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## EDUCATION FOR LIFE IN DIVERSITY: INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY OF STUDENTS IN SERBIA <sup>4</sup>

**Abstract:** Understanding cultural differences helps create a climate of togetherness, tolerance, and positive social change. Therefore, developing individuals' competence to live in a diverse world is one of the key tasks of society, educational policy, and the education system. In this study, the intercultural sensitivity of students was examined as an important aspect of the intercultural competence of young people, with the aim of analysing the influence of potential predictors on the level of intercultural sensitivity of students in Serbia (N = 452). While gender and age, on certain dimensions of the ISS, were identified as potential predictors of students' intercultural sensitivity, statistical significance was not confirmed for average grades, experience of studying abroad and ways of spending leisure time. The findings indicate that the intercultural sensitivity of students depends more on the personal and developmental characteristics of the respondents, such as gender and age, than on their educational experiences or ways of spending their leisure time. The implications point to the need for targeted programs for the development of intercultural competences in higher education, which will not rely exclusively on international mobility, but on developmental and individual differences between students.

**Keywords:** intercultural sensitivity, higher education, gender, years of life, reading.


### Introduction

Globalization, intense international mobility, and digital connectivity have made intercultural competence one of the key skills in modern society, as well as a necessity for functioning effectively within it. In the modern globalized business environment, intercultural sensitivity plays an important role in facilitating mutual cooperation (Toptsí & Hajeer, 2023). At the same time, globalization connects people in all aspects of life, and sensitivity to cultural differences encourages the development of abilities for successful and effective participation in intercultural communication. Students increasingly find themselves in situations that require understanding, respect, and mutually respectful communication with people from different cultural backgrounds.

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Therefore, exposure to diversity, especially in a university environment, becomes extremely important for both students and teachers (Gladushyna, 2021).

Increasingly pronounced cultural differences in the educational context, along with the ubiquitous mobility of students, highlight the need for future generations to prepare for the successful establishment of various forms of dialogue and cooperation with members of other cultures (Leutviler et al., 2018), which lays the foundation for intercultural sensitivity. In these circumstances, the development of intercultural sensitivity becomes an important part of the educational process because it contributes to overcoming stereotypes, improving communication, and encouraging social inclusion (Deardorff, 2006). Intercultural sensitivity refers to an individual's ability to recognize and appreciate cultural differences, and to modify their own behaviour in order to make interactions successful and meaningful (Chen & Starosta, 1996). As part of the broader concept of intercultural competence, intercultural sensitivity implies the development of openness, empathy, and flexibility when interacting with members of other cultures (Bennett, 1993).

It is particularly important in the educational context, where it can contribute to the development of students' ability to respond to the challenges of multicultural societies. Therefore, promoting and developing the capacity of learners for mutual interaction and communication with the world around them—even when differences are present—is rightly emphasized as the main goal of intercultural education (Leutviler et al., 2018). Cultural differences, shaped by the multicultural environment and the ongoing adaptation of the European education area to the democratic standards of culturally pluralistic societies, place the promotion of the basic values of interculturalism at the centre of attention as an integral part of European values (Hrvatić, 2018). This is especially true for the countries of the Balkan Peninsula, Eastern Europe, and new members of the European Union, whose past is characterized by significant cultural diversity (Iqbal, 2021). Education can thus contribute to developing the abilities necessary for life in a modern multicultural society and should play an essential role in creating and supporting the development of intercultural skills, abilities, values, and knowledge (Mrse et al., 2007).

Research (Hammer, 2009; Sarwari & Abdul Wahab, 2017) suggests that intercultural sensitivity contributes to more effective intercultural communication, better understanding, cooperation, and successful adaptation in international contexts. In education, it enables students to develop tolerance and a critical understanding of diversity, which has broader implications for social integration and civic identity (Anuar et al., 2025; Byram, 1997). In modern educational contexts, the development of intercultural sensitivity is influenced by various personal characteristics and social factors. Research highlights the key role of competence in intercultural communication in creating an inclusive learning environment (Anuar et al., 2025). For the development of intercultural sensitivity and communication, gender may play an important role, with women often scoring higher on dimensions such as empathy and openness (Chen & Hu, 2023; Williams, 2012). Age and life experience also contribute to greater acceptance of cultural differences (Chen & Hu, 2023; Hammer, 2009). On the other hand, academic success and cognitive abilities are not necessarily related to intercultural sensitivity, since it includes emotional and affective aspects of personality (Chen & Starosta, 2000).

