

DEVELOPMENT OF DEMOCRATIC CULTURE THROUGH CONTENTS ABOUT THE ROMA IN CLASSROOM TEACHING – STUDENTS' PERCEPTION

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Abstract. The research problem is the contribution of content about Roma in classroom teaching to the development of democratic culture of students in the third and fourth grades of primary school. The research started from the general assumption that content about Roma in classroom teaching significantly contributes to the development of democratic culture of students but that it is insufficiently represented in the content of classroom teaching. It also started from the specific assumptions that the research will determine the optimum number of lessons in which content about Roma is taught; identified factors that, according to students' assessments, determine the learning of content about Roma in younger grades of primary school; and how such student assessments are influenced by certain demographic characteristics of students (gender, grade they attend, regularity of class attendance and success in learning). The research was conducted. The research was conducted in the Sombor area in April 2024 on a sample of 104 students. Data collected by Scaler – USR-RDKU ($\alpha = .771$) and processed with descriptive statistics, factor analysis, Mann Whitney U test and analysis of variance confirmed all assumed hypotheses. The research results are presented in the form of conclusions and pedagogical implications are given.

Keywords: development of democratic culture; getting to know diversity; school; classroom teaching; contents about Roma

Introduction

The Republic of Serbia is formally committed to education and upbringing that encourages the development of the individual potential of each student to their

fullest potential, respects and promotes their dignity, while respecting the rights of the child and in an environment that is open, tolerant and dedicated to the values of justice, truth, solidarity, freedom – with getting to know others and others, mutual understanding, as well as preservation of diversity¹. This means, among other things, that we strive for schools with a developed democratic culture that will contribute to the educational system being in the function of preparing students for life as competent democratic citizens². The necessity of finding one's way in a rapidly changing world becomes today's imperative – and thus, like other segments of societies, educational systems are constantly permeated by the encounters of various identities, cultures and languages.

The idea of creating a tolerant and inclusive society rests on the upbringing and education of its youngest members (Jeremić, Trbojević, Lazić & Kozoderović 2023).

The authors introduce the phrase “confrontation with otherness” (Andrijević 2004), which becomes a key means of promoting critical thinking about one's own and other identities, and democratic behavior of the individual from the earliest age. Critical thinking about the other and different from oneself is seen as a barrier to distancing, division and discrimination in school³, and in this sense, the Council of Europe⁴ (2020) establishes the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture. These are competences based on the universal values of the human world, which in the educational space should contribute to the concept and understanding of the social environment in which personal and collective diversity, openness, empathy, assertiveness are recognized and respected and thereby overcome stereotypes. The model established by the Reference Framework contains a total of 20 competencies grouped into: values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge and critical thinking. So, for example, in the framework of values, it is actually about valuing cultural diversity, valuing democracy and justice, honesty, equality and the rule of law; within the framework of attitudes about openness to other cultures, beliefs and views of the world; in terms of skills, the skills of listening, cooperation, conflict resolution, empathy and adaptability are emphasized; while knowledge and critical thinking refer to understanding oneself and the world that surrounds the child⁴. The development of the aforementioned competencies among students, as well as their implementation in everyday life, depends primarily on the school. They must be transformed from places where the curriculum is implemented, into environments that promote the learning process with the participation and respect of all children (Hollenweger & Krompak 2018).

In a significant number of previous works, especially in Serbia, the issue of Roma students in school was investigated (Apostolović 2019, Starcevic, Dimitrijevic & Macura-Milovanović 2016, Petrović 2016). The authors point out that the issue of their integration into the community of their peers – the identity and culture that will be in the classrooms – is inextricably linked to the teaching process because

it is based on social values; and the ethos of the school, because it reflects the reality in which these values are manifested in life (Jeremić, Trbojević, Lazić, & Kozoderović 2023).

