

Evaluation of Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue Competencies. Identification of factors related with its performance among Adolescents in the City of Barcelona.

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A survey study was carried out among 942 students in Barcelona. The study demonstrated that the questionnaire applied ensured validity and reliability for detecting and evaluating interreligious dialogue competencies. The most significant results were that a regression analysis identified five predictor variables of intercultural and interreligious competencies: (1) overcoming prejudice; (2) disregarding a person's religion when establishing friendship; (3) the ability to cope with conflicts; and (4) not avoiding a relationship with someone due to their cultural background. Lastly, results also showed the importance of working in secondary schools in order to advance towards a culture of peace.

Keywords: competency evaluation, coping with conflict, interreligious dialogue, adolescents, migrants, regression.

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Introduction

This article presents the findings of a survey study on intercultural and interreligious dialogue competencies for fostering a culture of peace among students in compulsory secondary education in public and state-subsidized private schools in the city of Barcelona. The study formed part of the research project titled “Intercultural and interreligious dialogue for fostering a culture of peace among young people and unaccompanied foreign minors (MENA) in Barcelona and Melilla,” funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation and developed and carried out by the University of Barcelona Faculty of Education and the University of Granada, Melilla Campus (RTI2018-095259-B-I00, MCIU/AEI/FEDER, UE).

Competencies for intercultural and interreligious dialogue are essential in today’s world, where relationships with a diverse range of people from different cultural and religious backgrounds have become everyday occurrences. These competencies are also key tools for conflict resolution and building a culture of peace.

Intercultural competencies, or attributes and skills that enable a person to function in our current diverse, complex and democratic societies, are now part of the educational curriculum in most countries, since they are recognized as key competencies both in the European Higher Education Area Tuning Process (González & Wagenaar, 2003) and in the OECD PISA assessment program (Sälzer & Roczen, 2018). The conceptualization of these competencies has been discussed by various authors (Deardoff, 2006; Aneas, 2009; UNESCO, 2013; Barrett, Byram, Lázár, Mompoin-Gaillard & Philippou, 2013; Council of Europe, 2018; OECD, 2019, amongst others) and from varying perspectives, centering on communicative factors (Kim, 2007; Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005; Samovar, 2014), attitudinal factors (Robertson, 2008; Zua, 2016 and Borguetti, 2017,

etc.) and more integrated models (Gudykunst, 2005; Deardorff & Jones, 2009; Lustig, Koester & Halualani, 2006, etc.).

Integrating the religious dimension into intercultural competences has been extensively addressed from the standpoint of different religions, for example in important work by Altmeyer (2010), Morgan and Sandage (2016) and Anbeek, Alma and Shipani (2013), who have explicitly formulated the theoretical aspects of the construct.

These varying epistemological approaches pose complex methodological challenges when the objective is to evaluate them through a quantitative approach that will allow for extensive description, correlation of variables and the construction of explanatory and predictive hypotheses that can be used, for example, to support specific socio-educational policies or to verify the efficacy of particular education programs. This, then, is what this study sets out to do: to test an operational model of intercultural and interreligious dialogue competencies that allows for the performance of quantitative studies for diagnostic and explanatory purposes amongst a given population.

To give adequate grounding to the operational dimensions of a model of intercultural and interreligious dialogue competencies that can enable people to function effectively in an intercultural and democratic society and build a culture of peace, we chose the definition of competency applied in the Spanish education system. This describes competencies as the application in observable behavior of a set of knowledge, attitudes and skills that have been acquired through both formal education and lived experience (Aneas, 2009).