The experience of studying abroad can contribute to intercultural development, but the effects depend on the quality and intensity of contact with another culture (Vande Berg, 2009). Research from our region (Đurić et al., 2020) confirms that the degree of intercultural sensitivity of students who study in a multicultural environment—specifically in Novi Pazar—is associated with higher levels of intercultural sensitivity on certain dimensions of the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale.

In search of higher quality education, better living standards, and professional advancement, people increasingly travel and change their place of residence. Consequently, cultures around the world are partially or fully connected (Iqbal, 2021). Intercultural youth exchange has a highly

relevant educational goal: overcoming stereotypical thinking and fostering interest in diversity, multiculturalism, and intercultural sensitivity (Sredovska, 2015).

Studying abroad, as well as spending quality leisure time, provides an opportunity to gain relevant experiences in a multicultural environment. Study abroad programs appear to encourage inclusion in the host country's culture by providing culturally relevant leisure experiences within the local community (Powers, 2018).

Although research shows that intercultural sensitivity at the higher education level can increase through time spent abroad, Toptsi and Hajeer rightly note that the effect may vary depending on the specific context (Toptsi & Hajeer, 2023). As a stay abroad provides a unique opportunity to experience different societies and foster intercultural sensitivity, higher education institutions increasingly recognize the importance of preparing students to navigate intercultural interactions successfully. This, at the same time, represents an important component of students' preparation for entry into the labor market.

The length of time students spend abroad is directly associated with greater confidence in intercultural interactions (Toptsi & Hajeer, 2023). However, when considered in a broader context and with the aim of connecting different cultural identities, intercultural activism encompasses all community members, regardless of the time spent abroad, and emphasizes the importance of mutual learning and understanding through collaborative activities (Frisby, 2014). Research findings (Al-Haddad & Lu, 2024) indicate that shared learning or leisure activities enhance the acquisition of intercultural competence among both visiting and domestic students. The increasing number of international students introduces greater diversity, fosters the development of a global mindset, and promotes intercultural competences. This potential is realized through student interaction and mutual learning, both inside and outside the classroom (Lehto et al., 2014).

How leisure is spent, especially activities such as reading, art, or social engagements, can enrich an individual's cultural capital and encourage greater openness to diversity (Bourdieu, 1986). Leisure time can be defined as time freed from work, obligations, and various duties that are an integral part of everyone's life, and which individuals fulfil with various activities according to personal preferences (Jurković, 2024). In addition to providing satisfaction to the individual, it also affects his thinking and success in engaging in various activities (Muzindutsi & Masango-Muzindutsi, 2024). In modern society, leisure time is increasingly recognized as an area of significant human, social, economic, and political value that contributes to the quality of life, mental and physical health, as well as the well-being of individuals and communities (Elkington & Carnicelli, 2023). It is a particularly valuable resource when it comes to education, because that is the only time when an individual can freely decide how to use it according to his interests. Leisure time provides opportunities to satisfy personal and spiritual needs, which are conditioned by the value system of each individual (Sredovska, 2015), and its transformative possibilities allow it to successfully encourage intercultural understanding in the modern world (Frisby, 2014). Research results (Kim et al., 2021) also show that student participation in activities during leisure time can serve as an effective strategy for coping with adaptation challenges and contribute to the acquisition of cultural knowledge and the acceptance of new cultural values.

Therefore, the importance of culturally relevant leisure time is also reflected in its contribution to the development of intercultural sensitivity. On the other hand, findings confirm that people who have more intercultural contacts show more similar interests in their leisure time (Powers, 2018). Considering the fact that social networks are an integral part of leisure time, especially for young people, it is important to mention the results from Malaysia (Raja Zainal Hassan et al., 2020), which confirm that intercultural exposure via Facebook encouraged foreign students to become more attentive and culturally sensitive towards their peers from different cultures.

Joint activities, based on similar interests and realized during leisure time, contribute to the establishment of multicultural relations and successful integration into a multicultural environment. The development of intercultural sensitivity and the acquisition of certain multicultural experiences are especially strengthened by international travel, knowledge of foreign languages, friendships or living with members of other cultures, and similar experiences, which are mostly acquired in leisure time (Jurković, 2024).