The research problem of this paper focuses on the first of the general principles of education and upbringing in Serbia, defined as “...ensuring equality in the exercise of the right to education and accessibility of education to all children, students and adults, based on social justice and equal opportunities, without discrimination”, with awareness of cultural and civilizational connections in the world” – Law on the Foundations of the Education System, 2023, Art. 7, points 1 – 3. The authors’ views are respected that it is precisely curricula, through teaching content, that have the task of directing the processes of learning and teaching, in the spirit of developing democratic values, intercultural dialogue and understanding of diversity. Also, the literature tells us that the combination of democratic context, pedagogical approaches and methodologies in educational institutions form the foundations for the development of democratic competences, encouraging three types of learning: learning through democracy (solving tasks based on experience), learning about democracy (acquiring knowledge and critical understanding), and learning for democracy (using one’s own capacities in a given context or situation)⁴. The White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue of the Council of Europe⁵ (2008) indicates that democratic and intercultural competences are not acquired automatically, but are learned and must be practically applied. Education is in a unique position to guide and support students in this, and thereby empower them. In this sense, the Council of Europe⁶ (2022), with the help of educational experts from Serbia, issues Guidelines for the integration of the reference framework of competences for democratic culture in selected teaching and learning programs – with the task of offering examples of their development through cross-curricular correlation, and showing that the competencies they can continuously improve through all school subjects and all types of teaching, and that it is not only the content, but the way of learning⁶. Based on these foundations, we explored the issue of the possibility of introducing Roma content into an integrative teaching model, and then considered how the students themselves perceive it, what they think and how they experience another culture with which they should improve their school community on a daily basis.

Method

The education of marginalized and segregated minority ethnic groups in the Republic of Serbia is a problem that attracts the research attention of sociologists (Sokolovska & Jarić 2014), psychologists (Kostić 2003), economists (Jovanović et al. 2022), medicine (Mitrović et al. 2016), and especially theorists and practitioners in the field of pedagogy, didactics and teaching methods (Aleksandrović et al. 2021; Apostolović 2019). Research into various problems of the Roma, their origins, civic

and cultural life and education of the Roma are just some of the numerous problems that are the subject of research by numerous authors. This research examines the problem of the representation of content about the Roma in classroom teaching from the perspective of students in the third and fourth grades of primary school. The topic of this research is based on research conducted within the framework of the implementation of the previously mentioned projects, which are financially supported by the Provincial Secretariat for Education of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, and on a broader research platform of teams of authors dedicated to studying the education of Roma in the younger grades of primary school (Jeremić, Trbojević, Lazić, & Kozoderović 2023).

Based on these results, observed from the perspective of younger school-age students, the problem of this research can be defined through three research questions: 1) To what extent are certain contents about Roma represented in classroom teaching 2) What factors determine the learning of contents about Roma in the younger grades of primary school; and 3) Do certain demographic characteristics of students (gender, occasional absence from classes, grade they attend, and success in the previous semester) affect this? Hence, the aim of the research is to identify the assessments of younger school-age students about the representation of content about Roma in classroom teaching, and the effects of such teaching on values, attitudes, skills, knowledge, and critical thinking about others and the different.

The research started from the general assumption that content about Roma significantly contributes to the development of democratic culture of students in younger grades of primary school, but that it is insufficiently taught and that it is insufficiently represented in the program content in younger grades of primary school. It also started from the specific assumptions that the research will determine the optimum number of classes in which content about Roma is taught; identified factors that, according to students' assessments, determine the learning of content about Roma in younger grades of primary school; and how such student assessments are influenced by certain demographic characteristics of students (gender, grade they attend, regularity of class attendance, and success in learning).

