

*Original scientific paper*

Received: 8 May 2021

Accepted: 20 July 2021

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## **FROM MANAGEMENT TO STUDENT: THREE PERSPECTIVES ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

***Abstract:** The paper presents the results of research on human rights conducted during 2018 and 2019 at faculties of teacher education and studies of psychology, pedagogy, and social work in Croatia. The aim of the research was to examine the representation of human rights learning outcomes in these studies, with a special emphasis on children's rights, children's participation, and the concept of the child as an active citizen, common in the discourse of the contemporary childhood paradigm. The research was conducted by using the mixed methods approach. Triangulation with three different sources of respondents was applied: a survey with university teachers, interviews with representatives of study programs, and a survey with students, where all types of data in the analysis were treated as equal. Different types of data showed unequal perspectives between institutional actors, but also similarities of the university population with other levels of the education system.*

***Keywords:** children's rights, human rights, preschool teacher profession, primary school teacher profession, higher education*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Human rights are a set of moral and legal principles that belong to everyone equally, regardless of their gender, age, abilities, racial, ethnic, national, or any other affiliation, social, or state structure to which an individual belongs, and

which legally affirm and protect the human dignity of each individual (Spajić-Vrkaš et al., 2004). According to Kalanj, the present time can be called the 'age of human rights' (Kalanj, 1996), since we speak about them 'globally and locally, theoretically, politically and ideologically, substantially, and in relativistic manner, as well as in humanitarian-practically and principle-universalistic manner' (Kalanj, 1996, p.47) and are invoked by a wide variety of individual and collective actors. Human rights are a prerequisite for democracy, freedom, pluralism, autonomy, subjectivity, and tolerance. Human rights give them usable legitimacy; in times of sharp contradictions between democracy and authoritarianism, tolerance and exclusivity, the discourse on human rights become more intense and extensive (Kalanj, 1996). The concept of human rights was established in the Enlightenment Declarations (United States Declaration of Independence 1776 and French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen 1789), but their principle of universality was later questioned due to industrial development, large-scale mobilizations within totalitarian movements and globalization (Kalanj, 1996).

Regardless of these questions, human rights, both in the political-ideological field and in the academic scientific-humanistic field, have remained the foundation on which many new concepts have been built, especially those applied in education: interculturalism and multiculturalism, civic education, inclusion, social distance, child and student participation, democratic culture, cultural diversity, and others. Each of these concepts emphasizes a different subset of human rights (civil rights, political rights, social rights, etc.), but they all have in common the idea that an education system is a place of nurturing humanistic values and human rights education.

Human rights in the Croatian educational system have been researched and analyzed within various social sciences, most often within the already mentioned various educational concepts. This paper will try to give an overview of some key researches, and we will start with interculturalism.

When researching interculturalism among students at the universities in Rijeka and Pula attending undergraduate studies at faculties of humanities and social sciences and teacher education, Piršl (2011) found that almost a quarter of students had never heard of interculturalism, that they have not been learning much about it in their studies, and that they learned the most about the above-mentioned term from the media. Students, who more easily recognized the goals of interculturalism, such as 'the ability to communicate with someone culturally different' or 'nonviolent conflict resolution', showed a higher degree of intercultural sensitivity or a lower degree of ethnocentrism.

Generational similarities and differences were addressed by Čačić-Kumpes and associates in their research on attitudes about ethnic diversity among high school students and their parents (Čačić-Kumpes et al., 2014). The authors found that high school students show more ethnocentric attitudes and a closed nature

towards cultural and ethnic differences than their parents, and when compared to their children, the parents show greater social distance towards Albanians, Slovenes, and foreign workers. Therefore, they concluded that on the one hand the family has an important role in ethnic socialization, but on the other hand social changes have a great influence on the formation of individual attitudes and generational characteristics (Čačić-Kumpes et al., 2014). We would like to add that the media and the education system have a special place in shaping experiences and attitudes towards current social changes.

Examination of intercultural competencies of preschool teachers in Croatian regions of Kvarner and Istria (Boneta et al., 2013) showed that most respondents are familiar with the concept of intercultural education and that they apply it in their work, but that most of them were not acquainted with it through formal education, nor feel qualified for its practical application. The research also showed that preschool teachers who do not apply intercultural competencies in their work indicate more social distance towards Albanians and Roma than preschool teachers who apply them.

Social distance is closely related to the concept of interculturalism because it represents its 'negative' - this concept examines a series of social relations with members of certain social groups (usually ethnic and religious) that are more or less (in)acceptable to the respondent. Previšić (1996; 2004) originally studied social distance in the Croatian educational system during the 1990s. In a paper where he and his associates summarize research conducted on a national sample of high school students, he stated that students were most accepting of Croats, Americans, Italians, and Germans, while unacceptance was mostly expressed towards Serbs, Montenegrins, and Roma; however, he emphasized that one cannot speak about black and white relations, since the levels of acceptance of these ethnic groups were also not negligible (Previšić et al., 2004). Similar results were shown in other surveys as well – usually, the greatest social closeness is shown towards Croats, Italians, Germans, and Catholics, the greatest social distance is shown towards Roma, Albanians, Chinese, and Muslims; during the 1990s the social distance towards Serbs, Montenegrins, and Orthodox has decreased. (Boneta et al., 2013; Maričić et al., 2012; Mrnjauš, 2013; Sablić, 2005). The results are similar, whether it is the population of high school students (Sablić, 2005), students of social sciences and humanities (Mrnjauš, 2013), preschool teachers (Boneta et al., 2013), or primary school students (Maričić et al.). The research done by Maričić and associates in this series stands out because they were examining the social distance of relatively younger children (fifth grades of primary school) towards blind children, children in wheelchairs, obese children, and Roma children. The results of the research showed that children least wanted a Roma child for their best friend, although the percentage of rejection responses of the other three groups was not low as well (Maričić et al., 2012).