Students identify cultural and leisure activities at the university with extracurricular activities that contain elements of entertainment and communication, considering, at the same time, that participation in such activities is important and useful for them (Azizakhon et al., 2020). Given the numerous benefits that result from personal choice of leisure activities, more detailed and systematic studies of this area among the student population are necessary.

Based on theoretical and empirical indicators, it can be seen that intercultural sensitivity is a complex, dynamic, and developmental process that is shaped through the interaction of individual characteristics and social experiences. Theoretical models (Bennett, 1993; Chen & Starosta, 2000) indicate that it cannot be seen only as a cognitive ability, but as a combination of attitudes, emotions, and behaviour that are shaped in contact with others.

The model of intercultural sensitivity (Bennett, 1993) starts from the assumption that people go through developmental stages, from ethnocentric attitudes (e.g., denial or minimization of differences) to ethno-relevant attitudes (e.g., acceptance and integration). Intercultural sensitivity cannot therefore be seen as a static trait, but as a dynamic process of learning and development.

Empirical research confirms that gender, age, life, and educational experiences can play a significant role in the development of intercultural sensitivity (Chen & Hu, 2023). At the same time, it is emphasized that high academic achievements do not necessarily guarantee high intercultural competence, since it is a personality dimension that goes beyond cognitive skills (Chen & Starosta, 1996). Academic achievements have a positive effect on intercultural sensitivity because they strengthen cognitive, communication, and emotional competencies that enable understanding and valuing cultural differences. However, the effect is indirect and depends on the level of exposure to cultural diversity (Novikova et al., 2022).

Certain findings indicate that the development of intercultural sensitivity among students is of particular importance for the educational system, because it not only encourages tolerant and empathetic relationships, but also contributes to the formation of a society that is ready to respond constructively to the challenges of globalization and multiculturalism (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006). An indicative finding is that the academic context has a positive effect on the development of intercultural sensitivity, both of teaching staff and students (Jurković, 2025). For research in Serbia, the aforementioned findings mean that intercultural sensitivity must be validated locally, because its dimensions and results depend on the cultural context, so patterns specific to Serbian society and the level of intercultural exposure are expected. That is why the constant research of factors that determine the level of intercultural sensitivity of students enables a deeper understanding of educational and social potential in the context of modern society.

### **Methodological research framework**

The aim of the research was to determine the level of intercultural sensitivity among students and to identify the factors that influence it, with special reference to the typical characteristics of the population in the higher education context of Serbia. In this part of the study, three groups of variables potentially affecting students' intercultural sensitivity were considered: demographic

variables (gender, age), educational variables (average grade, study abroad experience), and socio-psychological variables (ways of spending leisure time).

#### Sample

The research was conducted on a convenience sample of students (N = 452) from different faculties and study programs at four out of a total of six state universities in Serbia: Nis (n = 141, 31.2%), Kragujevac (n = 103, 22.8%), Novi Pazar (n = 97, 21.5%), and Kosovska Mitrovica (n = 111, 24.6%).

**Table 1.** Sample structure

Characteristics	Category/Value	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)	M	SD	Min	Max
Gender	Male	109	24,1	-	-	-	-
	Female	343	75,9	-	-	-	-
	Total	452	100	-	-	-	-
Age	-	451	-	20,54	1,70	18,00	25,00
Average grade	-	263	-	7,92	0,81	6,00	10,00
Education abroad	Yes	45	10	-	-	-	-
	No	403	90	-	-	-	-
	Total	448	100	-	-	-	-
Leisure time	I'm going out	207	45,8	-	-	-	-
	On social networks	194	42,9	-	-	-	-
	With family	178	39,4	-	-	-	-
	I read books	154	34,1	-	-	-	-
	Training / sports	117	25,9	-	-	-	-
	Hobby / art	95	21	-	-	-	-
	With a computer	76	16,8	-	-	-	-
	With a TV	59	13,1	-	-	-	-

#### Research instrument and procedure

The Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS; Chen & Starosta, 2000) was used to measure intercultural sensitivity, encompassing the following dimensions: interaction engagement, respect for cultural differences, interaction confidence, interaction enjoyment, and interaction attentiveness. The scale was translated into Serbian, and its reliability and validity were verified. The reliability coefficient for our student sample was  $\alpha = 0.890$ , indicating that the ISS maintained high levels of reliability and validity.

The scale was supplemented with a socio-demographic questionnaire, which for the purposes of this study included the following student characteristics: gender, age, average grade during studies, study abroad experience, and ways of spending leisure time. Participation in the research was voluntary and anonymous, and students provided informed consent prior to taking part, having been informed about the purpose of the study.

