How Teachers Facilitate Intercultural Communicative Competence in Multicultural Settings

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Abstract   The purpose of this paper is to investigate how teachers at the International Primary School of Sarajevo in Bosnia and Herzegovina facilitate Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) among students from different cultural backgrounds to establish welfare in the classroom environment. It is an obvious fact that Bosnia and Herzegovina is a multicultural country. The school population of the International Primary School of Sarajevo consists of students from different countries and geographical regions being 74% Bosnia and Herzegovina, 12% Turkey, 7% Middle East, 3% Europe, %3 Asia and 1% other. This diversity causes challenges for both teachers and students. For students from different ethnic groups the major challenge is to understand and respect the identity and beliefs of others. For foreign students, adaptation to a new environment brings many psychological and sociocultural challenges. For teachers teaching in a multicultural setting having substantial knowledge without bias of each and every student's cultural affiliations, religions, identities, customs, beliefs and thoughts is challenging. These teachers need to have adequate understanding/ information of different cultural backgrounds and ability to facilitate ICC among students. Teachers are also expected to enrich strategies and provide reinforcement activities such as giving a chance to both local and foreign students to represent their own cultures, beliefs and thoughts in a way that gets students involved in lessons without any hesitation or awareness of otherness. For teachers to be able to establish welfare in the classroom these kinds of activities are a must; they need to have a curriculum, which allows them to turn strategies and approaches into action.

Keywords   Multiculturalism, Diversity, Intercultural dialogue, Ethnicity, Otherness, Intercultural communicative competence

1. Introduction

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC); understanding and accepting people who belong to different cultural backgrounds, identities and beliefs is crucial to be able to communicate and understand each other in today's world. Accepting others would lessen misunderstandings, taboos and conflicts and promote universal peace. According to the findings of Gollnick and Chinn (2002), today's teachers are obliged to teach students various language, culture, capabilities and attributes. So teachers have very important responsibilities for establishing welfare in classroom/school environment by teaching or facilitating ICC.

Recent research shows that teaching language does not include linguistics competence only. This teaching also involves intercultural communicative competence because teaching a language is teaching the culture of that language, itself. According to Politzer (in Brooks, 2001), students would attribute wrong meanings to language unless learning that language with its cultural references. Teaching linguistic competence enables learners to use a language in four core skills; reading, writing, speaking and listening appropriately. However, teaching ICC within linguistic competence enables learners to interact with people who come from different cultures, religions, ethnic groups or identities. Therefore, how to teach and facilitate ICC in a multicultural environment and what affects teachers in terms of teaching ICC should be taken into consideration.

Accommodating communication within ESL classes between teacher and student is one of the dynamic ways to facilitate intercultural communicative competence. Howard Giles, a professor at the University of California, first developed the communication accommodation theory (CAT). According to Giles and Ogay, CAT "Explores the different ways in which we accommodate our communication, our motivations for doing so, and the consequences" (2007, p. 16) They also note that people configure their speech styles such as accent, their vocal patterns and their gestures when they communicate, to accommodate to others. Briefly, CAT manages our social relationships with interlocutors or within interpersonal or intergroup. In a way it helps us know what to say as well as how to say it. Giles and Palomares (2005)

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stated four CAT strategies for analyzing accommodation communication; Accommodation, Under-Accommodation, Over- Accommodation, and Non-Accommodation. As reported by the research, these strategies might help us to overcome "communicative grenades" (p. 123) or communicational problems in our lives. For instance, Rogerson-Revell (2010) uses these four strategies in his study and states that CAT "lends itself well to the analyses of intercultural communication" (p. 435). Based on his study, CAT's four strategies are suggested for use in ESL classes to analyze the similarities and differences in the ways ESL teachers communicatively accommodate to intercultural competence.

According to Vollmer (2000), academic and social atmosphere in the classrooms are greatly influenced by teachers' beliefs and thoughts. However, Howard (1999) stated that "We can`t teach what we don`t know." It is important therefore that teachers have enough knowledge about the different cultural backgrounds, ethnicities, identities, beliefs and religions of their students and also know ICC strategies. This knowledge and skill will help diminish misunderstandings among students that occur because of cultural differences. Thus, having sufficient knowledge and applying ICC strategies in classroom environment will help them to provide a peaceful atmosphere, which is a need for proper learning.