Attitudes towards other religions and beliefs have been extensively investigated (Ramarajan & Runell, 2007; Dervin & Hahl, 2015; Maudarbux, 2016; Sanchez, 2018; Abu-Nimer & Smith, 2019, etc.). For the purposes of this study, we chose the model

proposed by Holm, Nokelainen and Tirri (2012). These authors identified five successive stages describing personal attitudes and postures towards interfaith dialogue:

- (1) Denial: people at this stage have difficulty recognizing differences in religions beyond those that are predictable and/or similar to their own, and typically avoid or dismiss other people's religions.
- (2) Defensive: people at this stage idealize their own personal beliefs and religion, showing loyalty to their peer group. They denigrate other religious stances and beliefs through prejudice and stereotyping, and often have the perception of being threatened by outside groups. Differences are perceived as a threat to their own beliefs.
- (3) Minimization: people at this stage assimilate others' models and categories into familiar religious ideas (e.g., "All religions say the same thing"). This emphasis on similarity often conceals or obscures important distinctions between religions. Such people ignore the differences between faiths and thus minimize the specificity of each.
- (4) Acceptance: people at this stage, developing increased cognitive complexity and emotional flexibility, are able to shift frames of reference and acknowledge religious differences while retaining an awareness of their own religious preferences and perspectives. They show acceptance, respect and recognition of the right of others to hold and practice different beliefs.
- (5) The last stage, adaptation/integration. People at this stage, in addition to accepting the beliefs of others, have the ability to code-switch behavior and act respectfully and appropriately towards different beliefs and religions. Adaptation involves exercising empathy and pluralism, while integration means that the subject "lives" adaptation and commitment to healthy interfaith relationships, accepting the stress and marginalization that often come with such commitments.

A conflict-resolution framework was chosen for the skills dimension of the competency model. In the socio-educational context of Barcelona, problems in intercultural and

interreligious relations do not normally arouse hateful or openly racist reactions among young people, but rather more subtle responses, such as feelings of discomfort, insecurity or threat, amongst others (Andreu & Ouhamid, 2021). For this reason, we adopted the view that positive conflict management could be valid evidence of students' level of intercultural and interreligious competencies (Abu-Nimer, 2001 and Leiva, 2007). For the practical application of this view, we used the Frydenberg and Lewis model (2000). These analysts identified three coping strategies that, in our opinion, fit perfectly with the real experience of our target population. The first set of strategies centers on problem-solving and features skills aimed at resolving conflict. A positive emotional balance is maintained, and behaviors such as concentrating on solving the problem, seeking alliances and focusing on the positive consequences of the conflict are deployed. A second set is characterized by coping with the conflict by seeking external support (either personal allies or material resources). The third set of strategies is termed “unproductive coping,” and describes an inability to cope with conflict. People adopting these strategies are immersed in a negative emotional state of anxiety, fear, anger, etc., and their behavior is oriented towards avoiding the problem by postponing facing it, ignoring it, avoiding responsibility, blaming themselves, etc.

We based the cognitive dimension of the competency model on the extent to which participants had overcome prejudices and stereotypes towards other young people from cultural and religious minority groups different from their own. This dimension represents a first step towards understanding the other, and gives an initial idea of the nature of contact and its intercultural and interreligious outcomes (Puerta-Valdeiglesias, 2004; Trujillo, Mollano, León & González- Cabrerar, 2005; Jensen, Reeh, Nøddeskou, Bulian & Lapis, 2018).

On the basis of the rationale discussed above and the issues identified, the following objectives were set: (1) to apply empirically the chosen model of intercultural and interreligious dialogue competencies among compulsory secondary education students in the city of Barcelona; (2) to determine the current situation of Barcelona adolescents with regard to their intercultural and interreligious dialogue competencies; (3) to analyze a range of variables involved in the development and application of these competencies; and (4) to identify any variables that might predict such competencies.

Method

Population and Sample

The study population consisted of students in the 3rd and 4th years of compulsory secondary education in public and state-subsidized private schools in the city of Barcelona. The average age of the students was 14.8. 53.9% were in the 3rd year and 44.4% in the 4th year of ESO (compulsory secondary education). In terms of gender, a total of 504 students (53.5%) identified themselves as female, 409 (43.4%) as male and 29 (3.1%) as “other.”

