

## **5 Teachers' professional competencies for individualised instruction in inclusive classrooms**

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### **5.1 Introduction**

An inclusive education policy, as initiated at United Nations World Conferences (UNESCO, 1990; 1994), promotes the inclusion of children and youth with disabilities in regular education. The right of people with disabilities to “an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live, reasonable accommodation of the individual’s requirements, the support required, within the general education system, to facilitate their effective education, and effective individualised support measures provided in environments that maximise academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion”, is defined in Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2006).

The Republic of Croatia, as well as most European countries (Meijer, 2010), shapes its inclusive educational legislation, which is complementary to the educational policy of integration, through the ratification of the aforementioned convention (Education Act, 1980). The harmonisation of the national education policy with international and European inclusive legislation began around the mid-2010s (State Pedagogical Standard for Primary Education, 2008, Primary and Secondary Education Act, 2008; Primary and Secondary Education Act, 2008). The most important turning point towards a more inclusive education policy was the Rulebook on the Primary Education of Children with Developmental Difficulties (2015), which envisages adjusting the primary education system to the needs of each child with disabilities, as well as developing a system of professional support for children, their parents, and educational staff.

Inclusive education is “a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education” (UNESCO, 2005, p. 13). It is a comprehensive concept and a continuous process of eliminating all forms of discrimination and ensuring education for all (UNESCO, 2009), and a global descriptor of education policies (Vislie, 2003). The development of a quality education system is a key challenge in building more inclusive and equitable communities that are ready to respond to the vast range of educational needs as well as respect for diversity, including the consideration of

different needs and abilities, characteristics and academic achievements (Acedo, Amadio, and Operetti, 2008).

The creators of the European education policy agree that teachers require knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values to teach in accordance with the individual educational needs of all pupils (Kaikkonen, Maunonen-Eskelinen, and Aidukiene, 2007). The European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education has developed an “inclusive” teacher profile, identifying the basic skills, knowledge, understanding, attitudes, and values which candidates need for the teaching profession, regardless of the subject they teach, their profession, age, or the type of school in to which they are employed (*European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education*, 2012). Four core values and areas of teacher competency for inclusive education are defined as follows: “(1) valuing learner diversity as a resource and an asset of education; (2) supporting all learners and having high expectations for all learners’ achievement; (3) cooperation and teamwork as essential approaches for all teachers; (4) personal, professional development includes teaching as a learning activity and teachers who take responsibility for their lifelong learning” (p.11).

Teacher attitudes are considered the foundation for the development of an inclusive educational practice, given that behaviours are known to be aligned with attitudes (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002). Numerous studies (Avramidis and Kalyva, 2007; Beacham and Rouse, 2012; Campbell, Gilmore, and Cuskelly, 2003; Cook, Cameron, and Tankersley, 2007; de Boer, Timmerman, Pijl, and Minnaert, 2012; Malinen, Savolainen, and Xu, 2012; Sharma and Sokal, 2015; Wilde and Avramidis, 2011) have identified positive teacher attitudes towards inclusive education. In accordance with the findings of meta-analyses (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002; Scruggs and Mastropieri, 1996), teachers support inclusive education, but they do not feel sufficiently qualified to implement it. They assess themselves as particularly insufficiently qualified to teach pupils with severe disabilities such as behavioural, intellectual, and multiple disabilities (Avramidis, Bayliss, and Burden, 2000a). Therefore, the aforementioned authors believe that teacher attitudes continue to reflect the integration paradigm and the medical model rather than the inclusion paradigm and the social model.