Attitudes towards civic education (hereinafter: CE) were examined in Rijeka among students in the final grades of primary and secondary schools and their teachers (Piršl et al., 2007). Male students expressed a greater perception of freedom than female students, while female students expressed greater motivation for social participation, which corresponds to stereotyped gender roles. Primary school students expressed a higher level of perception of freedom to express their views in the local community, as well as a higher motivation for participation in the local community than high school students, which may be due to closer relationships between students and teachers in primary school, or more critical attitude towards social injustice and limitations in adolescence. Students have unanimously labeled freedom and equality as the values most associated with democracy, while they have ranked political diversity and minority rights in the lowest places. Piršl explained this order in the spirit of classical liberalism, as a students' reflection on specific Croatian problems such as unemployment or underdevelopment, due to which students are primarily focused on social inequalities or social injustice, however, since students were asked to rank these values rather than judging each one on its own, this order is perhaps more a reflection of a logical assessment in which students superimposed broader concepts over narrower concepts - equality over minority rights and freedom over political diversity. When it comes to teachers, it is interesting that older respondents were more prone to include CE content in extracurricular activities rather than in the formal curriculum, and expressed concern that this content could burden, for which they considered as more important subjects, such as mathematics, languages, history, or geography, with which in their opinion have no connection with CE (Piršl, 2007).

In the analysis of the experimental implementation of the CE curriculum in primary and secondary schools in continental Croatia (Spajić-Vrkaš, 2015), many interesting findings were obtained, but we will discuss only a few. In the initial research before the implementation of the curriculum, when asked what a good citizen for them was, students answered that it was the one who cares for himself and his family, and then a patriotic and supportive citizen, i.e., one who respects the flag, coat of arms, and tradition of their country, but also cares about the well-being of fellow citizens regardless of their origin. At the bottom of the scale were, in all age groups, the characteristics of a citizen who contributes to his country by membership in a political party, who puts the interests of one's country over one's own interests and who trusts political leaders. From the above mentioned, we may see that students see a good citizen as a private and patriotic citizen. The characteristics of an engaged citizen are not highly ranked, and a political opportunist is the least acceptable to them. Other analysis showed mediocre awareness of political developments in the country, insufficient current participation in decision-making outside the family and an emphasis on humanitarian activism, and distrust towards domestic democratic

political institutions and actors. Unfortunately, after teaching CE, the results referring to knowledge and understanding of the concepts have shown that the outcomes of all six structural components of the CE curriculum, especially the political one, have not been satisfactorily achieved. The most serious omission in this component was identified in relation to the understanding of the role of citizens and government in democratic processes, i.e., in the most important determinants of competent citizenship (Spajić-Vrkaš, 2015). When talking about learning and teaching methods, students rarely had the opportunity to independently choose teaching topics and learning methods. Many teachers have reduced the implementation of CE teaching to teaching and learning methods that are common in other subjects: the dialogue method, the method of lecturing or presenting by the teacher, and the method of discussion among students (Spajić-Vrkaš, 2015). Similar results were found by Diković (2016) in a study of the implementation of CE in Istria County with primary school teachers, the most used method of learning and teaching was a conversation on a particular topic from students' lives and discussion, while other methods were used less, but evenly (Diković, 2016).

An important component of civic education is civic or political participation. It seems that Croatian students are more interested in the humanitarian dimension of political participation than in political-civic participation in the narrower sense, such as joining a political party or running for office and regular voting in elections (Spajić-Vrkaš, 2015). That is why it is important to encourage children's or students' participation and create a link between participation in kindergarten/school and the local community, and future political and civic participation. A survey on a national sample of children aged 8 and 9 showed that children feel that their opinion was insufficiently considered when it comes to the local community and that a significant proportion of children were not informed about children's rights and in case that they were informed, it was most commonly done in school and family (Miharija and Kuridža, 2011). Analysis of the situation of children's participation in Croatia (Jeđud Borić et al., 2017) has shown that university study programs have not provided a subject exclusively focused on the topic of children's participation and participatory rights. Most of the courses relate to the mediation of *knowledge* about children's rights, while a smaller part of the course provides certain teachings on *how* to achieve children's participation in practice (Jeđud Borić et al., 2017). Following this analysis, Borić and her associates conducted the focus of the group with children, youth, and professional associates in 2019 and found that the purpose of participation in school was unclear to children, there was no active and meaningful participation of children in school, participation was more a privilege than the right of all, adults were key to children's participation, the relationship between children and adults in school is characterized by fear and

the future of children's participation in school is based on changing consciousness, attitudes, form, and space (Borić et al., 2019).

Bouillet (2018) also wrote about some issues in understanding the concepts and concrete situations behind those concepts, by researching the perception of inclusion of children in vulnerable situations (a child with disabilities, a child living in poverty, a child belonging to the Roma national minority and child from a remote rural settlement) among preschool teachers and principals in four Croatian counties, using a qualitative vignette research technique describing certain hypothetical situations that research participants may have encountered in the workplace. The author found that principals were focused on practical solutions to problems and that these solutions often involved resources outside the preschool institution, while teachers were primarily focused on the educational aspect of child development, and only a few of them thought about the social context in which the child grew up (Bouillet, 2018). These conclusions are connected to the research on access to education and (im)possibilities of educational success in the high school and student population, which confirmed that students with higher socioeconomic status and cultural capital from urban areas have better access to education and greater chances for educational success (Baranović, 2015; EUROSTUDENT report 2011, 2014, 2019).

This research review reveals that human rights in our country are in fact much researched at all levels of education. Researchers are mostly preoccupied with political and civil rights, i.e., first-generation rights (freedom rights), while the rights to equality (second generation rights) are only partially represented and they include economic, social, and cultural rights such as the right to social security, the right to work and trade union association<sup>1</sup>, the right to rest and leisure, the right to an adequate standard of living or the right of parents and children to special social protection and care. Third-generation solidarity rights (global rights to development, peace, a healthy environment and humanitarian aid), as well as fourth-generation rights (the right to effective and responsible governance) have not been analyzed. The research covers different populations within the educational system: the adult population of preschool teachers, primary school teachers, principals, and parents, as well as the population of primary and secondary school students, but we did not find works involving teachers of higher education institutions and children in kindergartens. Methodologically speaking, researchers most often apply the usual survey design in which the quantitative data collection techniques are predominant, while less frequently used qualitative data collection techniques are generally used as a supplement to quantitative data. Although the classical quantitative

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<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that although there is much research on the professionalism, professional identity, and professional competencies of teachers, there is not, at least as far as we know, research on labour rights and the preschool and primary teacher trade union movement.

survey has its advantages such as convenience, fast implementation, and relative efficiency, it has its flaws: in the context of human rights, methodological nationalism is perhaps the most important one, as well as limited participation of the underrepresented survey participants, and a greater focus on attitudes (prejudices) and perceptions, and less on ways of implementing human rights issues in practice.