Divergence is an accommodation strategy mentioned above in CAT's strategies that should be discussed here as it is related to teachers' sufficient knowledge about cultures." Divergence occurs when an interactant's communication styles become, to varying degrees, more different or deviant from the communicative desires and/or norms of others."[1] According to Giles and Ogay (2007) divergence is "an accentuation of speech and nonverbal differences between self and other" (pp.293-310) It is as also defined by Gasiorek and Giles (2012) as "a person persists in his or her original style" (pp.309-331) In the light of these scholars' findings, a teacher's degrees of communication divergence and convergence would effect their facilitation of ICC.

The resources from which teachers get information about cultures, religions or beliefs are also another important issue. It is important that these sources should not contain bias towards people's identities.

Geneva Gay (2002) states how teachers usually have information about a variety of cultures and how they should acquire adequate knowledge;

What they think they know about the field is often based on superficial or distorted information conveyed through popular culture, mass media, and critics. Or their knowledge reflects cursory academic introductions that provide insufficient depth of analysis of multicultural education. These inadequacies can be corrected by teachers' acquiring more knowledge about the contributions of different ethnic groups to a wide variety of disciplines and a deeper understanding of multicultural education theory, research, and scholarship." (Journal of Teacher Education, Vol. 53, No. 2, March/April 2002 p.107)

Rather than receiving poor information mostly through mass media or social media, teachers should prefer getting higher quality information through scholarly articles, books or multicultural orientation programs. Acquired substantial knowledge allows teachers to get overcome any prejudice, bias and misunderstandings between teachers and students and between students. It also helps teachers to develop strategies for misunderstandings among students of different cultures.

Common European Framework References (CEFR) describes intercultural awareness as "Knowledge, awareness and understanding of the relation (similarities and distinctive differences) between the 'world of origin' and the 'world of the target community' produce an intercultural awareness." (Page 103)

According to CEFR Intercultural skills are as follows:

- The ability to bring the culture of origin and the foreign culture into relation with each other;
- Cultural sensitivity and the ability to identify and use a variety of strategies for contact with those from other cultures;
- The capacity to fulfill the role of cultural intermediary between one's own culture and the foreign culture and to deal effectively with intercultural misunderstanding and conflict situations;
- The ability to overcome stereotyped relationships. (Page 104-105)

Lessons with a variety of kinds of activities, which lead students to represent their own cultures, discuss about a variety of identities, compare and contrast others cultures with their own, talk about taboos and misunderstandings among cultures would be very helpful. They would help students to be aware of 'otherness'. To help apply these kinds of activities in order to help teachers to facilitate ICC, schools or institutions should have an appropriate curriculum and adequate materials. According to Skopinskaja (2003), teaching materials in teaching or learning of a foreign language should include "presentation of content through attitudinal perspective, that is development of tolerance and empathy towards otherness as well as a feeling of the national identity; challenging the learners' existing stereotypes; arousing curiosity about otherness; and preparing students for an adequate behavior in the target language." (p. 63)

When working on facilitating ICC among students one of the most important questions is how curriculum should be designed for creating effective lessons and establishing welfare in the school and classroom environment.

Geneva Gay (2002) says that in addition to having enough knowledge about ethnicities and cultural differentiation, instructors also need to know how to apply knowledge in curriculum design and educational methods. She describes three types of educational module that are consistently

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[1] Accommodating new vistas Jessica Gasiorek, Howard Giles Jordan Soliz Language & Communication Elsevier journal (p.2)

revealing in the classroom. Each of the modules provides different opportunities for teaching cultural differentiation. The first module affirmed by national authorities of educational systems is called *"standards"*. They are usually supported by adopted materials and other curriculum frameworks. The second module is *"symbolic curriculum"* (*Gay, 1995*) and includes visual aids on the purpose of teaching morality and values. (Pp. 37-54). Decorating bulletin boards with rules, global values, famous people and their quotes, ethics and etc. are well-known ways of implementing a symbolic curriculum. The third module *"societal curriculum"* is called by Cortés (1991, 1995, and 2000). It involves having knowledge, ideas, and influences about ethnic groups that is illustrated in television programs, films, magazines and news. In this way, Gay's cultural responsive teaching tells us media manipulates people's point of views towards ethnic groups, different identities, cultures or religions and greatly influences people. School curriculum plays an important role to reduce this negative effect, which is created by media.