The sample was selected via random cluster sampling. The clusters represented the high schools in all ten districts of the city of Barcelona. Access to the schools was facilitated by the Barcelona Education Consortium. Of the total number of students included in the sample, 942 finally responded to the survey, attaining a confidence level of 95.5% for the population of 3rd- and 4th-year students of ESO in Barcelona (28,462), where p and $q = 0.5$, yielding an error margin of ± 0.032 . Participants were male and female students from twelve secondary schools, both public and state-subsidized private, in seven of the ten educational districts of the city of Barcelona: Ciutat Vella, Sarrià-Sant Gervasi, Gràcia, Horta-Guinardó, Nou Barris, Sant Andreu and Sant Martí (Table 1).

Table 1. District, high schools, type of school and participating students: totals and by year

District	School	Type	Students	% of total participants	3 rd -year students	4 th year students
Ciutat Vella	School 1	Public	111	11.8%	86 77.5%	25 22.5%
	School 2	State-subsidized	43	4.6%	7 25.9%	20 74.1%
Sarrià-Sant Gervasi	School 3	State-subsidized	72	7.7%	34 47.2%	38 52.8%
	School 4	State-subsidized	36	3.8%	18 50.0%	18 50.0%
Gràcia	School 5	State-subsidized	82	8.7%	11 13.4%	71 86.6%
	School 6	Public	95	10.1%	43 45.3%	52 54.7%
Nou Barris	School 7	Public	98	10.4%	49 50.0%	49 50.0%
	School 8	State-subsidized	34	3.6%	21 61.8%	13 38.2%
Sant Andreu	School 9	State-subsidized	53	5.7%	41 77.4%	12 22.6%
	School 10	State-subsidized	96	10.2%	67 69.8%	29 30.2%
Sant Martí	School 11	Public	157	16.7%	87 55.4%	70 44.6%
	School 12	Public	61	6.5%	44 72.1%	17 27.9%

55.7% of students taking part were in public schools and 44.3% in state-subsidized private schools. The sample included districts with high, medium and low levels of income, thereby ensuring it was representative of the different social classes.

Participants' family origins were defined as the country of birth of the student's mother and/or father, and in these terms, 54.1% gave Catalonia or Spain as their country of origin, 5.9% other European countries and 39.9% countries outside Europe.

Instrument

A self-perception questionnaire was developed based on the three dimensions outlined in the introduction with the purpose of quantitatively characterizing adolescents'

intercultural and interreligious dialogue competencies (Table 2). The questionnaire was composed of four dimensions: (a) demographic data and questions on living with diversity; (b) Abu-Nimer’s (2001) Interreligious Sensitivity Scale; (c) Frydenberg and Lewis’ (2000) Coping with Conflict in a Context of Diversity Scale; and (d) Etxeberria, Murua, Arrieta, Garmendia and Etxeberria’s (2012) Overcoming Prejudices towards Young Migrants and Minority Groups Scale. Together, these dimensions comprised an instrument of 68 items.

Table 2. Dimensions of the Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue Competencies Questionnaire

Items	Scale	Nº items	Cronbach’s alpha
Demographic and identifying data	Nominal scale	7	-
Living with diversity, important factors. A person's cultural background makes me avoid...	5-point Likert scale	6	0.795
Living with diversity, rejection factors. For a person to be my friend, it matters to me that ...	5-point Likert scale	4	0.849
Interreligious Sensitivity Scale (Abu-Nimer, 2001)	5-point Likert scale	15	0.671
Coping with Conflict in a Context of Diversity Scale (Frydenberg & Lewis, 2000).	5-point Likert scale	17	0.701
Prejudices towards Young Migrants and Minority Groups Scale (Etxeberria, Murua, Arrieta, Garmendia & Etxeberria, 2012)	5-point Likert scale	21	0.871

The questionnaire scales had been validated previously, and a Cronbach’s alpha internal consistency test confirmed that they were reliable. The questions on demographic data aimed to collect contextual information and a number of independent variables that could be contrasted with the results, such as contact with diversity, formal education on the issue, etc. This first part of the questionnaire also included ten items relating to

living with diversity, and specifically inquired into factors affecting participants when establishing personal relationships.