Furthermore, despite the positive attitudes towards inclusive education, teachers do not assess themselves as sufficiently competent to teach pupils with disabilities in regular classes. In general, teachers demonstrate lower levels of qualifications for inclusive teaching (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002; McHatton and McCray, 2007; Scruggs and Mastropieri, 1996; Skočić Mihić, 2011;

Stanisavljević-Petrović and Stančić, 2010; Cains and Brown, 1996; Lombardi and Hunka, 2001; Skočić Mihić, Lončarić, Kolumbo, Perger, Nastić, and Trgović, 2014, Skočić Mihić, 2011, Kudek Mirošević, 2016; Kudek Mirošević and Jurčević Lozančić, 2014). Teachers who were trained to work with children with disabilities and have the experience of working with them assess themselves as more competent (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002; Forlin, 2001; Skočić Mihić, 2011). Moreover, students who had volunteering experience with pupils with disabilities during their pre-service education assess themselves as more competent for inclusive teaching (Skočić Mihić, Lončarić, and Rudelić, 2011), as well as preschool teachers who have a positive attitude towards preschool inclusion (Skočić Mihić, Sekušak-Galešev, 2017). Higher levels of primary teacher and preschool teacher competencies are associated with more positive attitudes and participation in pre- and in-service education for inclusive teaching (Sharma and Sokal, 2015).

Many authors emphasise the importance of pre-service education in acquiring teacher competencies for inclusive teaching (Acedo, 2008, Avramidis, Bayliss, and Burden, 2000a, Avramidis, Bayliss, and Burden, 2000b, Avramidis and Norwich, 2002, Florian, 2012, Peček and Macura-Milovanović, 2012; Conderman and Johnston-Rodriguez, 2009; Harvey, Yssel, Bauserman and Merbler, 2010; Sze, 2009). Pre-service education also has an impact on teachers' and future teachers' positive attitudes towards inclusion, as well as their competency for the development, implementation, and evaluation of an Individualised Education Program (IEP) for students with disabilities (Avramidis, Bayliss, and Burden, 2000a; Avramidis, Bayliss, and Burden, 2000b; Van Laarhoven, Munk, Lynch, Bosma, and Rouse, 2007). Sharma and Sokal (2015) carried out a comparative pre- and post-designed study and measured the impact of course participation, and found that it raised the positive attitudes of teachers, reduced their concerns and improved teaching confidence and efficacy.

In a major study conducted by Scruggs and Mastropieria (1996), only one-third of teachers believe that they possess the skills, preparedness, and support needed to teach students with disabilities successfully. Teachers should have the competencies to organise and adapt the classroom environment, teaching strategies, and ways of monitoring and evaluating progress based on their students' strengths and opportunities for success (Martan, Skočić Mihić, and Lončarić, 2015). Individualization and orientation towards the child, inclusivity, integrity, cooperation, and availability are ensured through the development of IEP (Skočić Mihić, Beaudoin, and Krsnik, 2016). A teacher requires specific competencies, teaching methods for

children with disabilities, and specific professional skills to implement IEP programs, which are created through a team effort in cooperation with professional experts, teachers, and other professionals (Bouillet, 2010). Preschool teachers, who have written an IEP for children with disabilities, recognise the importance of the knowledge and skills needed for its implementation in successful inclusion, as opposed to preschool teachers who do not have IEP (Rudelić, Skočić Mihić, and Pinoza Kukurin, 2013).

The skills of individualised instruction are at the very core of inclusive education, and the inclusive teacher should identify the pupil's individual needs and learning style (Kudek Mirošević, 2016). The use of effective teaching strategies tailored to the individual needs of students with disabilities is a fundamental challenge for teachers working in inclusive classrooms (Yuen, Westwood, and Wong, 2004). Contemporary inclusive and educational trends emphasise that the quality of teaching lies in the individualised approach that is based on each pupil's strengths. Teaching in today's highly heterogeneous classes, in terms of the pupils' educational needs, requires a high level of teacher competencies for differentiated instruction.