The curriculum of IPSS is based on two different programs; a Bosnian / Croatian / Serbian Language Program that follows the Ministry of Education in BIH and an English Curriculum that is endorsed by the Cambridge International Primary Program. A Local curriculum is defined in Word Data on Education (7th edition, 2010/2011) as,

According to the Framework Law on Primary and Secondary Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2003) the purpose of education is to contribute to the development of society through the optimal intellectual, physical, moral and social development of individuals, based on the rule of law and respect of human rights, as well as to contribute to economic development to ensure the best standard of living for all citizens. The general aims of education result from the generally accepted, universal values of a democratic society, and from the values based on the specific national, historical, cultural and religious traditions of peoples and national minorities who live in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Aims of the education program are below:

- provide access to knowledge as basis for understanding of self, others and the world we live in;
- ensure the optimal development of each individual, including those with special educational needs, in accordance with their age, abilities and intellectual and physical capacities;
- promote and respect human rights and basic freedoms, and prepare each person for life in a society which respects democratic principles and the rule of law;
- raise awareness about belonging to the state Bosnia and Herzegovina, one's own cultural identity, language and tradition, respect others and those who are different, respect diversity and promoting mutual understanding, tolerance and solidarity between all human beings, peoples and communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in the world;
- ensure equal educational opportunities regardless of

gender, race, national identity, social and cultural origin and status, family status, religion, psycho-physiological and other personal traits;
- provide quality education for all;
- reach standards of knowledge which can be compared to the international and European levels ensuring integration into the European education system;
- achieve lifelong learning;
- promote economic development and integration into the European space.

Compulsory education and outcomes of primary schools in BIH are also stated in Word Data on Education 7th edition, (2010/11):

The Framework Law on Primary and Secondary Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina adopted in June 2003 initiated the primary (basic) education reform through the introduction of the compulsory nine-year program. The implementation of new nine-year compulsory primary (basic) education program started in 2003/04, and it is intended to replace the former eight-year primary program (still being offered in about 64% of schools in the cantons of the Federation in 2009/10). The entry age is 6.

The concept of nine-year primary education in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina defines the learning outcomes in all primary school programs as follows:

- student literacy in the broad sense of the term (reading, writing, numerical and computer literacy, media culture, etc.);
- possessing personal skills (ability to make decisions, cope with difficulties and problems, care about own health and the health of the others, positive habits, respect for life);
- student readiness to accept the role of responsible citizen (acknowledging the culture and customs of others, advocating equality, positively influencing the culture of peace and tolerance in school);
- successful problem solving critical thinking abilities;
- communication skills;
- a clear idea about importance of science and technology in contemporary society;
- basic knowledge of two foreign languages. (EQA/OKO, 2009).

In addition to the Bosnian/Serbian/Croatian Language Program IPSS follows the national plus program with the International Cambridge Primary Program, which enables learners to communicate confidently and effectively and to develop the critical skills to respond to a range of information, media and texts with understanding and enjoyment. Learners who follow this curriculum framework will develop a first language competency in English based on a curriculum designed to be successful in any culture and to promote cross-cultural understanding. This curriculum develops learners' speaking, listening, reading and writing skills in English. "It has been developed in conjunction with Cambridge English Language Assessment and is based on the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of

Reference for Languages (CEFR), used across the world to map learners' progress in English." [2] According to Cambridge International Examinations "Cambridge learners are together confidant, responsible, reflective, innovative and engaged – equipped for success in the fast-changing modern world. "[3]

2. Methodology

Data has been collected from primary school teachers at IPSS by having them fill out a questionnaire that was created by the researcher, which is based on intercultural communicative competence. In this questionnaire SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) is used to measure teachers` awareness of intercultural communicative strategies in order to facilitate communication among students, approaches to develop rich repertoires of multicultural instruction, and ways of allowing students and their parents get to know each other. All variables and correlations between variables have been evaluated.