Sample and procedure

The sample consists of 104 students in the third and fourth grades of primary school in the Sombor area. The sample is case-based and representative of the population of primary school students in the Sombor area in April 2024. According to the gender of the students, the sample structure is: 57 (54.80%) boys and 47 (45.20%) girls; according to the grade they attend – 57 (54.80%) third grade and 47 (45.20%) fourth grade; according to school attendance – 23 (22.10%) occasionally absent from classes and 81 (77.90%) regularly attend classes; according to the success in the previous semester – 3 (2.90%) sufficient, 16 (15.40%) good,

26 (25%) very good and 59 (56.70%) excellent; according to the interest in the life of the Roma – all children 26 (25%), 57 (54.80) some children while 21 (20.20%) children are not too interested; and according to the mood of the children due to learning content about the Roma – a lot 56 (53.80%), quite a lot 22 (21.20%), while 26 (25%) children are undecided in their assessment.

The research was conducted in April 2024 in primary schools in the territory of the city of Sombor with students of the city primary schools “Avram Mrazović” and “Nikola Vukićević” and the rural school “22. Oktobar” in Bački Monoštor.

Research instrument

Descriptive and transferal research methods were used. Research techniques were surveying and scaling. The survey collected data on the demographic characteristics of students (gender, grade, attendance, and success during schooling), and on the optimal number of lessons in which Roma content was presented. Scaling collected data on students' assessments of learning Roma content in class and the effects of such teaching.

A combined instrument was used to collect data, consisting of introductory questions related to some demographic characteristics of students (gender, grade, attendance, and success during schooling, as well as the optimal number of lessons in which Roma content was presented). The scale is of the Likert type. It also consists of 39 items with a three-point scale of agreement intensity (I agree, I am not sure and I disagree) that examined students' assessments of the contribution of learning content about Roma in class to the development of their demographic culture (Scaler – USR-RDKU).

The scale items are:

- 1) I am interested in learning about the history, culture and traditions of Roma men and women.
- 2) If we knew at least something about the Romani language, I think I would be more interested in learning about the Roma community.
- 3) I respect the Roma even though they differ from my people in language, history, tradition and culture.
- 4) I often notice that I find Roma music interesting because I am happier and more playful then.
- 5) Roma customs are interesting to me because they differ from the customs of my people.
- 6) While we were learning about Roma and the Roma community in class, I had the impression that I was learning something new and interesting.
- 7) I listened with interest to what we learned in class about Roma tradition, language and culture.
- 8) Whenever we learn about a people, it is interesting to me and I immediately solve those tasks.

- 9) I try to learn as much as possible in class, no matter what is being taught.
- 10) I am always interested in getting to know each child in my class better.
- 11) I don't care whose music we are learning about – Roma or other peoples – I am always interested in it.
- 12) Roma children immediately turn to the teacher if other children tease them.
- 13) While we were learning about Roma and their community, Roma children helped us understand.
- 14) Roma children try to be polite in class.
- 15) I think that Roma students have a hard time at school, because their people, culture, language, and traditions are never mentioned in class.
- 16) I have never had a Roma student tease me at school.
- 17) During the class we had about Roma, Roma children tried to help us learn the Roma anthem Đelem, Đelem and their other songs.
- 18) Roma sometimes tease other children in the class.
- 19) I try to get along well with all the children in the class.
- 20) I get angry if a Roma child teases me at school.
- 21) We would learn about the flag better if we taught about the Serbian flag and the Roma flag at the same time in class if we have a Roma child in the class.
- 22) It would be interesting if we started each lesson by singing the Serbian anthem and the Roma anthem if we have a Roma child in the class.
- 23) When learning about the Serbian coat of arms, it would be good to describe what the wheel on the Roma flag means if we have a Roma child in the class.
- 24) You would better understand the history, tradition, culture and life of the Roma if you carefully studied what is sung in the Roma anthem Djelem, djelem.
- 25) Sometimes I find it difficult to understand and learn something that we are learning about the Roma and Roma society.
- 26) I have heard that the Roma religion is quite complicated to understand and learn.
- 27) Roma society is complex to understand and learn, even for Roma children.
- 28) In order for the teacher to talk to us about the Roma, she should know Roma society well.
- 29) We don't have any classes that teach anything about the Roma, so we know very little about it.
- 30) I would like to learn about the past, history, traditions and culture of the Roma.
- 31) I have heard that there are different stories about why the Roma left India.
- 32) The Roma language is everywhere different and difficult to learn.
- 33) Roma are also depicted in the literature of other peoples.
- 34) Roma society is no different from other societies.
- 35) Music is important to Roma in everyday life.
- 36) If I understood the words in Roma music, I would be interested in singing Roma songs.