In our paper, we have tried to make up for some of these shortcomings. Primarily, we wanted to supplement the existing research corpus on human rights by including the perspective of teachers from higher education institutions, but also to compare their perspective with the student perspective.

Higher education in Croatia has undergone (and is undergoing) major changes under the influence of supranational organizations and global processes. The Croatian higher education system, part of the European Higher Education Area, was regulated in 2003 by the Scientific Activity and Higher Education Act (Official Gazette no. 123/03, 198/03, 105/04, 174/04, 02/07, 46/07, 45 / 09, 63/11, 94/13, 139/13, 101/14, 60/15, 131/17). The principles of the Bologna Declaration regulated by this Act were introduced in Croatian higher education between 2005 and 2009, through the application of a three-cycle system and the introduction of the ECTS credit system. European educational policies are the main driver of change in quality assurance at most Croatian universities (Baketa, 2019), but it seems that quality in the Bologna Process documents primarily refers to increasing the international competitiveness of the European higher education system, although the importance of the social dimension in education is also emphasized (Puzić et al., 2006). In the Croatian context, improving the quality of higher education is primarily understood as an instrument of economic development and competitiveness, and less as an instrument of eliminating inequalities in access to and participation in higher education (Puzić et al., 2006). This consideration is supported by EUROSTUDENT researches (2011, 2014, 2019) in which it is continuously confirmed that disadvantaged students have limited access to enrolment, participation, and graduation.

That is why experts have for some time been talking about the global trend of *marketization* of higher education, which is a term that refers to moving towards the introducing market-inspired financing mechanisms and investing more private money in higher education (Dolenec, 2006). The marketization of higher education is a consequence of a change in the economic paradigm in the 1980s when the emerging neoliberal doctrine began to criticize the bureaucratization and market inefficiency of higher education, advocating the image of the university as a driver of economic growth (Dolenec, 2006). Both capitalist and post-socialist countries have gone through this transition; in the capitalist countries, 'the transition' meant the transition from a traditional to a new university, while in post-socialist countries it meant the transition to a market economy (Wodak and Fairclough, 2010). Today, we are already accustomed to the

concepts of 'knowledge transfer' and 'cooperation with the economy' which encourage universities to conduct scientific research and those findings will result in 'products' that can be placed on the market with the help of private companies. In addition, the *mantra* that education primarily prepares students for the labor market is less and less questioned, and teachers seem to have forgotten the link between education and democracy (Giroux, 2012; Nussbaum, 2012).

Due to all the above, we found it especially interesting to examine the topic of human rights at faculties of humanities and social sciences and teacher education that are the holders of humanistic values and education and human rights should be their priority. In the context of the described trends in higher education, these faculties are in a position of the double disadvantage: topics that are the focus of their scientific research are difficult to shape into marketable products, and their students are employed predominantly in the public sector, primarily in education. Therefore, the financial unattractiveness of faculties of humanities and social sciences and teacher education diminishes their relevance in the higher education space, so the question arises whether topics such as human rights are 'cost-effective' to these faculties today - whether they are imposed by national and supranational organizations or their inclusion derives from interests and visions of teachers and study program in general; whether human rights are elaborated only at the level of knowledge and information or are students allowed to develop skills and attitudes; are students enabled to participate and to make a choice in the teaching process or do they learn only what the teacher targeted?

The main goal of the research was, therefore, to research the level of representation and the way of implementation of human rights topics in faculties of humanities and social sciences and teacher education, including the perspective of teachers, members of the management and students.

The guiding research questions were the following:

1. To what extent are the learning outcomes of human rights represented in study programs, which teaching and learning methods are mostly used and do they enable the development of student's skills and attitudes?
2. What are the reasons for (non)inclusion of human rights learning outcomes: personal, institutional, or supra-institutional?
3. Do students have the opportunity of choice and participate in decision-making in the teaching process?
4. What is the relationship between the perspectives of teachers, board members, and students? What do any differences in perspectives tell us about the higher educational system?

## METHODOLOGY

### SELECTION OF TOPICS AND PROFESSIONS

This research is part of a broader Erasmus + project ‘MEHR - Modernization, Education and Human Rights’ (2016-2019) on the implementation of human rights learning outcomes, which aimed to strengthen the inclusion of human rights content in the study programs and improve the methodology of external and internal evaluation of learning outcomes carried out by different stakeholders in the higher education system (accreditation agencies, higher education institutions, teachers, and students). The project was implemented in three European countries and included three areas of human rights:

1. Gender perspective of human rights education: human rights, gender and domestic violence (Sweden),
2. Migration, human rights, and intercultural competencies in higher education (Portugal),
3. Human rights, children’s rights and participation, and children (students) as active citizens (Croatia).<sup>2</sup>

Although dealing with different topics, the selected areas in the three countries were connected and intertwined - Swedish research focused on violence against children, gender-based and domestic violence, which is connected with the welfare of children. Similarly, the Portuguese partners’ focused on intercultural skills, migration and citizenship included the education of children of immigrant and non-immigrant origin. We also found that both interculturalism and a gender perspective in human rights education (or women and girls’ rights) are comprehensive issues in all three countries and a focus of research as well.

Specific topics of the Croatian part of the project (human rights, children’s rights and participation and the child (student) as an active citizen) were chosen because of their current relevance in the contemporary childhood paradigm, as well as their presence in various programs, curricula, and documents, such as cross-curricular subject Civic Education (Official Gazette, no. 10/19) or the National Curriculum for Early Childhood and Preschool Education (Official Gazette, no. 05/15).

