Innovative Reciprocal Maieutic Approach for a Critical Thinking Skills Acquisition in Secondary Schools* (pp. 75-83). Project n. 621522-EPP-1-2020-1-IT-EPPKA3-IPI-Soc-IN.

Sobkowiak, P. (2016). Critical thinking in the intercultural context: Investigating EFL textbooks. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 6, 697–716. <https://doi.org/10.14746/SSLT.2016.6.4.7>

Soboleva, A., & Lomakina, A. (2019). Critical thinking as a premise for the intercultural competence development. *Language and Culture*. <https://doi.org/10.17223/24109266/11/11>

Schwarzenhal, M., Schachner, M. K., Juang, L. P., & Van De Vijver, F. J. (2020). Reaping the benefits of cultural diversity: Classroom cultural diversity climate and students' intercultural competence. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 50(2), 323-346.

Stvetkov, P. (2023). Bulgaria. In F. Boldrini (Ed.), *REACT Model Manual: An Innovative Reciprocal Maieutic Approach for a Critical Thinking Skills Acquisition in Secondary Schools* (pp. 71-74). Project n. 621522-EPP-1-2020-1-IT-EPPKA3-IPI-Soc-IN.

The Foundation of Critical Thinking. (2024). Retrieved from: <https://www.criticalthinking.org/>

Tropp, L. R. & Saxena, S. (2018) “Re-Weaving the Social Fabric Through Integrated Schools: How Intergroup Contact Prepares Youth to Thrive in a Multiracial Society,” Research Brief No. 13., National Coalition on School Diversity

Vande-Berg, M.; Paige, R.M.; Lou, K.H. *Student Learning Abroad: What Our Students Are Learning, What They're Not, and What We Can Do About It*; Routledge: Sterling, VA, USA, 2012; ISBN 9781-57922-714-2.

Wells, A.S; Fox, L.; & Cordova-Cobo, D. (2016) “How Racially Diverse Schools and Classrooms Can Benefit all Students,” *The Education Digest*, 82 (1), 17.

Yankina, N. (2021). The development of critical thinking in foreign language classes at a university as a way to form the intercultural competence of students. *Vestnik Orenburgskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta*. <https://doi.org/10.25198/1814-6457-230-109>

Yershova, Y. A., Dejaeghere, J., & Mestenhauser, J. A. (2000). Thinking not a Usual: Adding the Intercultural Perspective. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 4, 39–78. <https://doi.org/10.1177/102831530000400105>

Yue, J., & Ning, P. (2015). The Cultivation of Critical Thinking Skills in Intercultural Communication Course. *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 11, 47–51. <https://doi.org/10.3968/%X>