- 37) Roma have similar customs to other peoples.
 38) Some Roma children come to school irregularly.
 39) I would like to go to a Roma festival and learn about the customs of the Roma people.

Table 1. KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.653
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	χ^2	1460.575
	df	741
	p	.000
		.771

The KMO test showed a sufficient value (KMO = 0.653). Bartlett's test of sphericity reached statistical significance of the difference at the $p < .001$ level ($p = .000$) (Table 1). The reliability of the instrument was tested by the Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which reached a good value ($\alpha = .771$) (Table 1).

All communality values are higher than the recommended .30 and range from $h = .314$ calculated for item seven, to $h = .751$ for item 39. In this way, the General Tosten criterion is satisfied.

The data indicate the reliability of the instrument, the factorability of the matrix and the adaptation of the scale to the selected sample and the justification of the factor analysis (Table 4).

Data processing

The data collected in the research were processed using descriptive statistics, factor analysis, Kornbach alpha coefficient, Mann Whitney U test and one-factor univariate analysis of variance.

Results

The presence of individual Roma content in classroom teaching was examined using descriptive statistics based on calculated frequencies and percentages.

Table 2. Representation of content about Roma in classroom teaching

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	more classes	3	2.90
	sometimes	55	52.90
	there wasn't	46	44.20
	Total	104	100.00

The data show that the majority of the surveyed students estimate that content about Roma is only sometimes included in the classroom – 46 (52.90%) or not included at all – 46 (44.230%) in the classroom. Only 3 respondents (2.90%) stated that content about Roma is included in the classroom in more than one lesson (Table 2).

The factors that, according to the students' assessments, indicate the development of democratic culture through content about Roma in the classroom were examined using factor analysis with Varimax rotation.

Table 3. Development of democratic culture through content about Roma in the classroom

Component	Initial Eigenvalues		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	4.367	11.198	11.198
2	2.904	7.446	18.644
3	2.765	7.090	25.734
4	2.631	6.745	32.480
5	2.114	5.419	37.899
6	2.043	5.238	43.137
7	1.949	4.997	48.137
8	1.847	4.737	52.871

According to the Gutman-Kaiser criterion, 8 main components with a characteristic root greater than one were singled out, which in total explain 52.871% of the common variance (Table 3).

