

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION: A FACTOR IN CAREER MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

The current tendencies of a global society are obvious: the labour market is expanding, people are travelling for various reasons all over the world, every organisation can have foreign workers with different cultural backgrounds, the internationalisation of studies HEIs is constantly being implemented, etc. Successful and effective daily life depends on the readiness of people of any age to be *open* to global change and innovation. The intense pace of life requires adaptation to new circumstances and the use of internationally recognised tools to address global challenges. This article reveals the benefits of intercultural communication in a global society. This form of communication influences the quality of modern life, and strengthens positive attitudes towards new trends in the labour market, global business, immigrants and foreigners. In addition, intercultural communication can be used to promote local culture to others, and to become familiar with other cultures. The analysis and survey of various sources provides valuable evidence that intercultural communication is beneficial to the quality of daily and professional life, and creates a competitive advantage for labour market professionals. According to the results of the survey, intercultural communication is useful for strengthening self-esteem and confidence, developing new competencies, studying abroad, and managing careers in business

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Introduction

The processes initiated by globalisation and the mixture of cultures are obvious. These processes penetrate academic, professional and daily personal life. Everyone faces many opportunities to get involved in international activities, projects and exchange programmes. Thus, the value of intercultural communication is constantly growing. Effective intercultural communication is a presumption of successful international cooperation. The capability to communicate efficiently becomes an integral factor in the professional career management of almost every person. In addition, this form of communication influences the nature of global life, and strengthens positive feelings towards immigrants and foreigners. It could be used for the promotion of culture to others as well. According to Hilton (2003), ‘cultural proficiency doesn’t mean memorising every cultural nuance of every market. It’s knowing when to listen, when to ask for help, and when to speak’ (Hilton, 2003: 35).

The impact of globalisation is leading to rapid changes in life, and the labour market is no exception, as the market for products and services is constantly expanding locally and internationally. Emerging global organisations and their leaders need to think how to communicate with employees and customers from different cultures/countries in order to fulfil the organisation’s mission and vision, and succeed at a global level. The use of technology makes communication even faster and easier, allowing companies to communicate without any restrictions, and to expand their product and service market. The success of personal and pro-

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essional activities depends on people's readiness to be *open* to global changes and innovation. Changing global professional, demographic and market trends encourage individuals to develop new competencies. Competence in intercultural communication should be acquired for career management, because nowadays people have to work with others whose cultural background is different to their own.

The significance of competence in intercultural communication in business has been analysed by many Lithuanian and foreign researchers. Shamne, Milovanova and Malushko (2019) agree that globalisation is a reason for intercultural communication, and makes the world more similar and changes people's lifestyles, attitudes and needs. Bauman and Shcherbina (2018) review the importance of intercultural communication in business, and explain how to avoid obstacles in communication processes. They agree that employees need to expand their cultural awareness, and in addition, to be familiar with cultural differences, and to be ready to meet foreign co-workers. Arthur (2000), Buinevičiūtė, Lepaitė (2003) and Cesevičiūtė (2004) focus on the competencies of a future specialist, where the competence of intercultural communication is referred to as an integral factor in successful career management. Bridges (2004), Straub (2008) and Shucha (2008) draw attention to the importance of *openness* in the 21st century. They emphasise the importance of exchanging information through intercultural communication channels, in order to operate effectively at a global level. Gudykunst, Mody (2002), Gudykunst (2003), Mažeikis (2008), Karaliūtė (2009), Baraldsnes (2012), Pruskus (2013) and Padhi (2016) acknowledge the role of intercultural communication in employment, migration and study processes.

Intercultural communication is chosen as the subject of research. The problem of the paper can be formulated by asking the question: *How is intercultural communication beneficial for young citizens/students of a global society?*

The paper aims to ascertain if intercultural communication can be used for career management, and how intercultural communication can be practised by students.

To achieve this aim, the following tasks have been formulated:

- To define the concept of intercultural communication.
- To view positive aspects of intercultural communication.
- To present the results of a survey revealing students' views on the benefits of intercultural communication.

Methods: theoretical analysis, survey, synthesis, generalisation.