In line with the aforementioned current knowledge, this paper focuses on determining the following: (1) verification of the measurement characteristics of the Scale of Teachers' Competencies for Individualised Instruction, (2) self-assessed levels of competencies of Croatian and Slovenian teachers for inclusive teaching/individualised instruction, (3) differences in teacher competencies for individualised instruction with regard to gender and the workplace, (4) correlation between teacher competencies for individualised instruction and professional competencies with regard to the age and years of teaching experience.

## 5.2 Method

### 5.2.1 Sample of participants

The research included 1,989 classroom and subject teachers, of which 1,195 were Croatian and 794 were Slovenian. The average age of the teachers is 42 (SD = 10.20; Min = 24; Max = 66), with an average of 17 years of work experience (SD = 11.01; Min = 0; Max = 44). The average age and years of teaching experience in the subsamples are presented in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1. Basic statistical indicators of age and years of teaching experience for the subsamples of Croatian and Slovenian teachers

	Croatian teachers			Slovenian teachers		
	n	Min-Max	M (SD)	n	Min-Max	M (SD)
Age	1173	24-65	41.69 (10.64)	771	25-66	43.60 (9.37)
Years of teaching experience	1169	0-44	16.23 (11.08)	775	0-40	18.93 (10.73)

Of the total number of teachers in the total sample who answered the question on their place of employment, 42% reported being classroom teachers and 58% being subject teachers. In the Croatian subsample, 39% are classroom teachers and 61% are subject teachers, while in the Slovenian subsample, 48% are classroom teachers and 52% are subject teachers.

## 5.2.2 Measurement characteristics of the measuring instrument

The Scale of Teachers' Competencies for Individualised Instruction is a modified version of measuring teachers' perceptions of the skills they possess for teaching a diverse group of learners and meeting all their needs (Avramidis, Bayliss, and Burden, 2000a). The short version contains eight items that describe teachers' self-assessed competencies for writing, implementing, and evaluating an IEP, and the use of professional experts' advice, cooperation with colleagues to provide coherent teaching programmes for learners who need them, individualization in teaching different groups of pupils, encouraging the development of pupils' social skills and managing classroom discipline. Teachers responded on a five-point Likert scale, with the following values: *1 - not competent, 2 - poorly competent, 3 - somewhat competent, 4 - well competent, 5 - highly competent*. The factor analysis of the Scale of Teachers' Competencies for Individualised Instruction revealed one factor that explains 61.17% of the common variance (eigenvalue of 4.893) in the subsample of Croatian teachers, and 56.80% of the common variance (eigenvalue of 4.544) in the subsample of Slovenian teachers. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient is  $\alpha = 0.908$  for the Croatian subsample and  $\alpha = 0.889$  for the Slovenian one. Table 5.2 shows the communality and factor saturation on the items of the Scale of Teachers' Competencies for Individualised Instruction.

*Table 5.2. Factor structure of the Scale of Teachers' Competencies for Individualised Instruction*

Teacher competencies for:	Croatia		Slovenia	
	$h^2$	$\beta$	$h^2$	$\beta$
implementing IEP	.765	.875	.747	.864
evaluating IEP	.761	.872	.760	.872
using expert associates' advice <sup>2</sup>	.671	.819	.656	.810
writing IEP	.664	.815	.575	.758
cooperating with teachers <sup>1</sup>	.663	.815	.607	.779
individualised instruction of pupils <sup>3</sup>	.570	.755	.554	.774
encouraging the development of pupils' social skills	.416	.645	.364	.604
classroom behaviour management	.383	.619	.281	.530

IEP – individualised education program; 1 – with colleagues to provide coherent teaching programmes for students with “SEN” pupils; 2 – (e.g. educational rehabilitators, psychologists, speech therapists) in the creation, implementation, and evaluation of IEP; 3 – from diverse multicultural environments

### 5.2.3 Methods of data processing

Basic statistical indicators (arithmetic mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum score) are presented for the questionnaire items. The factor structure was determined using the factor analysis, maximum likelihood method, for the factor extraction with oblimin rotation and Cattell's graphical representation of the decreasing value of the scree plot. The Pearson correlation coefficient was used to establish the correlation between the scale factors and continuous variables. The t-test for independent variables was used to test the differences between the groups of teachers with regard to gender and place of employment: classroom and subject teaching. The Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the scale factors, while the significance of the difference between the non-dependent correlations was verified using Fisher's z-transformation to test the obtained differences in the subsamples of Slovenian and Croatian participants.