2.1. Participants

A total of 13 teachers of ESL and Local Language who have been working in International Primary School of Sarajevo participated in the research. The mean of gender is M=1.08 and mean of grades is M= 3.00. Std. Deviation is SD= 1.41. The distribution of gender and grades are displayed in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

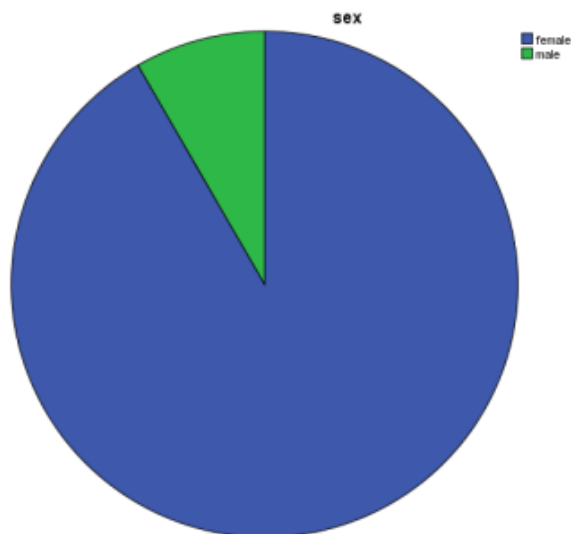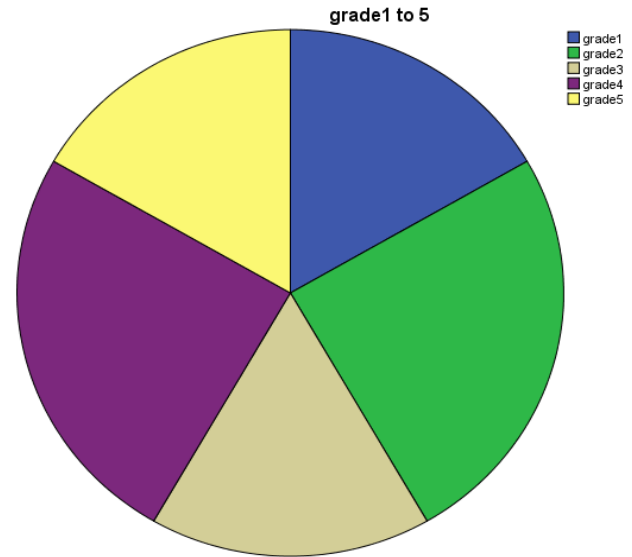**Figure 1.**

Figure 2.

As seen in Figure 1, there are more female participants than male participants and teachers of Grade 2 and Grade 3 are more represented than other grades as shown in Figure 2.
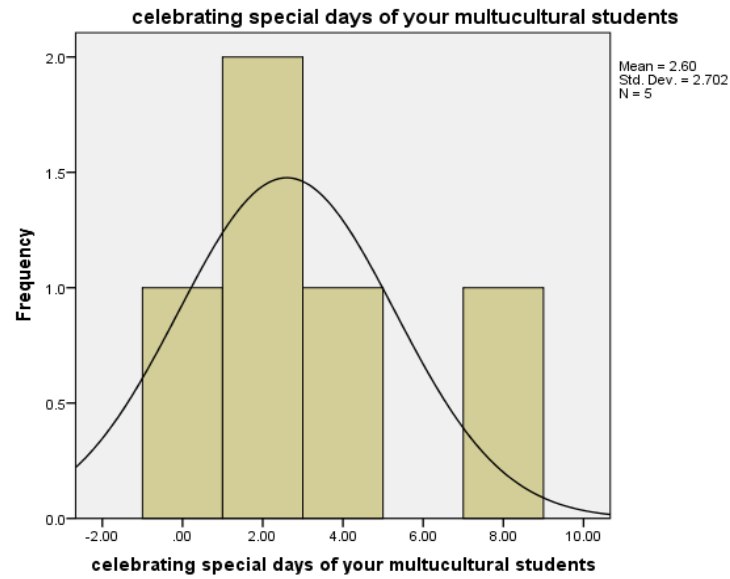
2.2. Frequency