### Data Processing

The data were processed using the SPSS software package, employing both descriptive statistics (arithmetic mean, standard deviation, frequencies, and percentages) and inferential statistics. The following tests were used to examine the hypotheses:

- t-test to assess differences between two groups (gender, study abroad experience),
- ANOVA to assess differences between multiple groups (ways of spending leisure time),
- Correlation analysis to examine the relationships between age and average grade with intercultural sensitivity.

The level of statistical significance was set at  $p < .05$ .

### Research results

The obtained research results are presented across five dimensions, in relation to the stated research hypotheses.

**Table 2.** Gender and Dimensions of the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale

Dimensions	Gender	N	M	SD	t	df	p
Interaction engagement	Male	109	3,689	0,574	-2,586	450	<b>0,010</b>
	Female	343	3,837	0,498			
Respect for cultural differences	Male	109	4,012	0,672	-3,075	450	<b>0,002</b>
	Female	343	4,208	0,548			
Interaction confidence	Male	109	3,796	0,631	0,923	450	0,357
	Female	343	3,737	0,569			
Interaction enjoyment	Male	109	4,228	0,767	0,465	450	0,642
	Female	343	4,193	0,649			
Interaction attentiveness	Male	109	3,563	0,680	-1,799	450	0,073
	Female	343	3,682	0,578			

A t-test for large independent samples was conducted to examine differences between sexes in relation to the dimensions of the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale. Statistically significant differences were found in the following dimensions: Interaction Engagement ( $t = -2.58$ ,  $df = 450$ ,  $p = 0.010$ ) and Respect for Cultural Differences ( $t = -3.075$ ,  $df = 450$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ). In Interaction Engagement, female students ( $M = 3.83$ ) scored higher than male students ( $M = 3.68$ ). Women also demonstrated greater openness and respect for diversity, scoring higher on Respect for Cultural Differences ( $M = 4.20$ ) compared to men ( $M = 4.01$ ). These results align with international studies reporting that women are generally more sensitive to interpersonal and cultural nuances. No statistically significant differences were found in the other dimensions.

The Pearson correlation coefficient was used to examine the relationship between students' age and the dimensions of the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale.

**Table 3.** Age of Respondents and Dimensions of the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale

Dimensions		Gender
Interaction engagement	R	-0,001
	P	0,982
Respect for cultural differences	R	<b>0,111*</b>
	P	<b>0,018</b>
Interaction confidence	R	<b>0,113*</b>
	P	<b>0,016</b>

Interaction	R	-0,030
enjoyment	P	0,519
Interaction attentiveness	R	0,075
	P	0,114

The results indicate a statistically significant positive relationship with the following dimensions: Respect for Cultural Differences ( $r = 0.111, p = 0.018$ ) and Interaction Confidence ( $r = 0.113, p = 0.016$ ). This positive correlation suggests that older respondents tend to score higher on these dimensions. The effects are significant, as they reflect a greater degree of respect for cultural differences and increased openness to interaction. This finding can be attributed to accumulated experience with age and, likely, greater exposure to diverse social situations.

The Pearson correlation coefficient was also used to examine the relationship between students' average grade during schooling and the dimensions of the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale.

**Table 4.** Average Grade During Studies and Dimensions of the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale

Dimensions	Average grade during studies	
Interaction engagement	r	0,008
	p	0,903
Respect for cultural differences	r	-0,018
	p	0,777
Interaction confidence	r	-0,024
	p	0,695
Interaction enjoyment	r	-0,006
	p	0,928
Interaction attentiveness	r	0,065
	p	0,296

No statistically significant positive correlation was observed with any of the dimensions of the scale. This is an important finding, as it indicates that academic success is not related to intercultural sensitivity; in other words, the development of intercultural competences does not depend on academic achievement.

A t-test for large independent samples was conducted to examine statistically significant differences between students who studied (partly or fully) abroad in relation to the dimensions of the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale.