## 5.3 Results and Discussion

### 5.3.1 Croatian and Slovenian teachers' competencies for individualised instruction

Basic statistical indicators for the Scale of Teachers' Competencies for Individualised Instruction in the samples of Croatian and Slovenian teachers are presented in Table 5.3.

*Table 5.3. Basic statistical indicators on the Scale of Teachers' Competencies for Individualised Instruction*

Teacher competencies for:	Croatia		Slovenia	
	n	M (SD)	n	M (SD)
classroom behaviour management	1088	4.11 (.410)	755	3.95 (.720)
encouraging the development of pupils' social skills	1093	4.03 (.740)	754	3.80 (.718)
cooperating with teachers <sup>1</sup>	1088	3.61 (.846)	752	3.82 (.771)
using expert associates' advice <sup>2</sup>	1086	3.50 (.848)	751	3.78 (.783)
implementing IEP	1097	3.30 (.897)	756	3.28 (.888)
individualised instruction of pupils <sup>3</sup>	1082	3.29 (.928)	753	3.27 (.853)
evaluating IEP	1092	3.20 (.920)	754	3.20 (.933)
writing IEP	1093	3.13 (.965)	754	3.79 (1.03)
Total	1117	<b>3.53</b> (.685)	750	<b>3.52</b> (.629)

IEP – individualised education program; 1 – with colleagues to provide coherent teaching programmes for students with “SEN”; 2 – (e.g. educational rehabilitators, psychologists, speech therapists) in the creation, implementation, and evaluation of IEP; 3 - from diverse multicultural environments

Both the maximum and minimum scores were obtained across all items of the Scale of Teachers' Competencies for Individualised Instruction, with the greatest dispersion of results on the items that describe the development, implementation, and evaluation of an IEP and individualization in teaching pupils from diverse multicultural backgrounds, pupils with special educational needs, and others.

Croatian and Slovenian teachers to a large extent assess themselves as competent to manage classroom behaviour and encourage the development of the pupils' social skills. This is followed by the cooperation with other colleagues to provide coherent teaching programmes for students who need them, and professional experts, such as educational rehabilitators, psychologists, speech therapists, and others in the preparation, implementation, and evaluation of an IEP for pupils with disabilities. They assess themselves as well competent for the aforementioned abilities, while both Croatian and Slovenian teachers consider themselves moderately competent for individualised instruction of pupils from diverse multicultural backgrounds and for the implementation and evaluation of IEP for pupils with disabilities. Among the aforementioned skills, the only difference between Slovenian and Croatian teachers lies in the assessment of the competencies for the development of IEP for pupils with disabilities. On this point, the Slovenian teachers see themselves as competent while the Croatian teachers as moderately competent.

Among the mentioned abilities, the only difference between Croatian and Slovenian teachers is found in the assessments of their competencies for the creation of IEP for pupils with disabilities.

Competencies represent a dynamic combination of cognitive and metacognitive skills, knowledge, and understanding, interpersonal and practical skills, and ethical values (Lončarić and Pejić Papak, 2009; Novović, 2010). They indicate the utilisation of specific abilities or skills to perform tasks, the ability to assess achievements, and they can be developed through training and education (Tuning, 2006, according to Vizek Vidović, 2009).