To evaluate the attitudinal dimension, we applied the Interreligious Sensitivity Scale. This scale is translated and adapted from the IRSS, the Interreligious Sensitivity Scale devised by Mohamed Abu-Nimer (2001), an instrument exploring a person's perception of their stance towards their own religion and its relationship to other religious beliefs and practices. The scale was based on Bennet's (1986) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), which proposes a continuum of stages in attitudes towards other people's cultures, moving successively from ethnocentric to ethnorelative. Abu-Nimer's model takes these stages and adapts them to the more specific context of religion and interreligious dialogue, describing attitudes ranging from religion-centered to religion-relative. These stances span a spectrum that stretches from seeing one's own beliefs as the only valid ones and therefore ignoring other options, to understanding that every belief is valid in itself and therefore accepting other beliefs and being willing to adopt different cultural and religious frames of reference (Abu-Nimer, 2001). It should be noted that (as was explained within the questionnaire and at the time of its application) in this study "beliefs" were defined in a broad sense, ranging from religious faiths to spiritual, agnostic and atheistic convictions.

To evaluate the conflict-resolution dimension, the Conflict Management Scale (CMS) was applied; this is a Spanish version of the Adolescent Coping Scale (ACS) devised by Erica Frydenberg and Ramon Lewis (2000). The scale is a self-reporting instrument that allows young people to examine and analyze their coping behaviors when faced with conflict situations.

Lastly, the Overcoming Prejudices Scale (OPS) was included in the questionnaire. This instrument, developed by Felix Etxeberria Balerdi, Hilario Murua Cartón, Isabel

Arrieta, Joxe Garmendia Larrañaga and Juan Etxeberria Murgiondo (2012), is especially designed for the Spanish context, and evaluates the degree to which the respondent has overcome prejudices and stereotypes towards young migrants or members of cultural or religious minority groups.

Data collection and analysis

The questionnaire was administered during the months of May, June and November 2021, with the Barcelona Education Consortium facilitating contact with and access to participating schools. The Consortium is the official body that oversees educational competencies in the city's non-university formal education. The Consortium is managed by Barcelona City Council and the Department of Education of the Generalitat de Catalunya (Catalan regional government), the two bodies jointly responsible for education in Catalonia and its capital.

To comply with University of Barcelona ethical research requirements, the study and its instruments were evaluated and approved by the city's Bioethics Commission. To comply with Spanish law and to protect the rights of underage students, all necessary permissions and informed consents were obtained from families and teachers. The Consortium liaised with participating schools, facilitating in-person access to classrooms so that researchers could inform participants of the objectives and aims of the questionnaire and answer any queries arising. The survey, which was anonymous, was administered in electronic form so that the students could respond using their cell phones. Before starting on the questionnaire, the researchers explained to the students that the information and data gathered would only be used for academic and research purposes. After piloting and validation of instrument's measures, the first analysis of definitive data was performed during the months of November and December 2021.

A descriptive analysis of all the study variables was carried out, examining the central tendency and deviation measures for the quantitative variables, and the frequencies of appearance of the categories for the qualitative variables. Correlation and hypothesis comparison tests were also performed (Student's *t*-test for two independent groups and one-factor ANOVA) in order to determine differences in the scale scores according to demographic and identifying variables. All operations were carried out using the SPSS statistical package, version 20. The most salient results are explained below.

Results

The outcomes of the survey are summarized below. First, we describe the profile of adolescent students in the city of Barcelona in terms of their intercultural and interreligious dialogue competencies. Second, we analyze the range of variables relating to the contexts in which these competencies are used. Lastly, we present the analyses performed to identify any factors associated with these competencies and their prediction.

Student profiles

In this section we describe participants' levels of interreligious sensitivity, the extent to which they had overcome prejudices, and their conflict-resolution style, as determined by our psychometric scales.