The frequency of each question in the questionnaire (which can be found in the appendix) has been evaluated. Only crucial questions, which are related to awareness of intercultural competence and strategies for establishing peaceful settings for multiculturalism, are displayed below Figure 3.
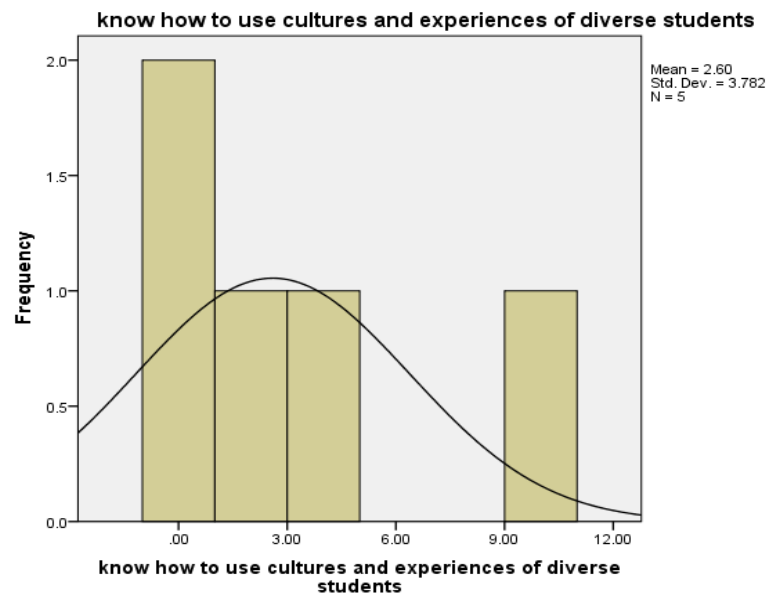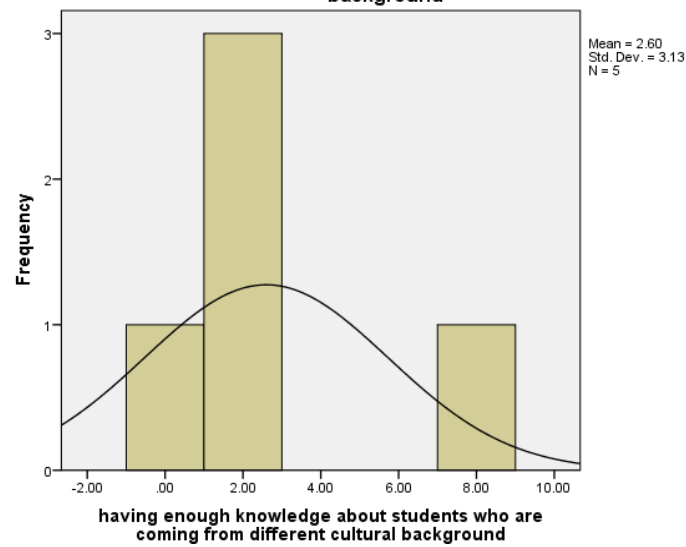
3. Conclusions