According to the findings of this cross-cultural study, Croatian and Slovenian teachers uniformly assess themselves as well qualified, albeit with lower values, for the performance of individualised instruction. The values of their self-assessments are only slightly above partial competence, which is in line with the abovementioned international and domestic research results (Skočič Mihić et al., 2014; Skočič Mihić, 2011; Kudek Mirošević, 2016; Kudek Mirošević and Jurčević Lozančić, Martan, Matošević, and Skočič Mihić, 2017). These consistently highlight that teachers, preschool teachers, and student teachers feel insufficiently prepared for inclusive teaching.

Research findings by Kudek Mirošević (2016), which are based on a sample of teachers and students, show a higher level of self-assessed competencies of third-year students and employed teachers for the planning of teaching and creation of customised teaching materials and individualised education programs compared to the fifth-year students. Precisely in the third year of studies such students take part in the course *Inclusive Education*, which is a possible reason why they assess their competencies similarly to employed teachers and higher than the fifth-year students. Teachers consider themselves more competent to write and implement an IEP than preschool teachers (Kudek Mirošević and Jurčević Lozančić, 2014). In the early and preschool period, the obligation to write an IEP has not been standardised. Preschool teachers express the willingness to write and implement an IEP, but they do not feel sufficiently competent to do so, whereby only 14% of preschool teachers write an IEP for children with disabilities (Skočič Mihić, Beaudoin, and Krsnik, 2016). In the current study, a higher level of self-assessed preschool teacher competencies for the implementation of the goals and tasks of an Individualised Education Program is related to their assessment of their competencies for the implementation of an IEP.

Overall, it should be emphasised that the obtained differences in teachers' self-assessed competencies to perform individualised instruction among Croatian and



Slovenian classroom teachers are negligible, and this refers to their competencies to write an IEP. This finding did not confirm the expected differences regarding variations in legal regulations, pre-service education, and inclusive practice. In other words, the starting point in thinking about differences derives from differences in social contexts. Although Croatian and Slovenian teachers shared the same social context at the beginning of the education policy of integration in the 1980s, there have been significant social differences in trying to overcome the existing segregation and discrimination patterns, as well as in promoting the right to inclusive education for all, in these two independent countries.

### 5.3.2 Differences in teacher competencies for instruction with regard to gender and the workplace

The Mann-Whitney test was carried out on the subsamples in order to determine whether there are differences in self-assessed teacher competencies to perform individualised instruction with regard to gender and the workplace: classroom and subject teaching (Table 5.4).

*Table 5.4. Results of the Mann-Whitney test in the subsamples*

		Croatia			Slovenia		
		n	M <sub>rank</sub> (SD)	U	n	M <sub>rank</sub>	U
Gender	Female	911	555.23	80865.00	667	380.51	21001.00**
	Male	188	524.63		78	308.74	
Workplace	CT	427	592.13	123775.00***	343	395.64	50203.00***
	ST	668	519.79		370	321.18	

Legend: CT – classroom teaching, ST – subject teaching, U – Mann-Whitney U value; \*p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

Statistically significant differences were obtained in the self-assessed competencies of Slovenian teachers for individualised instructions with regard to gender (U = 21001.00; p <0.01) and the workplace of classroom teachers and subject teachers (U = 50203.00; p<0.001). Slovenian female teachers (M<sub>rank</sub> = 380.51) assess themselves as more competent to perform individualised instruction compared to their male counterparts (M<sub>rank</sub> = 308.74), as well as elementary school classroom teachers (M<sub>rank</sub> = 395.64) compared to subject teachers (M<sub>rank</sub> = 321.18).

Statistically significant differences were obtained in the self-assessed competencies to perform individualised instructions on the subsample of Croatian teachers with regards to the workplace (U = 123775.00; p<0.001), but not with regard to gender. As was the case with Slovenian classroom teachers, Croatian classroom teachers

( $M_{\text{rank}} = 592.13$ ) assess themselves more competent to perform individualised instructions as opposed to subject teachers ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 519.79$ ).