1. Intercultural communication *opens* global society

The concept of communication is quite complex. Jenifer and Raman (2015) note that the concept and process of communication are constantly changing, due to globalisation and new trends, the use of modern communication methods, the development of information and communication technologies (ICT), the application of the Internet, and various computer programs. Considering the fact mentioned, it is important to review various aspects of communication. First, the process of communication can be perceived as 'a process in which at least two individuals have to exchange information using sounds, words, posture, body language and gestures' (Lunenburg, 2010: 2). It seems quite clear and simple, but some questions and obstacles come up when individuals with different cultural backgrounds start interaction. Today, as Jenifer and Raman (2015) note, the world is expanding, and gives citizens of different countries unlimited opportunities to communicate and use different communication channels. According to Mažeikis (2008), a new concept of *intercultural communication* should be used, which is a way of communication between members of different cultures. The ability to communicate properly and gain knowledge about the attitudes of different people, their personal and professional responsibilities, business and daily life etiquette, and behaviour patterns, is a very important aspect. As Straub (2008) says, *openness* has to be a key feature of 21st-century global society. This phenomenon is important in education, as students can participate in various international projects, continue their studies abroad, and explore future employment opportunities at local and international

levels. Entrepreneurs and the modern business world need to exchange knowledge and collaborate with partners overseas and expand their operating market. This leads to the need to communicate interculturally.

According to Straub (2008), unconditional intercultural communication is the bedrock of successful globalisation in the 21st century. *Openness* and the desire to participate actively in global processes are features of the modern global world, so the author suggests perceiving how important *openness* is to global society and its members. *Openness* might be interconnected with human values, such as tolerance, individual freedom, lifelong learning, initiative, empowerment and cooperation, which are contrary to the values of a 'closed' world. An *open* world is a world of desired opportunities and challenges, which requires change in our individual behaviour and attitudes (Straub, 2008).

Intercultural communication, with its characteristics and benefits, can facilitate the resolution of current issues, such as international education, successful employment, immigration, and migration.

2. Intercultural communication in business

Today, it is impossible to do business globally without communicating interculturally. Targovski and Metwalli (2003) consider this period to be an era of global organisations, with an increasing focus on intercultural communication and business expansion. Understanding cultural factors, such as values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviour patterns, should be broadened, in order to communicate successfully between cultures. Effective intercultural communication provides strategic tools for further communication strategies and training business professionals, and influences business results and achievements.

New trends and processes in global society are challenging business organisations to get the right people and the proper training for their positions. As Arthur (2000) points out, future professionals must be able to work in a local and international environment. Thus, they must be prepared to expand their responsibilities, and to be prepared to meet higher operational expectations. Such changes in the work environment motivate workers to respond to the changing needs of the local environment, and to new challenges related to living and working abroad. According to the author, there is a need for employees to have effective communication skills with people of diverse origins and experience (Arthur, 2000). Such a changing world of work requires future professionals to expand their profile of competencies to manage their career development. According to the author, the competence of intercultural communication has to be improved (Arthur, 2000). Therefore, educational institutions need to be aware of the processes taking place in global society. Future specialists who have been trained to work in the international market are more competitive and skilled in acting successfully, not only in designated areas but also in the international market (Hansen, 1990; Herr, 1993).

Business activities are organised at a global level, and the communication channels and methods that people, institutions and organisations use to communicate are vital factors. People should not forget that all information is transmitted using modern information communication technology (ICT), and preferably in a foreign language. Future entrepreneurs should realise that growing globalisation makes many organisations more flexible, with more potential to operate in a global context. Such businesses have their own unwritten corporate culture, rules and hierarchical structure, and approaches to decision-making processes, employees and business performance. So transmitting information has to be organised properly around the world. The global business environment is becoming more productive and efficient. As Evans (1990) and Rosenbaum (2005) note, business teams consist of individuals who rely on intercultural communication, and promote greater creativity, flexibility, responsiveness and continuous business development. Intercultural communication is important not only to any organisation, but also to its clients, because that is how to provide people with relevant information in an appropriate way, taking all cultural features into account.