At the level of an international project, it was decided that each partner country would select five professions that they consider crucial for the specific human rights they would process in their part of the project, provided that each

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2 The project coordinator was the Swedish Agency for Higher Education (UKÄ), and the partners were: Karolinska Institutet Medical University in Stockholm, the Portuguese Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education (A3ES), the Institute of Geography and Regional Planning of the University of Lisbon, the Croatian Science Agency and Higher Education (ASHE), Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Rijeka and European Student Union. Documents resulting from the project are available at: <https://mehr.azvo.hr/>.

country included the profession of social work for easier international comparison. Having in mind the introductory part of the paper about the specific position of faculties of teacher education and humanities and social sciences in contemporary higher education, as well as the fact that our research interest was primarily related to children's rights, participation, and active citizenship, we decided that the remaining four professions would be early childhood and preschool teacher profession, primary teacher profession, pedagogy, and psychology. We have chosen pedagogues and psychologists because they are the most frequently present professional associates in kindergartens and primary schools. School and preschool psychologists and pedagogues provide not only professional counseling to children, parents, preschool, and primary teachers, but also a professional contribution to curriculum development and extracurricular activities. Social workers do not work directly in schools and kindergartens but are involved in the education and development of children in an institutional capacity and participate in the overall development of social policies. Of course, there are other professions with activities that are extremely important for the educational process and the well-being of children (for example, social pedagogy or speech pathology), but due to the rules set at the level of the whole project, we were not able to include them.

## SAMPLE AND RESEARCH METHOD

The research was conducted by using the mixed methods approach and triangulation was applied with three different sources of respondents: university teachers, board members (vice deans for education and student affairs, heads of departments, and heads of study programs) and students, whereas all types of data in the analysis were treated as equal. Separate surveys were conducted with teachers and students and semi-structured interviews were conducted with board members. Both surveys were anonymous and voluntary, while the principle of confidentiality was applied in interviews with board members.

The survey was conducted during the second half of 2018 and early 2019 and was organized sequentially: first, a survey was conducted with teachers at faculties of teacher education and humanities and social sciences in the country, then members of faculty boards were interviewed and students were surveyed in the end.

The surveys for teachers were sent by e-mail to the addresses of 47 study programs within 13 faculties. Despite repeated official calls from ASHE and personal contacts of the researchers, the teacher response rate was low: only 40 teachers from 21 study programs completed the questionnaire. Teachers from early preschool and primary education were the most responsive ones (a total of 23 or 56.1%), while 8 (19.5%) from psychology studies, 5 (12.2%) from pedagogy studies and 5 (12.2%) teachers from social work responded. The reasons

for the low involvement of teachers in the research was probably in the fact that the survey was conducted at the end of the summer semester and during the summer exam finals when teachers are saturated with obligations of the current academic year, although the distribution of responses by study programs would suggest different levels of interest in human rights topics, which will be discussed in more detail in the research results.

When it comes to cities, the sample includes the greatest number of teachers from Zagreb (18 or 43.9%) and Rijeka (14 or 34.1%), slightly smaller number of teachers from Osijek (5 or 12.2%), Zadar (3 or 7.4%) and Pula (1 or 2.4%), while none of the teachers from other cities responded. The responses correlate with the size of the university, although, sociologically speaking, the distribution of the responses according to the cities may be even better explained with the Croatian index of local and regional self-government development<sup>3</sup> (with the exception of Dubrovnik), which would correspond to cultural theories of social development such as Inglehart's theory, according to which the development of a society is followed by an increase in the interest of its members in the topics of democracy, gender equality, human rights and environmental protection (Inglehart and Welzel, 2007). It would be interesting to test this hypothesis in the future; a small sample certainly does not allow us a more serious interpretation.

The sample for interviews with representatives of study programs, i.e., members of faculty board members, was made by asking teachers in the survey to propose a study program that they thought was an example of good practice. Most teachers did not list any study program, and in all cases where they did, teachers had chosen their own institution as an example of good practice<sup>4</sup>. Almost all examples were study programs of early and preschool and primary education, and in one case, pedagogy study program, while no psychology study program and social work were listed. Six faculties with a total of 11 study programs were selected.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with faculty representatives. Prior to the interview, participants were notified about the purpose of the interview by e-mail, together with an interview protocol so that they could prepare. Four participants were vice-deans for education and student affairs, one head of the department and one lecturer in the field of human rights. In case that several study programs were nominated for one faculty, it was decided that one representative of the institution should be responsible for all study programs, since study programs usually do not have separate representatives, teachers often

<sup>3</sup> Data on the development index are available on the website of the Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds: <https://razvoj.gov.hr/o-ministarstvu/regionalni-razvoj/indeks-razvijenosti/112>.

<sup>4</sup> This "local patriotism of the university" has also been observed in Sweden and Portugal.

teach in several study programs, and paradigmatic orientation is determined at the institution level, not the study program. Participants were instructed to point out the differences between individual study programs when necessary. Three interviews were conducted face-to-face, one via a video meeting application, and in two cases, participants were asked to send written responses by e-mail. Face-to-face and in-app interviews lasted 20-30 minutes. Given the fact that in our work we do not view these interviews as examples of good practice but as a separate perspective of study program representatives (board members) that we wish to compare with the perspectives of teachers and students, in the research we did not state which study programs are in question and we presented the statements of participants in a group form.

After interviews with representatives of higher education institutions, a survey was conducted with students. The survey involved students in the fifth year of teacher education ( $N = 31$ ) and students in the first year of graduate study of early childhood and preschool education ( $N = 26$ ), a total number of 57.

#### MEASURING INSTRUMENTS USED IN SURVEY AND INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

In the survey done with teachers, all measuring instruments were simple, i.e., they were nominal variables that measured the following categories: inclusion of learning outcomes on human rights, children's rights and participation and the child as an active citizen in study programs, reasons for (non) inclusion of learning outcomes about human rights in the study program, specific learning outcomes at the study program level, student participation in decision-making, teaching forms of work and evaluation of learning outcomes, teacher competencies and plans for improving study programs. With each category, respondents could write additional clarification and opinion.