Concerning the obtained gender differences, it should be noted that the share of male teachers in the Croatian subsample is 20.63%, while in the Slovenian sample it is just 11.69%. In the subsample of Slovenian teachers, the differences found indicate a higher level of assessed competencies among Slovenian female teachers compared to male teachers. On the other hand, no gender differences were obtained in the attitudes towards and concerns about inclusive education among the students and teachers in the research conducted by Bradshaw and Mundia (2006).

With regard to the teachers' workplace, the obtained differences show a statistically significantly higher level of assessed competencies among Croatian and Slovenian classroom teachers compared to subject teachers. Similarly, Martan, Skočić Mihić, and Puljar (2017) found that classroom teachers and those who during their pre-service education attended a course on special education and had volunteer experience working with pupils with specific learning difficulties reported that they more frequently applied appropriate didactic strategies with such students. Kudek Mirošević and Jurčević Lozančić (2014) note that the inadequate competencies of elementary school teachers and preschool teachers in this context are the result of traditional education, because teachers are mostly educated to teach regular pupils. Moreover, study programs for subject teaching do not ensure the acquisition of competencies for teaching in inclusive classrooms, while for classroom teachers these competencies are provided only in a single mandatory course (Kokić, Vukelić, and Ljubić, 2009), as is also the case in some other countries (Bouillet, 2008; McHatton and McCray, 2007; Skočić Mičić, 2011; Sze, 2009; Peček, Macura-Milovanović, and Čuk, 2015). Skočić Mihić, Beaudoin, and Giugno Modrušan (2016) also found that it is mainly through independent learning that teachers acquire the competencies needed for teaching pupils with different educational needs in inclusive classrooms.

### 5.3.3 Correlation between teacher competencies for individualised instructions and professional competencies

The Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated in order to establish the correlation between self-assessed teacher competencies for individualised instruction and their age and years of work experience (Table 5.5).

*Table 5.5. Pearson correlation coefficient of teachers' competencies for individualised instruction and their age and years of teaching experience*

Teacher competencies for individualised instruction	Croatia			Slovenia		
	Age	Years of teaching experience	Professional competencies	Age	Years of work experience	Professional competencies
	.089**	.089**	.516***	-0.103**	-.058	.378***

Professional competencies - Scale of Teachers' Professional Competencies (see Chapter 2)

No statistically significant correlation was determined between teacher competencies for individualised instruction and their age and years of teaching experience.

In order to determine if the Pearson correlation between the self-assessed levels of teacher competencies for individualised instruction and professional competencies is statistically significantly different between the Slovenian and Croatian subsamples, the significance of differences between independent correlations was tested using Fisher's *z*-transformation correlation (Cohen and Cohen, 1983). For the sake of clarity, statistically significant correlations obtained in the subsamples are indicated with asterisks (\*\* $p < .05$ ), and the significance of correlation differences is noted as the *p*-value.

It was determined that the correlation between the self-assessed level of professional competencies with teachers' competencies for individualised instruction is statistically significantly higher for the subsample of Croatian participants compared to the correlation obtained in the subsample of Slovenian participants:  $r_h (n = 964) = .516^{***}$ ,  $r_s (n = 719) = .378^{***}$ ,  $z = 3.209$ ,  $p = 0.001$ .

The assessment of teachers' professional competencies is presented in the second chapter of this monograph. It is interesting to note that there is a statistically significant correlation between these competencies and teacher competencies for individualised instructions among Croatian teachers and a low statistically significant correlation among Slovenian teachers. It is precisely the relationship between the skills for professional activity, which includes the analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of their educational work, constructive dialogue, mentorship, reflective and cooperative skills, and the skills required for individualised instruction, that supports the theoretical construct of transversal skills presented in the work of Čepić, Tatalović Vorkapić, Lončarić, Anđić, and Skočić Mihić (2015). It should be added that when considering the quality of education we are referring to the importance of the skills contained in intersubject topics, which

are referred to by different names, such as transversal competencies or soft skills. The very high level of teachers' transversal competencies, among other things, and their competency to shape the learning environment by providing a high level of self-regulated learning, can significantly contribute to the respect for the individual educational needs of pupils and the promotion of their strengths in teaching. In formerly homogeneous classrooms, teachers taught regular pupils, while in heterogeneous classrooms their teaching should focus on the educational needs of diverse pupils.