What has been found in this research is that IPSS has a multicultural setting and teachers are aware of intercultural communicative competence primarily through media, parents themselves and multicultural education research. According to Gay (2000), teaching students who come from a variety of cultures and ethnicities by using different aspects of their cultures, experiences and attitudes is described as culturally responsive teaching. It is based on "teacher attitude and expectations, cultural communication in the classroom, culturally diverse context in the curriculum, and culturally congruent instructional strategies" (Gay, 2000, p. 44). In light of Gay's study, teachers should have substantial information about their students' cultural backgrounds through scholastic resources, seminars or lectures rather than having manipulative knowledge from media. Being aware of cultural responsive teaching provides teachers having abilities to decide weaknesses and strengths of the curriculum and materials in light of multiculturalism. It also enables teachers to make changes if it is necessary in order to increase their quality. (Gay, 2002)
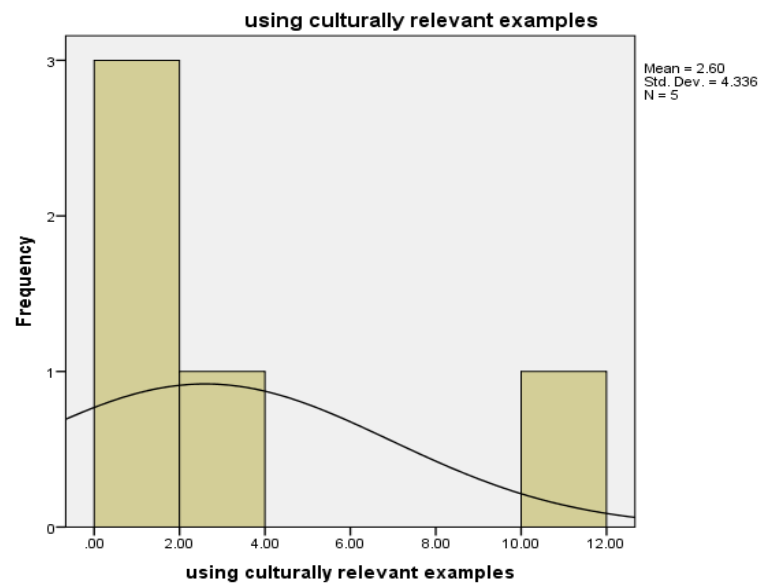

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http://www.cie.org.uk/programmes-and-qualifications/cambridge-primary/cambridge-primary/curriculum/
3
http://www.cie.org.uk/images/134557-implementing-the-curriculum-with-cambridge.pdf

celebrating special days of your multucultural students

Mean = 2.60
Std. Dev. = 2.702
N = 5

having enough knowledge about students who are coming from different cultural background