**Table 5.** Study Abroad Experience and Dimensions of the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale

Dimensions	Part of schooling or any type of education abroad	N	M	SD	t	df	p
Interaction engagement	Yes	45	3,829	0,467	0,332	446	0,740
	No	403	3,801	0,527			
Respect for cultural differences	Yes	45	4,274	0,455	1,389	446	0,165
	No	403	4,146	0,598			
Interaction confidence	Yes	45	3,662	0,621	-	446	0,275
	No	403	3,763	0,581			
Interaction	Yes	45	4,219	0,603	0,148	446	0,882

enjoyment	No	403	4,203	0,685			
Interaction	Yes	45	3,763	0,442	1,326	446	0,185
attentiveness	No	403	3,637	0,620			

The small number of respondents with study abroad experience (n = 45) was likely insufficient for statistically reliable results; consequently, the test did not reveal significant differences (p > 0.05). At the same time, the effects of studying abroad depend on the duration and type of program, personal experiences, and integration with the local community, meaning that not all stays have an equal impact. Since the question about leisure activities was posed as a multiple-choice item, each option was treated as a separate variable in the analysis.

**Table 6.** Leisure Activities and Dimensions of the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale

Leisure Activities			Interaction engagement	Respect for cultural differences	Interaction confidence	Interaction enjoyment	Interaction attentiveness
I practice some sport (including fitness and gym)	Yes	M	3,757	4,037	3,791	4,171	3,604
		SD	0,516	0,625	0,502	0,712	0,639
	No	M	3,816	4,204	3,737	4,213	3,671
		SD	0,522	0,565	0,610	0,667	0,594
On social networks	Yes	M	3,803	4,165	3,704	4,189	3,632
		SD	0,494	0,549	0,569	0,632	0,566
	No	M	3,800	4,158	3,787	4,211	3,669
		SD	0,541	0,612	0,594	0,712	0,635
I'm going out	Yes	M	3,828	4,156	3,699	4,200	3,633
		SD	0,511	0,602	0,547	0,709	0,592
	No	M	3,778	4,165	3,796	4,204	3,671
		SD	0,529	0,572	0,611	0,653	0,618
I do hobby / art	Yes	M	3,905	4,265	3,798	4,265	3,839
		SD	0,510	0,533	0,603	0,719	0,545
	No	M	3,773	4,133	3,739	4,185	3,604
		SD	0,521	0,596	0,579	0,667	0,612
Mostly with family	Yes	M	3,835	4,236	3,776	4,204	3,654
		SD	0,485	0,503	0,529	0,628	0,567
	No	M	3,779	4,112	3,735	4,200	3,653
		SD	0,543	0,629	0,618	0,710	0,630
With the TV	Yes	M	3,692	4,054	3,641	4,162	3,542
		SD	0,452	0,608	0,565	0,537	0,479
	No	M	3,817	4,177	3,768	4,208	3,670
		SD	0,529	0,581	0,586	0,697	0,621
With a computer	Yes	M	3,767	4,116	3,763	4,202	3,535
		SD	0,585	0,674	0,619	0,750	0,649
	No	M	3,808	4,170	3,749	4,202	3,677
		SD	0,508	0,566	0,578	0,664	0,595
I read books	Yes	M	3,884	4,292	3,792	4,310	3,786
		SD	0,516	0,505	0,623	0,652	0,567
	No	M	3,758	4,093	3,730	4,146	3,585
		SD	0,519	0,612	0,563	0,686	0,614
F			1,711	1,977	0,991	1,541	1,667

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p	0,178	0,124	0,441	0,221	0,233
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No statistically significant differences were observed between respondents who spend their leisure time in different ways with respect to the mean scores on the dimensions. However, it should be noted that respondents who read books or engage in hobbies/art tend to have slightly higher scores than those who do not, suggesting a potential pattern for enhancing intercultural sensitivity. Based on this distribution of leisure activities, it can serve as a useful indicator for understanding students' cultural capital, which is also valuable for the development of intercultural education strategies.

### Discussion

The results of this study highlight several key factors influencing students' intercultural sensitivity. First, gender was confirmed as a significant predictor, with female students scoring higher on the dimensions of interaction engagement and respect for cultural differences. This finding is consistent with previous research indicating that women generally exhibit stronger interpersonal and communication competencies, as well as greater empathy in social relationships (Stewart & Bennett, 2011). Sociological patterns may emphasize care and sensitivity in women, which likely contributes to their greater openness to cultural diversity.

Regarding age, the results reveal a weak but statistically significant positive relationship between age and the dimensions of respect for cultural differences and interaction confidence. This suggests that as students grow older and gain life experience, they develop a greater willingness to appreciate other cultures and a higher level of trust in intercultural interactions. This effect can be attributed to the gradual expansion of social networks, increased contact with diverse individuals, and the acquisition of maturity through academic and personal development. However, given the relatively narrow age range of the sample (18–25 years), the magnitude of this effect is understandably modest.