The survey with students also included simple measuring instruments: inclusion of learning outcomes on human rights, children's rights and participation and the child as an active citizen in study programs, examples of subjects in which they learned about these topics, teaching methods and ways of evaluating learning outcomes, cooperation with civil society organizations and other study groups, self-assessment of competencies for human rights topics.

The protocol for interviews with representatives of study programs included the following questions:

1. How is teaching organized on the topics of human rights, children's rights and participation, and the child as an active citizen? Is there a separate course or are these contents integrated into other courses?
2. What teaching methods are used?
3. Are there explicit learning outcomes on these topics and is knowledge about those topics tested?

4. Give examples of exam questions or describe ways to test knowledge on these topics.
5. How the study program ensures that teaching on these topics are student-centered?
6. How the study program ensures that teachers have appropriate qualifications to teach these topics?
7. Is there interdisciplinary learning about these topics (students learn from students of other related studies)?
8. Your personal reflection?

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the research are divided into three parts: the results of the survey with teachers are presented first, then the results from interviews with representatives of study programs (members of faculty management boards) and finally the results of the survey with students. The results of the survey with teachers are partly presented regarding the study programs in which they teach, and partly regarding the individual answers of teachers.

### RESULTS OF THE SURVEY DONE WITH TEACHERS

#### *HUMAN RIGHTS LEARNING OUTCOMES IN STUDY PROGRAMS*

After analysing the collected data on the implementation of learning outcomes at the level of study programs, we may conclude that the learning outcomes on human rights are almost completely part of the program contents. Most study programs (95.2%) include materials about human rights. Having in mind that the content of the study programs is shaped by legislation and national curricula in the education system, these results were expected.

However, if we look at the individual responses of teachers, it must be concluded that there are certain differences in the inclusion of learning outcomes on human rights. The negative answers of teachers came from the study programs of early and preschool education, with comments that these programs are focused on children's rights, but not human rights, which is why they answered negatively questions about plans to include these topics in the future.

If we look at the topic of the inclusion of learning outcomes on children's rights and children's participation in the program content, 100% of the answers were affirmative ones. This is in line with the findings of the analysis of the situation of children's participation in study programs conducted by Jeđud Borić et al. (2017).

Teachers gave the least affirmative answers to questions about the inclusion of learning outcomes of children (students) as active citizens. Teachers from four study programs gave negative answers or did not give an answer at all

(three psychology study programs, one social work program), which means that a total of 80.9% of study programs in the sample include the topic of the child as an active citizen.

#### *REASONS FOR NON-INCLUSION OF TOPICS IN THE STUDY PROGRAM*

As stated in the previous paragraph, the lowest percentage of inclusion in the program content is found in the topic of children's active citizenship. Answering the question why these topics are not included, the respondents from the psychology study gave an explanation, saying that they do not deal with the topic of active citizenship because it is not relevant to their field. Psychologists also gave several negative answers to the first topic, human rights. This is quite interesting, given that psychology study programs not only educate school and preschool psychologists, but psychologists are often involved in various scientific and professional projects and programs dealing with children's and civil rights and participation, or child welfare, and educators and teachers rely heavily on them as highly professional authorities.

A larger number of negative answers is more visible when we look not only at the answers according to study programs but individually, according to teachers: learning outcomes on human rights are not represented in 7.5% of answers, children's rights, and participation in 2.5%, and children's active citizenship in 22.5% answers of respondents.

If we observe all the answers, respondents from the Early Childhood and Preschool Education (ECPE) (25% negative answers) and Primary Teacher Education (PT) (18% negative answers) provide an additional explanation of their negative answers regarding the inclusion of the topic of children (students) as active citizens:

'Not suitable for preschoolers.'

'They are kindergarten teachers, so we are talking about children's rights.'

Given that the concept of the child as an active citizen is taken from the National Curriculum for Early Childhood and Preschool Education (Official Gazette nr. 05/15), these statements, although expressed by the minority, are alarming. This extremely traditional conception of the child and kindergarten is by no means in line with the contemporary paradigm of childhood.

Some negative responses from teacher education studies indicate a critical attitude and the need for future inclusion of these topics:

*'There is no dialogue on the content of human rights in certain courses at the level of faculty board members. ECTS credits are awarded as usual. The*

*content is defined by traditional topics for which teachers already have the necessary references.* ‘

This statement points to the expected problem of constructing study programs. Ideally conceived, the learning outcomes are determined at the level of study programs and the necessary courses are defined according to them, in reality, the courses are introduced and shaped primarily according to the personal scientific interests of teachers. Given that every teacher has autonomy in scientific and teaching work, it is difficult to establish a dialogue on the basis of which teachers would change the content of their courses or expand their competencies on behalf of the study program as a whole.

#### *REASONS FOR INCLUSION OF TOPICS IN THE STUDY PROGRAM*

Considering the already mentioned legal preconditions for education on human and children's rights and children's participation, it is not surprising that in more than two-thirds of the programs (71%) legislation is mentioned as a reason for including topics on human rights and children's rights. However, we may find that 71% is low if the inclusion of these learning outcomes is anticipated by law. The next more common response (24%) includes requirements of the departments or faculties. The answers for the first two topics are identical, while the topic of children's active citizenship includes a much wider distribution of answers.

The described explanations for the first two topics (human rights and children's rights and participation) were given for only two ECPE programs: one program stated that these were ‘historical aspirations’. In the second program, the inclusion of human rights topics was explained by the competencies of the teachers working on it, as well as their motivation:

*‘I believe that these topics are very important for the education of future preschool teachers, teachers and professors, and through elective courses on human and children's rights, I am committed to implementing the topic of civic education and education for democratic citizenship.’*

Some explanations of teachers, regardless of specific study programs, were as follows:

*‘The right to education is one of the fundamental human rights and a precondition for the effectuation of other human rights. Teachers are obliged to ensure that every child enjoys this right in accordance with their abilities.’*

*‘Education and development of individual and cultural identity, acculturation ...’*

*‘Since my scientific field of educational rehabilitation is related to these topics, it is logical that I cover these topics.’*

*‘It's important for the study of pedagogy.’*

We see that one part of teachers when thinking about the teaching process is focused on preparing students for the educational process and the well-being of children, while the other part of teachers is more focused on the specific area of their profession. This is in line with the conclusion already made those different perspectives of teachers about the role of their subjects in the study program represents an obstacle to a more constructive discussion of the needs of the study program as a whole.

