



Students' Attitudes toward Immigrants: An Analysis of ICCS Data

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Purpose: This study investigates changes in students' attitudes toward immigrants among 14-year-old students in Slovenia between the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) cycles of 2009 and 2016. Additionally, it explores the relationship between civic knowledge and attitudes toward immigrants.

Study design/methodology/approach: The study performed descriptive statistics and further linear regression analysis to investigate the relationship between civic knowledge and students' attitudes toward immigrants.

Findings: The results show that attitudes toward immigrants have become slightly more positive between the two cycles in Slovenia, but the differences are not statistically significant. Civic knowledge is positively related to attitudes toward immigrants in both cycles. These findings are consistent with previous studies, highlighting the importance of education in promoting positive attitudes toward immigrants and the need for continuous evaluation of educational policies and practices to improve attitudes toward immigrants in Slovenia and beyond.

Originality/value: The originality and value of this study lie in its focus on Slovenian students' attitudes toward immigrants and their relationship with civic knowledge by analyzing data from two ICCS cycles.

Introduction

The issue of attitudes toward immigrants is a critical concern in contemporary society, and education has been recognized as having a key role in shaping such attitudes (Bayram, 2022; Davidov & Semyonov, 2017; De Coninck, 2020). Numerous studies have consistently demonstrated that education can significantly promote intercultural competence and understanding, enhancing positive attitudes toward immigrants and reducing prejudice and discrimination (Boateng et al., 2021; Guo-Brennan & Guo-Brennan, 2020; Pryce, 2018). In Slovenia, as in many other European nations, the attitudes of young people toward immigrants are of particular interest as they represent the country's future and workforce (Klun & Vombergar, 2021; Krstic & Schulz, 2018; Losito et al., 2018). Therefore, it is crucial to comprehend how young people's attitudes toward immigrants have evolved in Slovenia and how civic knowledge can influence these attitudes. The International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) is an extensive international research project that examines students' civic knowledge, attitudes and behaviours and explores how young people are prepared to assume their roles as citizens (Schulz et al., 2018). In this paper, a secondary analysis of ICCS is performed to examine changes in student's attitudes toward immigrants between 2009 and 2016 in Slovenia and to explore the relationship between civic knowledge and attitudes toward immigrants. Civic education is essential for preparing individuals to be active and responsible citizens, and it can positively impact attitudes toward immigrants (Diazgranados & Sandoval-Hernandez, 2015). Therefore, investigating the relationship between civic knowledge and attitudes toward immigrants can provide insights into how civic education can promote positive attitudes toward them. The paper focuses on two research questions, as follows. Did attitudes toward immigrants of 14-year-old students change in Slovenia between 2009 and 2016, and, if yes, in which direction (more or less favourable)?

Secondly, how does civic knowledge relate to the students' attitudes toward immigrants in ICCS cycles 2009 and 2016?

Theory background

In recent years, the flow of refugees and migrants into Europe from the Middle East and North Africa has significantly increased. This migration wave has been linked to the rise of ISIS and the Syrian conflict (UNICEF 2018; UNHCR, n.d.). Although some European countries and citizens have welcomed refugees and migrants, others have opposed their presence. As a result, conflicting views on migration have emerged across Europe, with some leaders and nations considering refugees and migrants as an opportunity for European societies, while others view them as a threat (Davidov & Semyonov, 2017; Isac et al., 2019). As the number of immigrants settling in Europe continues to grow, both citizens and politicians have started to question the social, political, economic, and legal implications of immigration. There is also growing concern about the impact that immigrants have on their host societies in terms of social, cultural and economic factors. The status of immigrants in European societies has become a major topic of public debate across the continent (Davidov & Semyonov, 2017). Attitudes toward immigrants vary widely across countries and demographic groups. In Slovenia, 14-year-old students' attitudes toward immigrants are particularly interesting since they represent the country's future and workforce. The ICCS 2009 and 2016 surveys conducted in Slovenia, among others, allow us to explore reporting of students' attitudes toward immigrants. The previous findings of the study suggest that civic knowledge is positively associated with attitudes toward migrants. This highlights the importance of education in shaping attitudes toward immigrants among young people (Schulz et al., 2018). Overall, immigration to Europe has sparked heated debates and conflicting views on migration across the continent. The integration of migrants has become more pressing, and education is seen as a key factor in shaping attitudes toward migrants and promoting social cohesion.