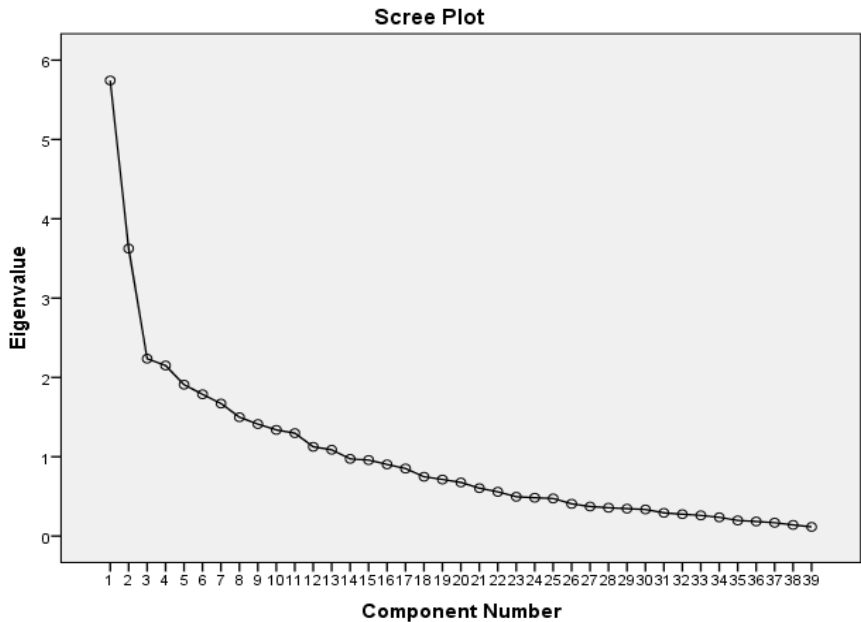


Figure 1. Cattell’s test of the rod (Scree Plot)

A review of Figure 1 shows the most pronounced break in the third factor, but also in the eighth factor, which confirms the decision to choose eight factors according to the Guzman-Kaiser criterion.

Table 4. Factors that, according to students’ assessments, determine the democratic culture of students through content about Roma in classroom teaching

	Component								h
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
a2	.778								.647
a1	.734								.689
a6	.714								.682
a30	.654		.350						.631
a38	-.572			.372					.597
a39	.521	-.328	.303				.335		.751
a4	.458		.312						.400
a13	.408		.365		.306				.487
a7	.403			.340					.314

a3	.303								.315
a32		.736							.620
a33		.733							.636
a31		.638	.300	.315					.681
a22	.415		.647						.711
a23			.621						.458
a34			.456						.329
a24	.320		.418			.330			.460
a35				.684					.542
a19				.594					.505
a10		-.359		.552					.503
a9	.349			.460					.398
a15					.687		.308		.609
a17					.657				.541
a16		-.461			.472				.476
a36	.351	-.412			-.425				.580
a11					.352	.305			.376
a25						.741			.610
a26						.670			.621
a27		.376				.618			.607
a37							.535		.371
a18			.460				-.518		.534
a8			-.312	.325			-.499		.519
a12						.314	-.483		.531
a29							.479		.390
a5	.351			.363				.598	.680
a14								.561	.466
a20								-.552	.514
a28			.389					-.525	.604
a21								.394	.333

Factor analysis identified eight factors that, according to students' assessments, indicate their assessments of the contribution of learning about Roma content in classroom teaching to the development of their democratic culture. The first factor determines 10 items: 2, 1, 6, 30, 38, 39, 4, 13, 7 and 3; explains 11.198% of the common variance; it is called learning about Roma culture. The second

factor determines three items: 32, 33 and 31; explains 7.44% of the common variance; it is called learning about the Romani language and literature. The third factor determines four items: 22, 23, 34 and 24; explains 7.090% of the common variance; it is called learning about the symbols and features of Roma culture. The fourth factor determines four items: 35, 19, 10 and 9; explains 6.745% of the common variance; it is called respect for others and otherness. The fifth factor is determined by five items: 15, 17, 16, 36 and 11; it explains 5.419% of the common variance; regardless of the negative sign in front of item 11, it is called learning about Roma music versus students' assessments of the contribution of content about Roma in classroom teaching to the development of their democratic culture; The sixth factor is determined by three items: 25, 26 and 27; it explains 5.238% of the common variance; it is called the complexity of Roma culture. The seventh factor is determined by five items: 37, 18, 8, 12 and 29; it explains 4.997% of the common variance; regardless of the negative signs in front of items 18, 8 and 12, it is called the difficulty of learning content about Roma culture versus students' assessments of the contribution of content about Roma in classroom teaching to the development of their democratic culture. The eighth item explains five items: 5, 14, 20, 28 and 21; explains 4.737% of the common variance; taking into account the negative signs in front of items 21 and 28, it was called the optimal organization of learning content about Roma culture against the students' assessments of the contribution of content about Roma in class teaching in the development of their democratic culture.