The professional development of teachers, which includes pre- and in-service education, is crucial for the development of competencies for inclusive teaching (Kudek Mirošević and Jurčević Lozančić, 2014). Kurniawati, de Boer, Minnaert, and Mangunsong (2014) confirmed through an analysis of 13 studies the positive impact of in-service training on the teachers' readiness to teach students in accordance with their individual needs. They also found that most related research focuses on teacher attitudes, knowledge, and abilities.

The professional development of the educational staff is neither standardised nor licensed, but is instead realised in accordance with the available education and in line with their interests and voluntariness. Also, the role of teacher education in inclusive teaching has not been adequately discussed at the international level (Savolainen, Engelbrecht, Nel, and Malinen, 2012). Bouillet (2008) suggests that the development of teacher competency for inclusive education in most countries is a topical issue without universal answers. Moreover, there is an open debate as to how teacher competencies are linked to teaching practice and real-life situations (Kaikkonen et al., 2007).

In conclusion, there are many challenges to the implementation of the inclusive legislative policy in practice, without a joint perspective at both the state and school levels (Acedo, 2008; Ainscow and César, 2006; Ainscow, Farrell, and Tweddle, 2000; Booth, 1996; Bouillet, 2010; Igrić, 2015). Also, it is indisputable that inclusive legislation has influenced the increase in the number of children with disabilities in regular classrooms, especially in the number of pupils with a greater need for program individualization and accommodation. However, national education policies in most developed countries have not ensured the acquisition of sufficient teacher competencies during pre- and in-service education to achieve this, as proven by the results of this research.

## 5.4 Conclusion

Inclusive education is a global descriptor of education policy in developed countries around the world with different national education policies. The findings of this cross-cultural study point to a very uniform assessment of teachers' competencies for inclusive teaching, i.e., the writing, implementation, and evaluation of an IEP with the use of professional experts' advice, implementation of individualised instructions to diverse learners, cooperation, and the creation of a positive classroom climate through the strengthening of the social skills of all students. They differ only in their competencies to assess the IEP, whereby Slovenian teachers assess themselves somewhat well competent. Furthermore, the differences in the competencies were obtained with regards to the workplace, i.e., classroom or subject teaching. Croatian and Slovenian classroom teachers assess themselves as more competent to perform individualised instruction. Croatian classroom teachers acquire competencies for inclusive teaching during their pre-service education, unlike the subject teachers. Moreover, Slovenian female teachers assess themselves as more competent than male teachers, while this was not found with the Croatian subsample. Given the inadequate pre-service education of teachers for inclusive teaching, continuing professional development is crucial. The assessed professional competencies of Croatian and Slovenian teachers are associated with a higher level of competencies for the performance of individualised instruction, whereby the correlation is more significant in the subsample of Croatian teachers.

Although there are differences in national inclusive education policies in the two countries examined in this study, as well as in the implementation of an inclusive education policy, it is interesting that the teachers assess themselves as equally well competent for individualised instruction. In further research the content of study programs of classroom and subject teaching in both countries should be analysed in order to determine the possible impact on the results obtained in this work, as well as other contextual factors. Furthermore, given that the findings on the representative sample of teachers were obtained using a measurement instrument with good measurement characteristics, it would be worthwhile to compare the relationship between teacher competencies to perform individualised instruction with the other constructs used in this study. This would help to identify the contributing factors, rooted in knowledge of the characteristics of particular groups of pupils as well as effective teaching strategies, to teaching children with different abilities through teacher competencies for individualised instruction that are in line with the educational needs of such pupils.

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