Mean = 2.60
Std. Dev. = 3.13
N = 5

know how to use cultures and experiences of diverse students

Mean = 2.60
Std. Dev. = 3.782
N = 5

organizing social gatherings with parents to get to know each other

Mean = 2.60
Std. Dev. = 2.302
N = 5

Frequency

organizing social gatherings with parents to get to
know each other

using images, icons, motoes to use moral and global ethic values

Mean = 2.60
Std. Dev. = 2.51
N = 5

Frequency

using images, icons, motoes to use moral and global
ethic values

using culturally relevant examples

Mean = 2.60
Std. Dev. = 4.336
N = 5

Frequency

using culturally relevant examples

is there multicultiral environment in your school

Mean = 2.60
Std. Dev. = 3.435
N = 5

designing lessons through thinking of students` cultural background

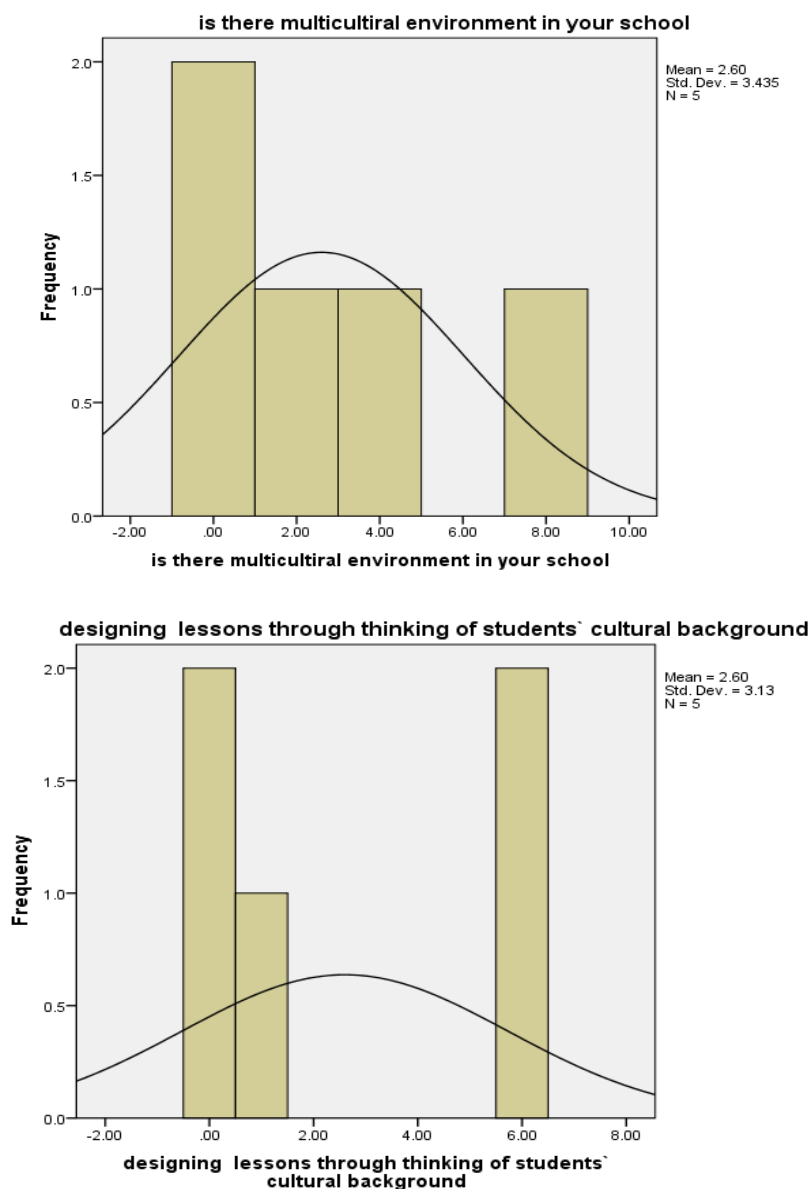Mean = 2.60
Std. Dev. = 3.13
N = 5

Figure 3.

As was noted in introduction, the curriculum of IPSS is based on two different programs; the Bosnian / Croatian / Serbian Language Program that follows Ministry of Education in BIH and the English Curriculum that is endorsed by Cambridge International Primary Program. With this curriculum, teachers know how to design their lessons through thinking of each and every student's cultural background. This includes considering accepting others and respecting all identities and religions using the sufficient number of materials provided by Cambridge University Press, which are integrated in a multicultural way. "Facilitators need to include experience, comparison, analysis, reflection and action in their planning"[4] and these components are covered in the materials. The provided materials enable teachers at IPSS to develop students' curiosity towards other cultures, attitudes of respect, acceptance and to have knowledge of cultural affiliations. Some activities allow students a chance to compare and contrast their cultures with respect and acceptance. As part of the curriculum students analyze similarities and differences among cultures as well as reflect on their own ideas in different ways. Other activities that might be done in ESL class include representing one's own culture, working in pairs or groups, organizing debates, giving examples of equivalence word(s) in mother tongue, role playing or doing drama in a target language, writing stories/ poems, and watching films or reading various texts.

In this study teachers state that they have little experience organizing social gatherings to get to know parents of students. Gathering people with different cultural affiliations,

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identities, ethnicity, religious or socio-economic groups would be a great opportunity to raise ICC for both teachers and parents. According to Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (2010) there are three types of education. One of them is *informal education* which is described as "the lifelong process whereby every individual acquires attitudes, values, skills and knowledge from the educational influences and resources in his or her own environment and from daily experience (family, peer group, neighbors, encounters, library, mass media, work, play, etc.)". (p.8)

The White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue (2008) tells us;

Youth groups and community centers, alongside the family, school and workplace, can be pillars of social cohesion. Through the wide variety of their programs, the open and voluntary nature of their activities and the commitment of their members, these organizations are often more successful than others in actively involving persons from a minority background and offering opportunities for dialogue." (p.31)

This tells us that intercultural competence is acquired from different kinds of sources including parents and parents' gatherings or organizations by youth groups and community centers. These groups aim to exchange cultural characteristics, customs, thoughts etc. or celebrate people's special days with respect. Forming these groups would help to overcome prejudice and raise awareness of ICC.