3. Intercultural communication is a prerequisite for career management

It has been mentioned that competence in intercultural communication is relevant for future entrepreneurs. As a matter of fact, acquiring competencies should be initiated at secondary school and later in higher

education institutions. ‘Effective communication is one of the preconditions for successful cooperation and activity; therefore, the ability to communicate effectively in an intercultural context is an integral part of the profile of a modern specialist’ (Cesevičiūtė, 2004). This problem is relevant to Lithuania, which is currently integrating into European and global business societies. Communication and intercultural communication competencies are the most important competencies for a modern specialist (Buinevičiūtė, Lepaitė, 2003).

A review of the essence of intercultural communication reveals many advantages of intercultural communication for professional careers. Many scholars (Bukantaitė, 2004; Merkys et al., 2004; Tutlys, Butkienė, 2010; Kalninytė, 2011; Storey, et al., 2019) emphasise the need to develop competence in intercultural communication for future entrepreneurs. Higher education institutions have to recognise that competence in intercultural communication cannot be ignored when studying. Confidence in intercultural awareness and intercultural communication guarantee greater student achievements and better preparation for the future, which can help to create better job opportunities. Competence in intercultural communication is considered an integral factor of career management. Career planning includes preparing to work with people from other cultures and countries. International education and study programmes abroad are career development opportunities to acquire a wide range of cultural and professional practices (Arthur, 2000). Our global world, according to the author, is like a mixture of people and cultures. To be successful and productive, personally and professionally, one must become a ‘global citizen’, competent in communication and intercultural communication between different cultures, and able to analyse problems at a global level.

The most beneficial aspects of intercultural communication for future employment are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Benefits of intercultural communication for young specialists/entrepreneurs

Aspects	Benefits of intercultural communication
A new view of the world, experience and personal growth	Intercultural communication allows local and foreign students to exchange personal, cultural and academic insights on issues of globalisation, development, poverty and social inequality. Having the possibility to communicate internationally, young people can develop a greater sense of autonomy and confidence in their abilities
Getting to know another culture firsthand	Differences in cultural factors do not just mean a different language, food, lifestyle, behavioural patterns and values/beliefs. The core of culture is a deep understanding of how every cultural factor influences the lifestyles of others, and how others view the world
Improving decision-making and problem-solving skills	Students who have the possibility to travel and meet foreigners are always in unfamiliar situations. They have to manoeuvre through unknown territory and express their needs and thoughts using a new language and intercultural skills. These skills are important in personal and professional life
New contacts and long-term connections	Effective intercultural communication between academic staff, other students and host families can form a large network of new contacts
Development of career skills	Intercultural communication can develop and strengthen the skills sought by employers (critical thinking and problem-solving, autonomy and self-confidence, teamwork and communication, motivation and leadership, flexibility and adaptability, creativity, a wider world-view and multicultural perspective)
Increasing employment opportunities	In the eyes of the employer, a student who has studied abroad and interacted actively in an intercultural environment is motivated, independent, willing to accept challenges, and able to cope with various problems and situations. Intercultural communication and experience of being abroad will create a competitive advantage for an entrepreneur

Source: compiled by the author.

4. Students' attitudes towards intercultural communication

The analysis of scientific sources has proven that intercultural communication plays an important role in global society. Today, people are facing new challenges initiated by globalisation, and it is recognised that confidence in intercultural communication facilitates problem-solving, and challenging and successful career management.

Therefore, a survey was organised in order to analyse students' attitudes towards competence in intercultural communication and its benefits. The study was completed between March and April 2020. The target audience of the survey were students in the first and second years at two higher education institutions ($n = 176$ students) in Klaipėda, Lithuania. The participants in the survey came from courses in business management (75 students), economics (56 students), and public administration (45 students). The research tool was a questionnaire submitted to students online. The main objective was to overview areas of intercultural communication usage, and to review the benefits of intercultural communication mentioned by the participants in the survey.

Students were provided with a list of areas where intercultural communication could be practised. The list was created after reviewing scientific sources and studies by various authors. The main areas were as follows: education, travel, personal development, and employment. Each area consisted of subgroups representing more alternatives where intercultural communication could be used/practised (see Fig. 1).