Contrary to expectations, academic success (measured as average grade) did not significantly predict intercultural sensitivity. This indicates that the development of intercultural competences is not necessarily dependent on cognitive ability or academic achievement but is shaped primarily through social and emotional experiences. In other words, high grades do not guarantee greater sensitivity to cultural differences, aligning with models that emphasize the importance of experiential learning and direct interaction with individuals from other cultures (Bennett, 1993; Jurković, 2025).

Similarly, the experience of studying abroad did not yield statistically significant differences. This may be explained by the small proportion of respondents with such experience (approximately 10% of the sample) and by the fact that mere exposure to another culture does not automatically foster intercultural competence. Previous research highlights that the transformative potential of international experiences depends on factors such as the duration of stay, the degree of integration into the local community, and reflective engagement with the experience (Hammer, 2009; Toptsi & Hajeer, 2023).

Regarding leisure activities, no statistically significant differences were observed in students' intercultural sensitivity. Nevertheless, descriptive trends suggest that students who read books or engage in hobbies and artistic activities tend to score slightly higher on the dimensions of intercultural sensitivity compared to those who do not. This may indicate that culturally enriched experiences contribute to broader perspectives and openness to diverse value systems; however, further research with larger and more diverse samples is needed to confirm this effect.

Overall, the findings suggest that the most consistent predictors of intercultural sensitivity in this sample are gender and age, while academic achievement, formal international experiences, and leisure activities appear less influential. These results underscore the importance of considering gender and age differences when designing educational strategies aimed at developing intercultural competence. At the same time, they highlight that intercultural sensitivity is cultivated primarily through experiential and reflective learning rather than academic performance or mere exposure to foreign cultures.

### **Conclusion**

Competence for living in a diverse world should be integrated into the curricula of faculties that prepare students for careers in education in Serbia, as recognizing and understanding differences fosters a climate of togetherness, tolerance, and positive social change.

The research results indicate that students' intercultural sensitivity is primarily influenced by gender and age. Female students demonstrate higher levels of interaction engagement and a greater willingness to respect cultural differences compared to male students. Similarly, older students show slightly higher trust and respect toward other cultures. In contrast, academic achievement, studying abroad, and leisure activities did not emerge as significant predictors of intercultural sensitivity. These findings underscore that intercultural sensitivity is not developed solely through formal education or academic performance but requires targeted educational and social interventions.

The results suggest practical implications for educational curricula, including the introduction of content and activities that foster intercultural learning, such as workshops, projects, and group work promoting diversity and dialogue. Experiential learning should also be encouraged through exchanges, study visits, volunteering, and participation in international student networks, combined with reflective tasks that deepen understanding of these experiences. Particular attention should be given to supporting male students in developing social and communication skills that enhance intercultural sensitivity, as they scored lower than female students in this study. Additionally, support programs for younger students are recommended, since respect for cultural differences and confidence in intercultural interactions increase with age. Early exposure to other cultures can facilitate the development of intercultural sensitivity. Culturally enriched leisure activities, such as reading, artistic expression, and hobbies, should also be promoted, as they contribute to a broader spectrum of intercultural competences.

Overall, the findings confirm that developing intercultural sensitivity among students requires a systemic approach that extends beyond formal education and academic achievement. Interdisciplinary and interactive programs aimed at enhancing empathy, tolerance, and openness can contribute not only to professional preparedness but also to the creation of a society capable of responding to the challenges of a globalized, multicultural environment.

Although this study provides valuable insights into factors influencing students' intercultural sensitivity, it has several limitations. The sample was convenient, limited to one generation of students from a narrow geographic area, so the findings cannot be fully generalized to the broader population. The study also relied on self-reported data, which may be influenced by subjectivity and socially desirable responses. Furthermore, quantitative methods were used, which do not allow for a deeper exploration of students' experiences and attitudes.

For future research, a longitudinal design is recommended to monitor changes in intercultural sensitivity over the course of studies, along with the integration of both quantitative and qualitative methods for richer analysis. Expanding the sample to include students from other universities and study programs, and incorporating additional variables such as international contacts and personal

values, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that contribute to the development of intercultural sensitivity and competence in educational contexts.

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