Slovenia started receiving immigrants from other ex-Yugoslavian territories after 1991, the year of the disintegration of Yugoslavia and Slovenia's independence. These migrants often had families and friends living in the country and shared languages and cultures similar to those of Slovenians. This facilitated their integration. Since Slovenia joined the EU in 2004, more third-country citizens (TCNs) have settled there. The increasing number of asylum seekers since 2015 has further accentuated this trend. Many moved to Slovenia for better job opportunities and living conditions (European Commission, 2023). Slovenia experienced several waves of immigration from non-European countries, particularly Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq. These waves of immigration resulted from conflicts and wars in these countries (Zavratnik, 2012). As we can see from the literature, the waves of immigration to Slovenia have been shaped by political and economic factors and by conflicts and wars in neighbouring and non-European countries. These waves have had a significant impact on Slovenia's social, economic, and cultural dynamics, as well as on the attitudes of its citizens toward immigration and migrants. Integrating migrants into their host countries' civic and political life is crucial. It promotes integration and is influenced by various individual, social and political factors (European Commission, 2023a). One important aspect of this process can be the development of civic knowledge and engagement, enabling migrants to participate fully in the democratic processes of their new communities. Civic knowledge refers to understanding a society's political and legal systems, social norms and cultural values (Maiello et al., 2003). It involves understanding citizenship rights and responsibilities and political participation mechanisms, such as voting and advocacy. Research has shown that migrants with higher levels of civic knowledge are more likely to engage in civic activities, such as volunteering, community organizing and political participation (Maiello et al., 2003; Schulz et al., 2018). Education seems to be a

consistent element that influences one's perspective on immigration and immigration policies, as demonstrated in numerous studies (Gang et al., 2002; Hainmueller & Hiscox, 2007; Hello et al., 2002). Those with higher levels of education tend to have a more favourable attitude toward immigrants and immigration (Wright et al., 2012).

Research design

This chapter outlines the methodology of conducting a secondary analysis of the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) conducted by the IEA. Specifically, the focus is on 14-year-old students' attitudes toward immigrants, using the Slovenian national database for two ICCS cycles – 2009 and 2016. The study aims to identify any changes in attitudes toward migrants between the two cycles and explore the relationship between civic knowledge and attitudes toward migrants.

This paper focus on the following research questions:

- Did the attitudes toward immigrants of 14-year-old students in Slovenia change between 2009 and 2016, and, if yes, in which direction (more or less favourable)?
- How does civic knowledge relate to the students' attitudes toward immigrants in ICCS cycles 2009 and 2016?

We performed a secondary analysis using the Slovenian national database. We used the database from the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) 2009 and 2016. In Slovenia, this research was carried out by the Educational research institute, and at the international level, it was coordinated by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievements (IEA). The sample represents eighth-grade students from Slovenia, and the sampling corresponds to the ICCS study standard (Klemencic et al., 2019).

Firstly, this study performed descriptive statistics by category for each form of Students' attitudes toward equal rights for immigrants (IMMRGHT). This composite variable is taken from the Students' questionnaire in ICCS 2009. In ICCS 2009, the following five Likert-type items (with response categories "strongly agree," "agree," "disagree," and "strongly disagree") were used to measure students' attitudes toward equal rights for immigrants (IMMRGHT): "Immigrants should have the opportunity to continue speaking their own language"; "Immigrant children should have the same education opportunities that other children in the country have"; "Immigrants who live in a country for several years should have the opportunity to vote in elections"; "Immigrants should have the opportunity to continue their own customs and lifestyle"; "Immigrants should have all the same rights that everyone else in the country has" (Schulz et al., 2009).

In ICCS 2016, five ICCS 2009 items were used again to construct the scale - students' endorsement of equal rights for immigrants (E_IMMRGHT). This composite variable was featured in the regional module European questionnaire (Schulz et al., 2018).

Descriptive statistics were done with SPSS, a widely used software for statistical analysis, particularly in social science research (Rahman & Muktadir 2021).

Next, we performed the linear regression to test the association between students' attitudes toward equal rights for immigrants and civic knowledge. This analysis was performed with RALSA, an R package designed to analyze complex sampling data in large-scale assessments, such as the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) (Mirazchiyski, 2021).

Findings

In this section, the study explores students' attitudes toward equal rights for immigrants, compares two cycles (ICCS 2009 and ICCS 2016), and describes the relationship between attitudes toward equal rights for immigrants and students' achievement on the ICCS student test. We look to see where Slovenia is compared to other similar European countries.