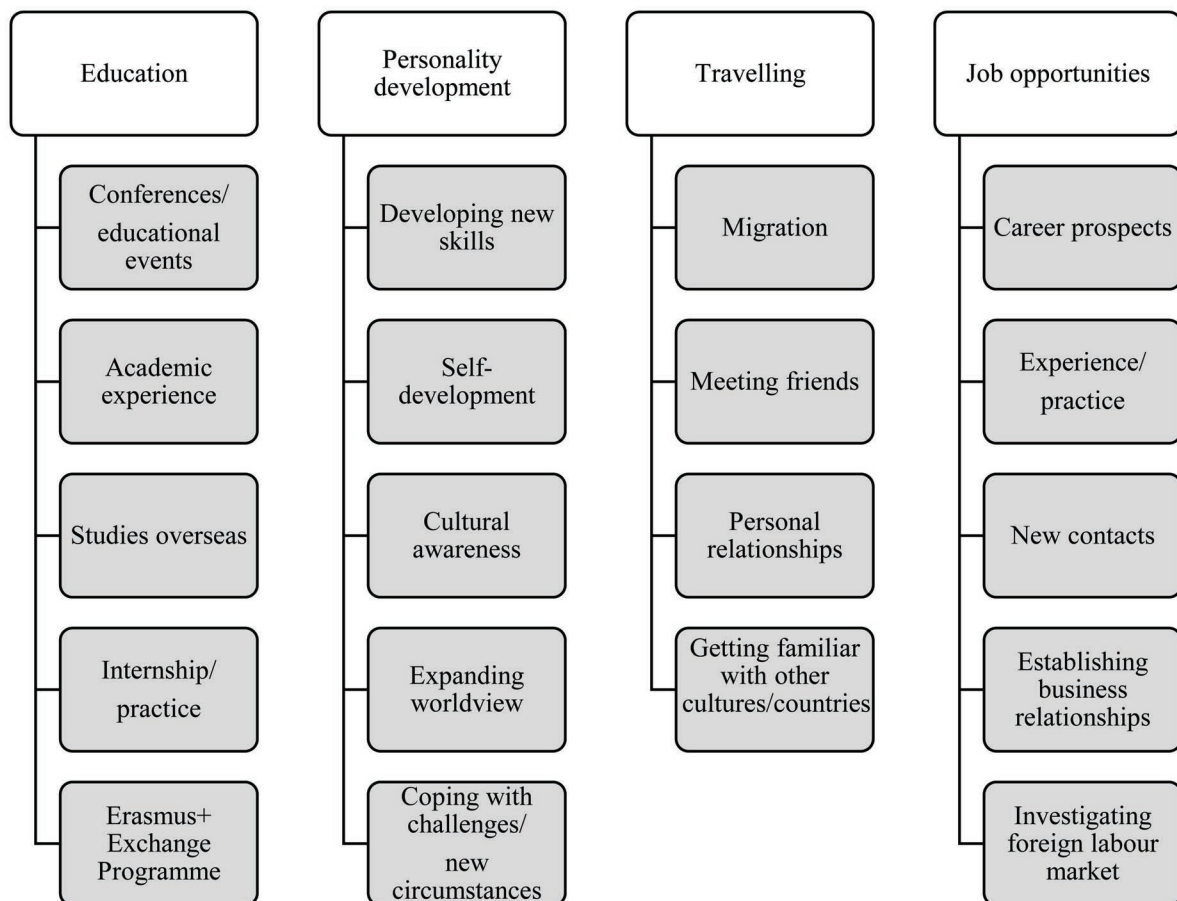


Fig. 1. Use of intercultural communication

Source: compiled by the author.

Respondents had to choose areas where the use of intercultural communication is important. The most frequently (average) specified areas are shown in the diagram below (see Fig. 2).