Participants' interreligious sensitivity

Analysis of the students' average scores according to the scale reference values (Table 3) revealed that their attitudes were at the stage of acceptance of religious differences. In other words, they did not ignore or minimize differences, but neither did they adopt behaviors facilitating their integration.

Table 3.

Statistics and contrasts of the interreligious sensitivity scale.

	N	Theoretical minimum score	Theoretical maximum score	Observed mean	Standard deviation
Interreligious Sensitivity Scale	942	15	75	54.5255	7.41304

Conflict management in a context of diversity

In general terms, the results showed that in conflict situations caused by cultural or religious diversity, students tended to seek support from third parties, whether friends, teachers or other adults. In other words, they used strategies typical of previously identified coping styles (Table 4). This could be interpreted as meaning that respondents did not avoid conflict but that, in most cases, neither did they possess adequate resources for coping with it and resolving it.

Table 4.

Statistics and comparisons of the intercultural conflict-management scale

	N	Theoretical minimum score	Theoretical maximum score	Observed Mean	Standard deviation
Conflict management scale	942	17	85	55.5828	8.41669

Overcoming prejudices towards migrant youth and minority cultural and religious groups

It should be noted that in this case we did not focus on the presence of prejudice, but the opposite: the extent to which it had been overcome. Thus, high scores were positive in this respect. The results indicated that, in general terms, young adolescents in the city of

Barcelona had a notably positive level of overcoming prejudice towards young immigrants or members of religious or ethnic minorities (Table 5).

Table 5.

Statistics and contrasts of the of overcoming prejudice toward young lone migrants scale.

	N	Theoretical minimum score	Theoretical maximum score	Observed Mean	Standard deviation
Overcoming prejudice towards young migrants scale	942	21	105	77.1964	13.13207

Thus, in general terms, secondary education students in the city of Barcelona (average age 14.8) showed a low level of prejudice towards young migrants and youth belonging to other cultural or religious minority groups. They recognized religious diversity without minimizing it, and they had potential awareness of the complexity of the issues involved, in their individual, family and social aspects. When conflicts arose in which cultural or religious factors were present, they did not avoid them, but mostly sought the support, resources and intervention of a third person; for example, an adult to arbitrate in the conflict.

Context of the development and application of intercultural and interreligious dialogue competencies.

The questionnaire included a series of descriptive questions whose responses enabled us to understand to what extent policies, education practices or other social and organizational factors, such as gender, birthplace or type of school, may be related to the development and application of the competencies studied. The tables below show the basic descriptions and correlations identified in relation to religious awareness. This dimension was chosen because in our view it shows the most specific items in the interreligious dimension.

Table 6.

Statistics and contrasts of the interreligious sensitivity scale

Significant contrasts in the Religious Sensitivity Scale		Mean	Standard deviation	Contrast statistic	p value
<i>Gender</i>	Females	55.59	6.53	t = 4.377	0.000
	Males	53.42	8.10		
	Other	51.59	8.82		
<i>Have you been educated to live with people from other countries and origins?</i>	no	52.48	8.30	t = -4.512	0.000
	yes	55.20	6.97		
<i>Have you been educated to live with people of other beliefs?</i>	no	51.72	8.50	t = -5.818	0.000
	yes	55.37	6.83		
<i>Have you worked on spirituality?</i>	no	53.84	7.46	t = -3.485	0.001
	yes	55.55	7.24		
<i>Do you have any religious education?</i>	no	53.20	7.25	t = -3.992	0.000
	yes	55.22	7.41		
Non-significant contrasts in relation to the Religious Sensitivity Scale		Mean	Standard deviation	Contrast statistic	p value
<i>Type of school</i>	Public	54.15	6.66	t = -1.940	0.053
	State-subsidized	55.11	8.15		
	private				
<i>Have you had any contacts with young migrants or minority groups?</i>	no	54.72	7.53	t = 1.060	0.289
	yes	54.18	7.20		
<i>Where did you receive your religious education?</i>	School	55.34	7.43	t = 1.697	0.091
	Other	53.96	7.48		
	School and other	56.08	7.26		
<i>School year</i>	3 rd year of ESO	54.40	7.32	t = -0.227	0.821
	4 th year of ESO	54.51	7.50		
<i>Birthplace</i>	Spain	54.35	7.52	F = 1.530	0.217
	Europe	55.22	6.99		
	Other	55.19	6.86		