Legislation is less often cited as a reason to include a third topic, the child as an active citizen, and is included in only 38% of study programs surveyed. This is surprising, having in mind the fact that the topic of active citizenship is not only one of the basic principles of education and training prescribed by law and curricula, but it has been introduced in schools as a compulsory interdisciplinary content as part of the Civic Education curriculum (Official Gazette nr. 10/19).

The second most common reason for including active citizenship in the programs is the request of the faculty or department, with a percentage similar to the previous topics - 29%. Other answers cite teacher competencies (14%) and kindergarten and school requirements (10%) as reasons for including the topic. Also, many respondents (19%) did not explain their reasons, which should also be considered in relation to negative responses to topic inclusion (about 20% of programs do not include the topic); this primarily refers to programs that do not train students exclusively for future careers in education (such as study programs in psychology). Out of the total number of completed questionnaires, the percentage of respondents who did not provide their responses (including teachers and students) was matched and amounted to approximately 22%.

Some of the teachers' explanations were the following:

'This topic, as an inter-curricular area, is anticipated by the national curriculum. In addition to the elective course, active citizenship is present in many methodological courses.'

'Active citizenship is an important part of an inclusive curriculum, through which various forms of children's participation in the community are achieved (kindergarten, for example).'

'In addition, learning about human rights and the legal framework in general is an important element in building a competent and active citizen.'

If we focus on the type of program, almost all studies of pedagogy, psychology, and social work cited legislation as a reason to include all three topics; teacher studies give the same reason in more than half of the answers (three-quarters of the program cite legislation as a reason to include the first two topics, while half do the same for the third topic); while for ECPE studies legislation is the reason for only 50% of the program (others explain themselves by requirements of the department).

Teachers' responses reveal that the overall inclusion of learning outcomes in human rights, children's rights, and participation, and children's active citizenship at the program level is very high, 81% for the first two areas and 71% for the third. Although the involvement is quite high, the descriptive responses do not confirm whether the programs actually defined the learning outcomes at the program level. Several affirmative answers contain a list of courses that include these areas or provide generic outcomes and values, which seem more like individual statements and opinions of respondents than formally defined learning outcomes in the program. Such examples were mostly provided by psychology and pedagogy programs. This can be explained by the fact that most Croatian study programs have not yet developed or defined the final learning outcomes of the program, which will have to be done as part of the evaluation of programs for their enrolment in the Register of Croatian Qualifications Framework.

### SPECIFIC HUMAN RIGHTS LEARNING OUTCOMES AT STUDY PROGRAM LEVEL

When talking about learning programs, preschool and teacher education programs state that they include learning outcomes to a greater extent in their declared program outcomes, both at the level of knowledge and at the level of skills and responsibilities. The responses of the respondents of the field of psychology and social work study programs were generally more negative when talking about the inclusion of these areas in learning outcomes at the program level. The following text states some of the most common examples of learning outcomes in the subject areas.

#### Human rights:

- *Understanding, evaluation and active participation in the recognition, respect, and protection of human rights on a personal and professional level,*
- *Analysis and adoption of basic definitions and guidelines from international and national human rights documents,*
- *Active participation in solving current issues and problems related to human rights at the local and global levels.*

#### Children's rights and children's participation:

- *Knowledge and awareness of the role and importance of respecting children's rights as well as the obligations of those in charge of monitoring and ensuring them, informing them about proactively resolving issues and issues related to children's rights in everyday life.*

#### Child (student) as an active citizen:

- *Be informed and able to analyze the basic values of a democratic society,*
- *Raising awareness of the role of active citizens and topics related to education and training efforts and perspectives,*

- *Issues of equality, justice, freedom, responsibility, and active participation of future citizens,*
- *Ability to demonstrate respect for diversity and multiculturalism, constructive conflict resolution, decision-making skills, a commitment to teamwork and partnership-based cooperation.*

It is interesting to note that, despite a very detailed description of the learning outcomes that belong to the sector of knowledge and, to a lesser extent, the skills of applying human and partly children's rights and active citizenship, no answer states learning outcomes that refer to children's participation, they are stated only indirectly. For example, one answer provides an explanation instead of the predicted learning outcomes, as follows:

*'Understanding and respect for all stakeholders participating in the civic education process and the ability for quality communication, collaborative work, and teamwork (the outcome is unachievable without respecting children's rights, including the right to participate,).'*

Here we add that when asked about the way in which the institution ensures that the learning outcomes on the above-mentioned topics are appropriate to the future occupations of students, in more than 90% of programs, the following answers were received: *'dialogue with the representatives of the profession'*, without further explanation. Other responses say that the students are the most relevant source of feedback on the relevance and need for education in relevant areas.

## STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING IN THE TEACHING PROCESS

Ensuring that learning outcomes are appropriate for the student's future career and student participation in decision-making about the content, in most cases, seems to be achieved by the traditional Bologna process methods, i.e., 90% of teachers answered that they achieve this through *'student evaluations'* or *'student participation in bodies and procedures of decision-making'*. A small number of respondents added that they also asked for: *'feedback from students on the content of the course at the end of the semester and students are invited to propose a topic to be discussed in class, activities they would like to do with, etc.'*, *'through discussion in class'* or how they *'involve students through lectures and seminars and open them up to more active participation'*, *'involve students in research'*, etc.