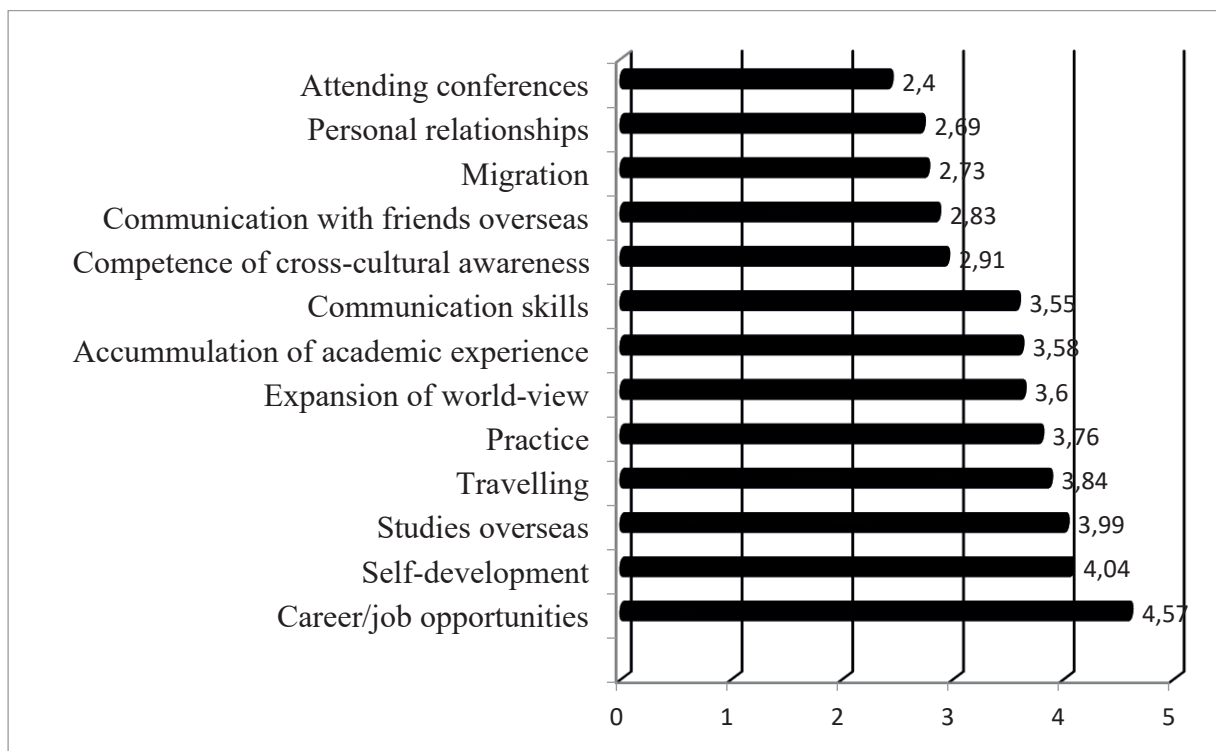


Fig. 2. Areas of the use of intercultural communication

Most respondents (average 4.57) relate the use of intercultural communication with future job opportunities. They understand the importance of intercultural communication in global business, and associate their future career prospects with intercultural communication.

The results show that students did not indicate that intercultural communication is important for gaining experience, establishing business relationships, researching the foreign labour market, or finding new contacts. The selection is not wide, as the respondents are not so experienced, they are only first and second-year students, and they do not have a clear vision of their future profession or employment.

The other most frequently selected alternatives in the use of intercultural communication are as follows: *personality development*, more precisely *self-development* (average 4.04), *expansion of world-view* (average 3.6), *development of new skills* (communication skills) (average 3.55), and *cross-cultural awareness* (average 2.91). More alternatives belonging to this group (coping with challenges or new circumstances) were not marked by the students. As was noted in the theoretical part, intercultural communication might be a part of getting familiar with the local or more distant environment, and a factor stimulating the growth of one's personality. Students consider this competence as a narrow part of self-development, and do not acknowledge that personality development is related to the ability to cope with challenges and new circumstances.

The students see intercultural communication as being beneficial for education: *studies overseas* (average, 3.99), *gaining academic experience* (average 3.58), *internship/practice* (average 3.76), and *attending conferences/educational events* (average 2.4). This provides evidence that students understand the benefits and significance of intercultural communication to their studies locally and abroad. They want to acquire wider academic knowledge, gain experience, and have possibilities to go on an internship or practice. Reviewing the alternatives included in the education group, one is still missing. The students did not select the Erasmus+ Exchange Programme. The reasons for these results may be the short period of studies (participa-

tion in the Erasmus+ programme is possible from the second year of studies), or participants in the survey (students) do not see any prospects of studying abroad for a short period of time (one semester).