These figures show that the variables of gender, education for living with people of other cultures and beliefs, educational work done on spirituality, and religious education correlated significantly with the participants' appreciably positive stage of acceptance of interreligious dialogue. In our view it is especially significant that the first three variables showed the highest correlations.

In contrast, the variables of school type, intercultural and interreligious experience, place of education, school year and birthplace showed no significant correlations with respondents' attitudes.

The answers to the following questions can be seen as a triangulation of the behaviors and attitudes expressed by these intercultural and interreligious dialogue competencies.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
For someone to be my friend, the following are important:					
their money	942	1.00	5.00	1.2707	.71270
their gender	942	1.00	5.00	1.3673	.88614
their religion	942	1.00	5.00	1.3132	.81733
their cultural background	942	1.00	5.00	1.2803	.82728
their political beliefs	942	1.00	5.00	1.8896	1.15831
their sexual orientation	942	1.00	5.00	1.4246	.97042
The cultural background of a person makes me avoid ...					
starting a conversation	942	1.00	5.00	1.3684	.85580
including them in my group of friends	942	1.00	5.00	1.3068	.78802
making them my best friend	942	1.00	5.00	1.3142	.80315
having a sentimental relationship with them	942	1.00	5.00	1.6380	1.02132
Valid N (listwise)	942				

Thus, Barcelona adolescents did not show any major tendencies in their reasons for establishing friendships. The different motives were relatively evenly distributed and, more significantly in relation to our topic, neither religion nor cultural background were stressed in comparison with the other variables.

Similar tendencies were shown in relation to avoidance in establishing relationships with others.

Factors associated with intercultural and interreligious dialogue competencies

A regression analysis was chosen to identify variables that could predict interreligious competencies. Thus, the factors associated with intercultural and interreligious dialogue

competencies were identified through a multiple linear regression analysis, using the input method. For this purpose, interreligious sensitivity, measured by the Interreligious Sensitivity Scale (Abu-Nimer, 2001), was taken as the dependent variable, and the following were taken as independent variables: (1) giving importance to religion and cultural background in establishing friendships; (2) not avoiding a relationship with a person because of their cultural background; (3) the ability to resolve intercultural conflicts; and (4) overcoming prejudice towards young migrants or youth from minority cultural and religious groups.

Table 7. Multiple linear regression analysis of intercultural and interreligious dialogue competencies.

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity statistics	
	B	Std. error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)	38.576	2.002		19.269	.000		
2.1. For someone to be my friend, the following are important (Not at all = 1; a lot = 5) [their religion.]	-1.607	.355	-.177	-4.524	.000	.516	1.939
2.1. For someone to be my friend, the following are important (Not at all = 1; a lot = 5) [their cultural background.]	-.254	.372	-.028	-.683	.495	.459	2.180
2.2. The cultural background of a person makes me avoid ... (Not at all = 1; a lot = 5) [starting a conversation with them.]	-.101	.363	-.012	-.278	.781	.451	2.217
2.2. The cultural background of a person makes me avoid ... (Not at all = 1; a lot = 5) [including them in my group of friends.]	-.949	.433	-.101	-2.192	.029	.374	2.676
2.2. The cultural background of a person makes me avoid ... (Not at all = 1; a lot = 5) [making them my best friend.]	.196	.429	.021	.456	.649	.366	2.733
2.2. The cultural background of a person makes me avoid ... (Not at all = 1; a lot = 5) [having a sentimental relationship with them.]	-.281	.262	-.039	-1.071	.284	.607	1.648
3.1. Conflict management scale	.132	.025	.150	5.180	.000	.945	1.058
4.1. Overcoming prejudice towards young migrants and minority groups scale	.164	.017	.290	9.513	.000	.853	1.172

a. Dependent Variable: Interreligious Sensitivity Scale

The results yielded a valid regression model with 26% predictive capacity ($r^2=0.255$).