The influence of the gender of the students on their evaluations of the development of the democratic culture of the students through the learning of content about the Roma in classroom teaching was examined with the Mann-Whitney U test and according to the calculated medians. According to gender, students are divided into two groups: 1 (boy) and 2 (girl).

Table 5. Gender and students' evaluations of the development of the democratic culture of students through content about Roma in classroom teaching

	Estimates
Mann –Whitney U	236.000
Wilcoxon W	251.000
z	-.246
p	.806
Md (boy)	92.0000
Md (girl)	93.0000

No statistically significant difference was found in the two groups of students according to gender – MD (boy) = 92,0000 and MD (girl) = 93,0000 in their assessments of the contribution of content about Roma in classroom teaching to the development of their democratic culture: $U = 236,000$; $z = -.246$; $p = .806$ (Table 5).

The impact of students' occasional absence from class on their assessments of the development of students' democratic culture through learning content about Roma in class was examined using the Mann-Whitney U test and calculated medians. According to the occasional absence from classes, students are divided into two groups: 1 (yes) and 2 (no).

Table 6. Occasional absence from classes and students' evaluations about the development of students' democratic culture through contents about Roma in classroom teaching

	Estimates
Mann – Whitney U	916.000
Wilcoxon W	1192.000
z	-.122
p	.903
Md (yes)	91.0000
Md (no)	92.0000

No statistically significant difference was found in the two groups of students according to the occasional absence from classes – Md (yes) = 91.0000 and Md (no) = 92.0000 in their assessments of the contribution of the content about Roma in classroom teaching to the development of their democratic culture: $U = 916.000$; $z = -.122$; $p = .903$ (Table 6).

The influence of the class of students on their assessments of the development of the democratic culture of students through the learning of content about Roma in classroom teaching was examined with the Mann-Whitney U test and according to the calculated medians. According to gender, students are divided into two groups: 1 (III) and 2 (IV).

Table 7. Class and students' evaluations about the development of the democratic culture of students through content about Roma in classroom teaching

	Estimates
Mann – Whitney U	1229.000
Wilcoxon W	2882.000
z	-.722
p	.470
Md (III)	92.0000
Md (IV)	93.0000

No statistically significant difference was found in the two groups of students according to the class they attend – Md (III) = 92.0000 and Md (girl) = 93.0000 in their assessments of the contribution of content about Roma in classroom teaching to the development of their democratic culture: $U = 1229.000$; $z = -.722$; $p = .470$ (Table 7).

The impact of students' success during schooling on their assessments of the contribution of learning content about Roma in classroom teaching to the development of their democratic culture was examined by one-factor univariate analysis of variance ANOVA. According to the success during education, students are divided into four groups: 1 (sufficient), 2 (good), 3 (very good) and 4 (excellent).

Table 8. Success during schooling and students' assessment of the development of the democratic culture of students through content about Roma in classroom teaching (ANOVA)

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Between Groups	236.975	3	78.992	1.014	.390
Within Groups	7787.939	100	77.879		
Total	8024.913	103			

No statistically significant difference was found in the evaluations of the four groups of students according to their success during schooling in their evaluations of the contribution of learning content about Roma in class to the development of their democratic culture: $F(3; 103) = 1.014$; $p = .390$ (Table 8).

Discussion and conclusions

In the theoretical approach to the research problem, it was determined that the development of students' democratic culture is influenced by numerous elements of their social and communication competence. One of the most important characteristics is the ability to cooperate and work in a team, but also respect for diversity. This seems particularly significant when it comes to students of Roma nationality who are often insufficiently involved in their learning and participation, primarily for subjective reasons, and there is talk of their self-segregation (Jeremić, Trbojević, Lazić, & Kozoderović 2023, Jovanović 2015). All this is reflected in the development of their democratic culture, as indicated by the positive results of numerous recent studies on various aspects of this problem published in leading world journals (Golubeva & Porto 2022; Koukounaras Liagkis, Skordoulis & Geronikou 2022; Ólafur Páll 2021).