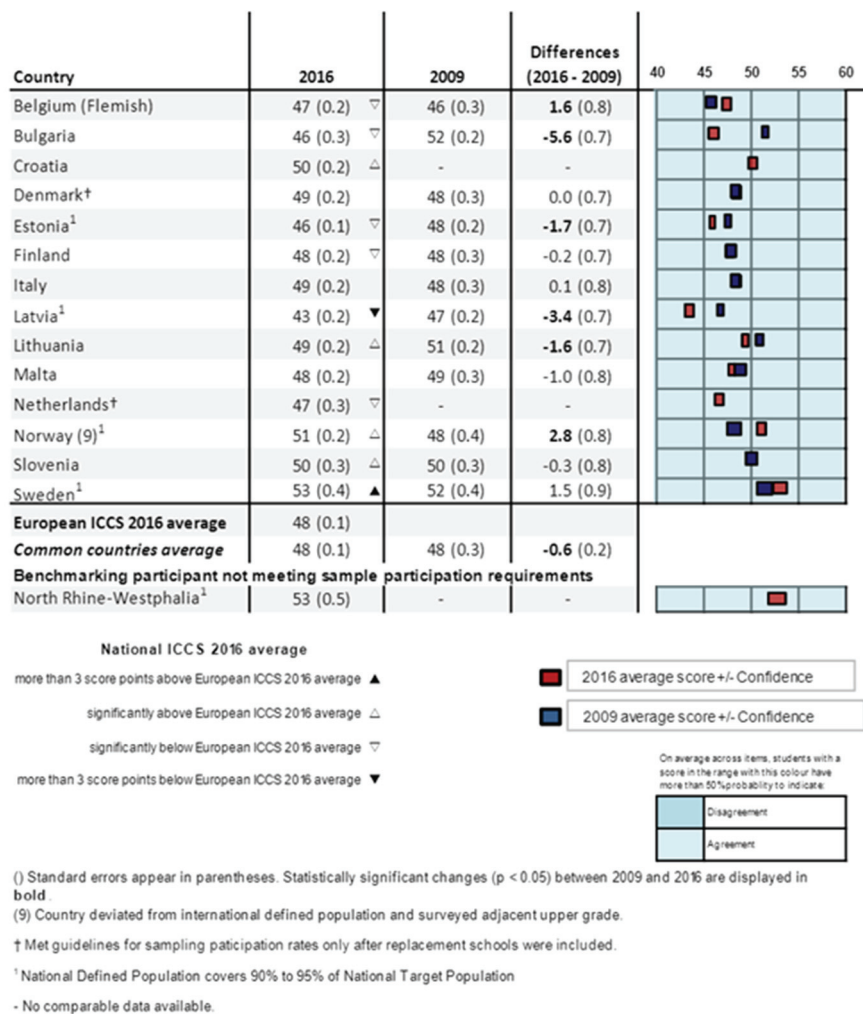
Table 1: Students' attitudes toward equal rights for immigrants

	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	2009 (%)	2016 (%)	2009 (%)	2016 (%)	2009 (%)	2016 (%)	2009 (%)	2016 (%)
Immigrants should have the opportunity to continue speaking their own language.	8.8	5.8	19.7	21.9	46.3	50.3	25.2	22.9
Immigrant children should have the same opportunities for education that other children in the country have.	2.3	1.2	5.6	3.5	37.7	46.0	54.4	49.3
Immigrants who live in a country for several years should have the opportunity to vote in elections.	4.9	2.8	14.5	16.2	45.8	50.5	34.8	30.5
Immigrants should have the opportunity to continue their own customs and lifestyle.	6.2	5.4	12.8	16.2	48.1	50.6	32.8	27.8
Immigrants should have the same rights that everyone else in the country has.	3.2	1.8	9.4	6.3	41.7	44.9	45.7	47.0

In the table above, we can see different statements that form the scale of Students' attitudes toward equal rights for immigrants. The result is shown for two ICCS cycles, 2009 and 2016. Overall, we can see much higher percentages on the side of agreement with the statement than on the side of disagreement. The highest percentage of students who reported that they agreed or strongly agreed was for the second category that immigrant children should have the same opportunities for education that other children in the country have. In 2009, 83.7 per cent of students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement and in 2016, even more, 95.3 per cent of eighth-grade students in Slovenia. There is quite a high percentage of agreement for all statements that support equal rights for immigrants. The highest percentage of disagreement we can report was for the first statement; in 2009, 28.5 per cent of eighth-grade students reported that they disagreed or strongly disagreed that immigrants should have the opportunity to continue speaking their own language. In 2016, the percentage of students who reported so was 27.7 per cent. In 2016, there was an overall increase in the percentage of students who agreed with all five claims, while there was a decrease in the percentage of students who disagreed with them, but the differences were not high.

Even though we observe some differences between 2009 and 2016 in students' attitudes toward immigrants, these differences are not statistically significant, so we cannot claim that our students are more or less in favour of equal rights for immigrants.

Picture 1: National average scale scores indicating students' endorsement of equal rights for immigrants.



Source: (Krstic & Schulz, 2018: 7).

The picture above shows the table of some European countries that measured students' endorsement of equal rights for immigrants. The European average for common countries in ICCS 2009 was slightly higher than in 2016. As we can see in Slovenia, the result is not statistically significant, which is also true in some other countries. Students from Slovenia are ranked above the European average on the scale of equal rights for immigrants. So students are more supportive of equal rights for immigrants than average students in Europe.

In Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, the national scores on the students' attitudes toward immigrants scale decreased. In Latvia, the lowest national average was reported. The study found statistically significant increases (in 2016) in national average scores in Sweden, Norway and Belgium.

Next, we wanted to see if the attitudes toward equal rights for immigrants can predict part of the student's achievement on the ICCS student test. We used a composite variable of IMMRGHT and used it in the regression analysis. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Relationship between civic knowledge and composite variable of attitudes toward equal rights for immigrants in ICCS 2009.

	Coefficients	t_value	p_value
IMMRGHT (2009)	0.17 (0.02)	8.72	0.000
*Standard errors appear in parentheses.			

The table shows the coefficients, t-value and p-value of the relationship between civic knowledge and attitudes toward equal rights for immigrants in the ICCS 2009 survey. The coefficient for the variable IMMRGHT (2009) is 0.17 with a standard error of 0.02, indicating a significant positive relationship between civic knowledge and attitudes toward equal rights for immigrants. The t-value of 8.72 and p-value of 0.000 suggest that this relationship is statistically significant. In other words, the analysis found that students with more positive attitudes toward equal rights for immigrants were likelier to score higher on the civic knowledge assessment in ICCS 2009. Specifically, the coefficient of 0.17 suggests that for every one-unit increase in attitudes toward equal rights for immigrants, the score in civic knowledge also increased by 0.17 units.

We did the same statistics for the ICCS 2016 data in the table below.

Table 3: Relationship between civic knowledge and composite variable of attitudes toward equal rights for immigrants in ICCS 2016.

	Coefficients	t_value	p_value
E_IMMRGHT (2016)	0.10 (0.02)	4.78	0.000
*Standard errors appear in parentheses.			

Table 3 presents the results of the relationship between civic knowledge and attitudes toward equal rights for immigrants in ICCS 2016. The composite variable E_IMMRGHT (2016) coefficient is 0.10, with a standard error of 0.02. This indicates a statistically significant positive relationship between civic knowledge and attitudes toward equal rights for immigrants in ICCS 2016. The t-value of 4.78 and p-value of 0.000 further suggest that this relationship is statistically significant. We could say that students who displayed more positive attitudes toward equal rights for immigrants also tended to score higher on the civic knowledge assessment in ICCS 2016. Specifically, the coefficient of 0.10 suggests that for every one-unit increase in attitudes toward equal rights for immigrants, the score in civic knowledge increased by 0.10 units.

Conclusion

This study has provided insights into changes in attitudes toward immigrants between 2009 and 2016 in Slovenia and the relationship between civic knowledge and attitudes toward immigrants. The results showed some differences between 2009 and 2016 in Slovenia, showing that in 2016, there was slightly more support among students regarding statements toward equal rights for immigrants. Nevertheless, the differences are not statistically significant, so we cannot claim that eighth-graders in Slovenia are more or less in favour of equal rights for immigrants. Compared to other similar European countries, Slovenian students are ranked above average on the scale of equal rights for immigrants; they are more supportive of equal rights for immigrants. In both ICCS cycles, 2009 and 2016, there was a statistically significant positive relationship between civic knowledge and attitudes toward equal rights for immigrants. We can report that students who displayed more positive attitudes toward equal rights for immigrants also tended to score higher on the civic knowledge assessment. These findings highlight the importance of civic education in promoting positive attitudes toward immigrants

and the need for continued efforts to improve civic education in Slovenia. The positive association between civic knowledge and attitudes toward immigrants is also in line with previous research (Claes & Isac, 2020; Lundberg & Abdelzadeh, 2022; Schulz et al., 2018; Schulz et al., 2010), which suggests that civic education can foster the development of positive attitudes toward immigrants and promote social cohesion (Verkuyten, 2021). This can be explained by the fact that civic education aims to promote democratic values, such as equality, respect for diversity and social justice, which are also relevant to attitudes toward immigrants (Crittenden & Levine 2018).

In conclusion, the findings of this study support the idea that civic education can promote positive attitudes toward immigrants among young people, and education programs can play an important role (Borgonovi & Pokropek, 2018). There are also some limitations of this study; we cannot forget that the study is based on cross-sectional data, which means that we cannot make any causal inferences about the relationship between civic knowledge and attitudes toward immigrants. It should also be noted that the sample used in this study is limited to eighth-graders in Slovenia and should not be representative of other age groups and populations. Since the study only uses two cycles of ICCS data (2009 and 2016), a follow-up cycle of ICCS 2022 can be researched when the national database is available. We could also consider some students' characteristics for further research and compare the results.

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