## TEACHING FORMS OF WORK AND EVALUATION OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

When asked whether human rights content and other areas were integrated or separate, two-thirds of respondents said they were integrated with other content. The area of children's active citizenship is the most integrated content, and children's rights and participation are the least integrated, which means that it has the largest number of separate subjects dedicated to this area. In other words, teachers recognize children's rights more as a learning outcome that they need to emphasize in their subjects than children's participation and active citizenship, which confirms the findings of previous research (Jeđud Borić et al., 2017).

Identical answers regarding the question about teaching forms of work were obtained for all three areas; all except one program (95%) have chosen several answers: lectures, seminars, mentoring, individual student work and written assignments, teamwork, independent work of students with literature, practical work. If we look at the representation of individual answers, seminars and lectures have an expected higher representation, but often student individual and group work are applied in the field of human rights, while practical work and mentoring are present in only 9% of answers, even then they are combined with other methods.

The methods of testing knowledge used by study programs in 100% of answers for the field of human rights are mixed; there are used the following ways of testing knowledge: written final exams, colloquia, oral final exams, seminar papers, oral seminar presentations, reports (reflections, practice diaries, etc.), essays and project tasks. Written exams and oral seminar presentations were chosen by 71% of programs, 67% chose seminar papers, 59% oral exams and 53% colloquia; reports and project tasks are the least used (47% in total).

The answers were similar for the area of children's rights and participation, with a slightly lower representation of programs that use written exams (67%) and a slightly more frequent use of seminar papers (70%).

When taking about the third area, the trend of not using the classic exams is more expressed, because only 31% of the programs use the written or oral exam, which is significantly lower than in the first two areas. This trend is confirmed by more frequent use of seminar papers as a means of assessing students' knowledge (77% use seminar papers, and the same percentage is given for oral presentation at the seminar), as well as practice reports and project assignments (54%). This means that the field of active citizenship tends to be more integrated into programs in more diverse and modern ways of checking learning outcomes.

If we summarize the findings of this and the previous chapter on student participation, we can conclude that a similar approach to learning and teaching

methods is repeated throughout the entire educational vertical, i.e., that the teaching process is generally approached in a more traditional way (Diković, 2016; Jeđud Borić et al., 2017; Piršl et al., 2007; Spajić-Vrkaš, 2015).

## TEACHERS' COMPETENCES

Depending whether they are involved in study programs or not, the areas of human rights are mostly taught by university staff and other teachers and professionals. Less than 5% of the programs stated that human rights lessons are not taught by their staff at all, while 23.8% of the programs do not include external teachers and experts. This shows that higher education institutions, as a rule, cover these areas with their own staff, which they combine with external associates, primarily from the areas on which the programs are focused (63% of study programs). Having in mind that these areas are within the scope of human rights, it is surprising that only 24% of the programs decided to include experts from the non-governmental sector, and even less than 14% from the public sector that specializes in these areas.

Similar to the previous issue, the contents related to children's rights and participation, as well as the third area - active citizenship of children (students) - are usually taught by teachers employed by the institution and external associates.

Teachers' competencies for this content mainly derive from experience in the professions for which these programs educate students, which is confirmed by over 95% of the programs. In 57% of the answers, competencies arise from the research of teachers in these areas, 52% from their professional work, and only 28% of teachers are in charge of these contents because they have completed some or the entire study program in one of these areas.

Finally, when asked about open issues how higher education institutions ensure that teachers' competencies are appropriate, the most common answers were student surveys (64% of responses), followed by research, professional development, additional formal education, and teacher participation in academic and non-academic forums, and management decisions and policies. We see that student evaluations are extremely important in the teaching process because, at least according to the responses of the teachers in the sample, they act as a powerful corrective and motivator to improve the work of teachers - even more than personal research or professional development of teachers.

## PLANS FOR IMPROVING STUDY PROGRAMS

The final questions were related to the teachers' plans to improve the study programs in accordance with the examined areas. The answers are presented according to the examined topics.

### Human rights

In the area of human rights, almost the same number of programs responded that they planned (9) or did not plan (8) to introduce any kind of changes in their studies. Additional explanations from those planning to make changes include:

- *Highlighting these topics in learning outcomes,*
- *Increasing the number of elective courses,*
- *Putting more emphasis on the topic within the existing teaching content,*
- *Attracting more experts working in this field,*
- *Cooperation with institutions dealing with these issues,*
- *Encouraging student research and their participation in solving certain issues and problems,*
- *Encouraging teachers to participate in training programs on the subject and conduct related research.*

### Children's rights and children's participation

Regarding the topic of children's rights and participation, there is a slightly higher number of programs that plan improvements and changes: 11 programs plan to introduce changes (66%), while 6 do not. Additional explanations with affirmative answers are the same as in the previous area, but there are also some new ones:

- *Increasing the content on this topic,*
- *Be more explicit in referring students to children's rights,*
- *Approach this topic in a more specific and systematic way, with examples from practice and workshops,*
- *Modernization of the program,*
- *Introduction of new teaching methods.*

### Child (student) as an active citizen

Similar to the first area, slightly over 50% of study programs plan to introduce changes related to the area of active citizenship. The explanations given are in line with the previous answers:

- *Greater number of elective courses,*
- *More specific and systematic dealing with this area,*
- *Emphasizing these learning outcomes in learning programs,*
- *Introduction of more practical and modern methods,*
- *Motivating students for more research work, and teachers for student-centred teaching.*

## RESULTS OF THE INTERVIEWS WITH THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STUDY PROGRAMS

According to the respondents, teaching about human rights, children's rights and children's participation, and the child as an active citizen is mostly integrated into the broader content of various courses, but everywhere there are courses that deal only with these topics. Some of these courses are compulsory, some elective. The holders of the courses are engaged in scientific work in the field of these topics, and this is the basic criterion by which they acquire the qualification to teach. It is desirable that they are additionally educated through various seminars, educations, and conferences. Study programs have explicit learning outcomes on these topics and knowledge about them is checked by classical final exams (written and oral), but also in other ways during classes, for example through seminar presentations or organization of workshops, since it is important to examine not only knowledge but also skills and attitudes.