To summarize, teachers are greatly influenced by living in a multicultural country, Bosnia and Herzegovina so it helps them to understand the needs of students from different cultural backgrounds. They are willing however to learn more about different cultures by attending orientation programs and reading educational research so as not to be manipulated or have distorted information through popular culture or mass media. Global English textbook published by Cambridge University Press contains various topics with different countries, cultures, lives and customs helps both teachers and students to gain a mentality of accepting others with respect. In this way the curriculum definitely facilitates ICC among students. Materials, which play another crucial role in ICC, will be explored in detail in later research by the researcher.

Appendix

Questionnaire

1. Is there a multicultural environment in your school? **Strongly Agree – Agree – Undecided / Neutral - Disagree - Strongly Disagree**
2. Is there intercultural dialogue in your school? **Strongly Agree – Agree – Undecided / Neutral - Disagree - Strongly Disagree**
3. Do you believe you have enough knowledge about your students who are coming from different cultural background? **Strongly Agree – Agree – Undecided / Neutral - Disagree - Strongly Disagree**
4. How do you obtain knowledge about different cultures? (Media, Critics, Multicultural Education Research, Scholarship) **Strongly Agree – Agree – Undecided / Neutral-Disagree - Strongly Disagree**
5. Have you ever attend in multicultural education orientation program in order to facilitate intercultural communicative competence among your students? **Strongly Agree – Agree – Undecided / Neutral - Disagree – Strongly Disagree**
6. Do you think your school curriculum is integrated into multicultural settings? **Strongly Agree – Agree – Undecided /Neutral-Disagree-Strongly Disagree**
7. Do you design your lessons through thinking of each and every student's cultural background? **Strongly Agree – Agree – Undecided / Neutral - Disagree - Strongly Disagree**
8. Do you have any hesitation about your students while teaching? (using hatred related words to ethnic groups) **Strongly Agree – Agree – Undecided / Neutral - Disagree - Strongly Disagree**
9. Do you use images, icons, mottoes or other artifact to use moral and global ethic values? **Strongly Agree – Agree – Undecided / Neutral - Disagree - Strongly Disagree**
10. Do you celebrate the special days of the students coming from different cultural backgrounds? (Christmas, Thanksgiving, Eid-Al-Adha, Ramadan and so on) **Strongly Agree – Agree – Undecided / Neutral - Disagree - Strongly Disagree**
11. Do you celebrate individually or with other students? **Strongly Agree – Agree – Undecided / Neutral - Disagree - Strongly Disagree**
12. Do you allow your students talk or give examples in their mother tongue? **Strongly Agree – Agree – Undecided/Neutral - Disagree - Strongly Disagree**
13. Do you allow your students to give examples from their own culture, traditions or experiences? **Strongly Agree – Agree – Undecided / Neutral - Disagree - Strongly Disagree**
14. Do your lessons include respecting other identities and religions? **Strongly Agree – Agree – Undecided/Neutral - Disagree - Strongly Disagree**
15. How often do you talk to your students about "accepting others"? **Always – Often – Sometimes – Seldom – Never**
16. Do you organize any social gatherings with your students` parents to get to know each other? **Strongly Agree – Agree – Undecided / Neutral - Disagree - Strongly Disagree**
17. Do you know how to use cultures and experiences of diverse students while teaching to expand their intellectual horizons and academic achievement? **Strongly Agree – Agree – Undecided / Neutral - Disagree - Strongly Disagree**
18. Do you use culturally relevant examples? (Wedding, clothes, food and etc) **Strongly Agree – Agree – Undecided / Neutral-Disagree - Strongly Disagree**

19. Do they have any conflict because of their diversity while working together? **Strongly Agree – Agree – Undecided / Neutral-Disagree - Strongly Disagree**

20. Do your students work in pairs or in a group? **Strongly Agree – Agree – Undecided / Neutral - Disagree - Strongly Disagree**

21. Do you think you provide a peaceful setting for students to work together? **Strongly Agree – Agree – Undecided/Neutral-Disagree-Strongly Disagree**

22. Do you know how to develop rich repertoires of multicultural instructional examples to use in teaching ethnically diverse students? **Strongly Agree – Agree – Undecided / Neutral - Disagree - Strongly Disagree**

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