The assumptions of linearity, normality independence and homoscedasticity were

confirmed. The collinearity tests (included in Table 7) demonstrated that there was no exact linear relationship between any of the independent variables.

The model included the following predictor variables of intercultural and interreligious dialogue competencies:

- Higher scores on the scale of overcoming prejudice towards young lone migrants (Etxeberria, Murua, Arrieta, Garmendia & Etxeberria, 2012). This was the predictor variable with the greatest weight and indicated that participants with higher scores on the intercultural and interreligious dialogue competency scale also had higher scores on the overcoming prejudice scale.
- Disregarding a person's religion when establishing friendships. This was the second most important predictor variable and indicated that participants with higher scores on the intercultural and interreligious dialogue competencies scale had lower scores in the importance of religion in the choice of friendship.
- Higher scores on the Coping with Conflict Scale (Frydenberg & Lewis, 2000). This was the third most important predictor variable and indicated that participants with higher scores on the intercultural and interreligious dialogue competency scale also had higher scores on the conflict management scale.
- Not preventing someone joining one's group of friends due to the person's cultural background. This was the least important predictor variable in the model and indicated that participants with higher scores on the interreligious dialogue competencies scale did not take the cultural factor into account when they wanted to prevent someone joining their group of friends.

Conclusions

With regard to the purpose of this study, i.e., to test-run an operational model of intercultural and interreligious dialogue for use in quantitative studies for diagnostic and

explanatory purposes among a given population, we consider the results to be relatively positive. It should be stressed that Mohamed Abu-Nimer's 2001 Interreligious Sensitivity Scale (IRSS) has low validity and very limited differentiating power. In fact, Bennet's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS, 1986), which inspired the IRSS, has also been criticized due to its psychometric limitations; but this has not prevented its widespread use as an instrument for assessing the transition from religion-centered to more religion-relative positions. The other scales worked well and the students responding to them had no comprehension problems or questions. Thus, we may conclude that the instrument is valid for evaluating these competencies quantitatively for diagnostic and evaluative purposes.

Our approach, combining cooperation with the education authorities and in situ administration of the survey, proved to be key to increasing the validity of responses, since we were able to successfully engage the schools and families in attaining high participation and fulfilling ethical and legal requirements, while at the same time any questions raised by participants could be directly addressed.

Regarding our findings for the interreligious competencies of high-school students in the city of Barcelona, there are a number of salient conclusions:

We observed that the students seemed to have moderately overcome major prejudices towards young migrants and members of cultural or religious minorities. Here it should be noted that due to the city's demographic and social configuration, diversity is present in all areas and all types of school. Also, while the Ciutat Vella district is known for its high numbers of non-European immigrants, there is no single area of the city where migrants are concentrated; in other words, there is diversity in all areas. This is true both for neighborhoods of higher social class, where diversity may be due to families' professional mobility and income levels, and for middle- and lower-class areas, in

which immigration and diversity are fairly evenly distributed throughout the city. Here we should stress that the public schools of Barcelona are highly regarded by city residents and that many families of higher educational and social levels choose non-religious public education for their children. In contrast, many families of migrant origin and practitioners of minority religions opt for state-subsidized private Catholic schools, seeking the values of order, tradition and spiritual transcendence. This may explain why the type of school was not found to be a significant variable.