All respondents stated that modern teaching methods were applied in their study programs. A frontal approach in working with students is avoided and students are encouraged to work in groups and pairs, which enables the development of social skills. Students learn a lot through workshops, project and research assignments, and practical assignments in kindergartens and schools. Such teaching methods are considered to motivate students and encourage reflection and critical thinking in students. Learning is focused on the student, which is primarily ensured by the possibility of choosing the course content, or specific topics that the student covers as part of individual tasks.

A common shortcoming or weak point of all the interviewed institutions seems to be the cooperation of students with students of related studies. There were mentioned the joint activities of ECPE and Teacher Education (hereinafter: TE) students, i.e., cooperation with incoming students from the international programs Erasmus + and CEEPUS. Systematic cooperation, i.e., collaborative learning, with students of related studies does not exist but is left to the individual possibilities and affinities of individual teachers and students. Encouraging collaborative learning between students of pedagogy, psychology, ECPE, TE, and social work is important in the context of their future collaboration in a professional environment. Encouraging collaboration at the student level could facilitate collaboration at the professional level.

All respondents stated that the topics of human and children's rights, children's participation, and the child (student) as an active citizen are extremely important for the education of future preschool teachers, primary teachers, pedagogues, and other professionals involved in the educational process. This is a cross-curricular topic that is mandatory in primary and secondary schools, and it is expected that the implementation of a comprehensive curricular reform will become mandatory for early childhood and preschool education.

However, there is dissatisfaction with current study programs because these topics are scattered across different courses dealing with different areas, rather than being dealt with by separate courses. Existing separate courses are often elective courses so not all students have the opportunity to participate. That is why most of the respondents state that it is necessary to refresh or completely reconstruct the existing study programs in accordance with the changes in society, educational policies, and education.

The negative consequences of unregulated study programs may be noticed in kindergartens and primary schools, where the topics of children's rights, children's participation, and civic education enter extremely slowly, although there are exceptions and university teachers organize cooperation with examples of good practice through which students can learn extra. One of the main reasons for the violation of children's rights in educational institutions is the ignorance, i.e., lack of knowledge of those who work with children about human rights issues, or about international documents, laws, and regulations governing them, which is why they do not know how to recognize situations in which children's rights are violated.

The suggestion of one respondent is that these problems could be solved by faculties offering lifelong learning programs that would cover these topics, but also redirect educators from orientation to content concept via teaching plan and program to orientation on curricular concept and learning outcomes. That is, as the other respondent pointed out, participatory rights put the child in the position of a subject who participates in decision-making and expresses his/her opinion, so it is important that the student is a co-creator of his curriculum so that in future professional work he/she can be a children-oriented reflective practitioner.

## RESULTS OF THE SURVEY WITH STUDENTS

Almost all students stated that in their studies they learned about human rights, children's rights and children's participation, and about the child (student) as an active citizen. TE students have mostly learned about these topics in compulsory and elective courses such as Family Pedagogy, Inclusive Education, Sociology, Didactics, General Pedagogy, Students with Behavioral Problems and Prevention of Peer Violence. Some of them pointed out that they studied these topics in the mentioned courses in the informative manner. Similar comments were made by ECPE students, and they heard about these topics in compulsory and elective courses such as Pedagogy of ECPE, New Paradigm of ECPE, Family Pedagogy, Sociology of Childhood, Professional Competences of Preschool Teachers, and Inclusive Education.

They learned about the topics mainly through frontal lectures (almost 100%), then through written and oral seminars (TE students in 35% of cases,

and ECPE students in 50% of cases) and group discussions (TE students in 30% of cases, and ECPE students in 50% of cases). Students also mentioned exercises and workshops (about 30% in both groups). They learned the least about the topics through essays, research projects, portfolio development, and internships, while project teaching was mentioned by only one student in the entire sample. About 40% of students stated that they did not have an exam on these topics.

When learning about these topics, students usually did not have organized collaboration with civil society organizations, and only some recalled collaborating with schools or kindergartens. They also had no contact with students of related studies such as psychology or pedagogy.

Most students felt that they were not sufficiently involved in the design and implementation of the tasks in which they learned about the topics. Almost 85% of students do not consider themselves capable of teaching on topics, but also 85% of students consider these topics to be important and necessary for contemporary education. In the final comments, some students stated that they learned about children's rights and participation mainly through volunteering and additional education outside of studies.

## **CONCLUSION**

The main goal of the research was to research the level of representation and the way of implementation of human rights topics in faculties of teacher education and humanities and social sciences, including the perspective of teachers, board members, and students. We will briefly summarize our findings by looking at the posed research questions.

Learning outcomes on human rights are included in almost all examined study programs, although there was noticed a greater representation of human and children's rights topics than child participation and children's (student) active citizenship, both at the level of study programs and at the individual teacher level. It seems that the topics of participation and active citizenship are still relatively unknown in the context of higher education, so it is not surprising that other research has shown similar problems at other levels of the educational vertical, given that the higher education system provides initial but also lifelong learning for future primary school and preschool professionals.

Supra-institutional and institutional reasons were cited as the most common reasons for including human rights learning outcomes, and individual reasons were cited as reasons for not including learning outcomes. There is a lack of reflection on the study program as a whole in the teaching practice of the faculty's collective.

Student participation in program design is ambivalent - through student evaluations, the students have the greatest power to improve programs for future

generations, but participation in deciding on the content and implementation of courses they currently attend is limited and varies from teacher to teacher.

The perspectives of teachers, board members, and students are uneven. They mostly differ regarding the issues of teaching forms and the way of evaluating learning outcomes. Visions about contemporary methods of teaching, teaching methods, and exams of knowledge, skills and attitudes conceived at the level of study programs are scattered in the practice of individual subjects and teachers, and therefore in the eyes of students, the traditional methods shall prevail. These differences between the normative and the practical indicate that the higher education system is still rather inactive and traditional. This conclusion is supported by the extremely low response of teachers in the survey, which is the main limitation of our research. Therefore, our question from the introductory part of the paper on the ‘efficiency’ of including humanities in study programs in the time of the neoliberal university, regardless of the enthusiasm of some teachers, could be answered negatively.

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