Empirical research first identified eight factors on the Scaler – USR-RDKU that, according to students' perceptions, indicate the contribution of learning about Roma content in classroom teaching to the development of their democratic culture. Students rated the items that indicated learning about Roma culture the most. The need to learn about Roma culture does not represent an educational deficit of younger primary school students who are not of Roma nationality, but to a certain extent also of the students themselves who are Roma. The reason is twofold. On the one hand, students of non-Roma nationality do not have the opportunity to learn about Roma culture because they are generally not represented in the curricula of the lower grades of primary school, while on the other hand, a significant number of the total Roma community is faced with numerous problems of a material and existential nature, which is why they do not sufficiently favor education and learning, which has repercussions on the educational deficit of their children, even about their own traditions and culture. This has been largely shown by the results of some research conducted in Serbia, which shows that the educational deficit mainly exists in environments that, for various reasons, are insufficiently favor education and learning (Weerasena & Jayathilaka 2023; Han, Therese & Strnadov 2022).

The research results further showed that students highly valued the item indicating the learning of Romani language and literature as a factor that contributes to the democratic culture of students. Not knowing the language is a disruptive factor and affects perceptions of the traditions and culture of people whose language is not sufficiently known, or not known at all. which is the case with the students included in this research. This problem is not an isolated case.

Learning about symbols and features of Roma Culture is the third most important factor identified in this research. Symbols and symbols, primarily the flag, coat of arms and anthem, are characteristic of all countries in the world. They largely reflect the history, tradition and culture of a particular state and the people who live in it (Vasiljević, Milenović & Alavanja 2023). Based on these

understandings, the Roma, who represent an indigenous people, without their own state and insufficiently studied origins with their own tradition, and culture do not represent a part of the flag, coat of arms and anthem of the Republic of Serbia, that is, elements of their tradition and culture are not contained in these symbols and signs. That is why students' perceptions that understanding the culture of Roma men and women is a problem are precisely for these reasons.

For understanding the culture of Roma and Roma, or rather her contribution to the development of democratic culture among students in the lower grades of primary school, is also important in accustoming all students to respect others and otherness. This is still not sufficiently represented in school practice, as shown by the results of this research. This problem is equally prevalent worldwide. Numerous studies show mixed results. On the one hand, Roma men and women are increasingly accepted in schools (Fehérvári & Széll 2024). On the other hand, there are still problems in the full integration (and inclusion) of Roma and Roma women in school practice (Vorliceck 2024). These results showed that the self-segregation of Roma women and men from classes and their insufficient involvement in their learning and participation in classes, as well as insufficient content on Roma culture, still represent an insufficiently resolved problem in school practice. practice.

The Roma population is particularly known for its affinity for music and folklore. Despite this, this has not been sufficiently exploited to motivate Roma men and women to participate more in their own upbringing and education at school. They are certainly more interested in getting involved in teaching if it is permeated with the contents of their tradition, culture, music and folklore (Karpati, Molnar & Munkacsy 2014). This is exactly what the fifth separate factor in this research showed. Students generally agree in their assessments that music is an important means of motivation in learning, which is contained in front of item 11, which has a negative sign. That is why this factor is called learning about Roma music, in contrast to students' assessments of the contribution of content about Roma in classroom teaching to the development of their democratic culture. The conclusion is that music always contributes to the development of democratic culture, regardless of the type of music in question.

In order to fully understand the culture of Roma men and women and its contribution to the development of democratic culture, its complex analysis is necessary. Due to its complexity, this is generally impossible for students in the younger grades of primary school (Gándara & Pahl 2024). Therefore, the assessments of students who, in this study, to a certain extent also evaluated the items that determine the sixth separate factor called the complexity of Roma culture are not without basis. It is also reflected in insufficient study. Although this is a problem of many studies, there are still no more comprehensive studies that would significantly contribute to its full grasp and understanding, especially in terms of the development of democratic culture of students in the younger grades of primary

school. All this is also indicated by the following separate factor, which indicates the difficulty of learning about Roma culture, and thus understanding its contribution to the development of democratic culture of students of younger school age. All of this is also contributed by the Roma students themselves, who sometimes exhibit behavior that distances themselves from other students, thereby significantly reducing their motivation to learn more about Roma and Roma culture, as shown in this research by the negative signs in front of most of the items that determine the seventh separate factor.