Our findings highlighted an important issue: the educational approach that should be adopted towards learning to live with people from other countries and cultures. If we recall that there were significant differences in the scales for students who stated that they had been educated to live with others different from themselves, we may venture the hypothesis that the differences between public and private schools are due to the fact that the former work more explicitly or effectively on these topics, or at least their students perceived it in this way. This reminds us of the importance of the role of education professionals (Engebretson, De Souza, Durka & Gearon, 2010; Fahed & Daou, 2021; Vilà, Rubio & Escofet, 2020) and school management teams (Arthur, 2011; Riitaoja, & Dervin, 2014 and Vilà, Freixa, Sánchez & Rubio, 2019) in relation to this issue.

Our empirical results also confirmed Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis. We can affirm this because no significant differences were found in levels of prejudice in terms of whether or not participants had contact with migrants and members of minority groups. Allport's theory suggests that contact by itself does not ensure satisfactory intercultural relationships. What matters is not the quantity but the quality of the relationship (Paluck, et al. 2019 & Zhou et al., 2019); and this means, if we look at the evidence from Barcelona, that the mere existence of diversity in the city and its classrooms is not

a predictor of competence (Zhou, Page-Gould, Aron, Moyer, & Hewstone, 2019; Paluck, Green & Green, 2019).

Regarding conflict management, it was observed that the high school students did not resort to the strategy of conflict avoidance. The most common strategy was seeking support. In our view, these findings demonstrate the need to take account of and work on these competencies more explicitly and/or efficiently, since our data showed that students were aware that they lacked adequate resources. Teaching conflict resolution strategies should enable adolescents to have positive and proactive personal attitudes when facing problems, especially in contexts of diversity.

In general terms, it can be affirmed that, with respect to interreligious dialogue, participants were situated within an intermediate band of acceptance of religious differences. A political issue to be debated, then, is whether the education system should work to help these adolescents advance to the adaptation and integration stages. Our findings are significant and show the importance of working through education and, specifically, in secondary schools to build a culture of peace and a more inclusive society. But they also show the value of the education received outside schools. Indeed, the major influence that educating students in coexistence, spirituality and religion had on their intercultural and interreligious dialogue competencies was not restricted to the formal system, since education in the family, in religious communities and in informal education bodies was also mentioned.

Our findings also suggest many future lines of research. The first that we would propose is the exploration of the significant difference between genders. The question to ask concerns the reasons why adolescent girls have less prejudice, more conflict resolution strategies and a more advanced stage of interreligious sensitivity than boys. Why should this be?

Another prospective line of research would be to study the relationships between spiritual education, education on religious culture and education for citizenship. This involves multiple and complex debates, since secular states have to balance their explicit non-confessional basis with the right of all citizens, enshrined in law, to receive a religious education. All Western countries apply such apparently contradictory or complex legislative frameworks in their educational systems (Vilà, Freixa & Aneas, 2020; Vilà, Freixa, Sánchez & Mateo, 2021). We consider that the results of our study illustrate the beneficial influence of education addressing the highly important issue of understanding spirituality, in addition to topics relating to culture and religious values. The identification of specific content and activities, i.e., what content is covered in the classroom and how it is covered, is another possible line of study. This would help us understand the reasons for this positive influence on the development of competencies for intercultural and interreligious dialogue and a culture of peace.

The questionnaire probed three interrelated areas: sensitivity to interreligious dialogue, conflict-management strategies, and perceptions of cultural and religious minorities. For each area a different scale was used, and all fulfilled reliability and validity criteria, thereby constituting credible instruments for gathering information and measuring the social situation studied. Comments in the classrooms after administration of the survey, when participants were asked for their impressions, showed that they understood the strong emotional charge underlying and permeating intercultural and interreligious issues. Many references to emotional states were expressed, and this is a major theme that we intend to explore in future studies. In our view, emotional self-regulation should be a key component of intercultural and interreligious dialogue competencies in education.

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Analyzing how young people position themselves and act with regard to this issue is essential to working on intercultural and interreligious dialogue and building a culture of peace in a diverse world, especially in a city like Barcelona, where people from different cultural backgrounds and with different beliefs live together.

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