Although the students included in this research rated the eighth item called optimal organization of learning content about Roma culture the least, it cannot be claimed that it is less important. On the contrary, the organization of learning and the organization of teaching are important in all phases of teaching. This seems especially important when organizing teaching, which needs to be prepared and implemented in a way that it is permeated with content about Roma culture. Although it is a complex process, it cannot be claimed that it cannot be implemented effectively. Despite the uniformity of the curriculum in the younger grades of primary school, teachers are able to adapt teaching to the needs of all students. This certainly indicates the need for content about Roma and their culture to always be implemented where it exists, and for new content to be introduced from time to time that can be adapted to each teaching unit. This seems especially important in classes that include students of Roma nationality.

The results of the research further showed that certain democratic characteristics of students (gender, unexcused absence from school, grade they attend and success during schooling) do not significantly affect their assessments of the contribution of learning content about Roma to the development of their democratic culture. Such results were expected because the predominant influence on the development of democratic culture is on the content and its representation in class teaching. Greater representation of content about Roma contributes to students' knowledge about others and otherness (Jeremić, Trbojević, Lazić, & Kozoderović 2023), but also about elements of explicit and implicit culture of other peoples and nationalities, in the specific case of Roma culture. All this significantly contributes to students developing a democratic culture by looking at their own culture and the culture of others and on the basis of their comparative analysis. The students of the third and fourth grades of elementary school who were included in this research have many things related to democratic culture unknown, and therefore it is necessary to guide them to the realization of these elements, all with the aim of developing their democratic culture by acquiring new knowledge.

This is indicated by numerous examples of positive practice of developing the democratic culture of students in many primary and secondary schools in the Republic of Serbia (Grujin 2019). The results of research carried out in the world also indicate that getting to know diversity, others, otherness and the culture of

others at the level of initial education significantly contributes to the development of students' speech and getting to know the languages and speech of students of other nations and nationalities (Rinnooy Kan, Munniksma, Volman & Bert Dijkstra 2024); the development of democratic culture in rural areas (Olawale, Mncube, Ndondo & Mutongoza 2022); practical acquaintance with the language, culture and symbols of other nations and nationalities (Erin, Brogan, Clerc-Gevrey, Minardi & Štiberč 2022) and other aspects and elements of democratic culture, which is also established in the findings of this research. Some research results have shown that international organizations in the field of culture also have a significant influence on the promotion of democratic culture (Toubier 2020). Based on the above analyses, it is understandable why the research did not establish that the perceptions of the students included in this research are not significantly influenced by some of their democratic characteristics on the assessments they have about the contribution of learning content about Roma in classroom teaching to the understanding and development of their democratic culture.

Based on the research results, the need is recognized for teaching in the younger grades of primary school to be organized in a way that, in addition to equal rights, also provides equal conditions for all students. This can be achieved by amending and supplementing the curriculum of subjects that should contain more elements of tradition, culture, music and folklore of minority communities and ethnic groups to which the Roma population belongs. Teachers are expected to continuously improve their skills and acquire new competencies for implementing teaching in a way that is more adapted to the needs of students from the Roma population. Future researchers are recommended to review the findings of this research and to conduct research on other aspects of this conducted research, especially newly opened questions that arose in the research results and especially the conclusions drawn based on critical analyses. The need for this was also shown by the results of this research, which examined the perceptions of students in the third and fourth grades of primary school and the contribution of learning content about Roma culture to the development of students' democratic culture in classroom teaching.

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NOTES

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