The last group of choices is related to *travelling* for different purposes. The most popular choices were *communicating with friends overseas* (average 2.83), *migration* (average 2.72), and *personal relationships* (average 2.69). The majority of answers are related to travelling to *visit friends* and *migration*. The latter is relevant in Lithuania, and young people (students) consider the possibility to go abroad in the future. Some may leave the country for reasons of employment, or to acquire more experience, and others may travel just for leisure. In both cases, students think that intercultural communication is beneficial, and it should be constantly developed for future success in professional and personal life. Just a few students chose the alternative to learn about other cultures/countries. This means that culture/country can be explored not just by travelling, but also by using interactive tools/programmes (the Internet, apps, etc).

The research data provides evidence that intercultural communication has to be practised if a young person wants to be successful in different areas relevant to the future of young people/students (*education, personality development, travelling and job opportunities*). They demonstrate the correct perception of intercultural communication, and where it is important to use intercultural communication. External factors (*globalisation, the labour market and education*) and internal factors (*self-development*) have a positive effect and impact on processes of communication at both local and international levels.

Conclusions

As globalisation expands, businesses face a major problem in intercultural communication. New global organisations/companies deal with diverse workforces, multicultural teams and technological advancements, so communication has a huge impact on their performance and on high employment standards. Intercultural communication, defined as the ability to communicate with members of different cultures and/or countries, is of particular importance, and forms an integral part of career management at local and international levels.

Students' lives have constantly been changing as a result of the internationalisation of studies. Young people are properly trained for a successful career. Any educational institution has an interest in the proper training of confident and intelligent professionals. These institutions should be progressive, and participate in lifelong learning. In other words, students need to be sure of their readiness for future professional activities, they have to be *open*, and at the same time 'open all doors'. Intercultural communication leads to healthy competitiveness in the labour market, and ensures success in professional career management. This form of communication improves self-realisation in the multicultural labour market, and creates better employability. Today, employers prefer candidates with more competencies, such as foreign languages, cultural awareness, flexibility and interpersonal relationships.

According to the survey, students know and understand clearly the possibilities offered by a specific form of communication, intercultural communication. Thanks to this form of communication, information can be provided without any limitations and obstacles in international educational and professional settings. The use of intercultural communication allows students to be better prepared for their future professional career, or to continue their studies abroad. As future entrepreneurs, students recognise the need to improve, develop and practise intercultural communication, if they want to present themselves in a more professional way, and to be recruited as culturally competent professionals.

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TARPKULTŪRINĖ KOMUNIKACIJA: KARJEROS VALDYMO VEIKSNYS

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Santrauka

Šiuolaikinę visuomenę galima apibūdinti kaip atvirą ir globalią. Kiekviena visuomenės veiklos sritis (švietimas, darbo rinka, gyvenimo būdas ir pan.) turi savų ypatumų, vis dėlto galima pamatyti, kokie veiksniai yra būtini, siekiant sėkmingos veiklos globaliame pasaulyje. Šiame straipsnyje tarpkultūrinė komunikacija išskiriama kaip būtinas sėkmingos profesinės veiklos ir nuolatinio tobulėjimo atviroje visuomenėje veiksnys. Toks bendravimo būdas turėtų būti priimtinas jauniems žmonėms (studentams), siekiantiems išsilavinimo, profesinės karjeros ir planuojantiems sėkmingą ateitį. Teigiama, kad jaunimas (studentai) yra pagrindinis elementas, siekiantis išnaudoti visą švietimo sistemos potencialą nacionaliniu ir tarptautiniu lygmenimis, galintis patenkinti darbdavių lūkesčius, kurie vis labiau susiję su tarptautine veikla ir pasaulinės visuomenės kompetencijomis. Profesinės galimybės ne tik susijusios su vidaus darbo rinka, bet ir neatmetamos migracijos alternatyvos. Apžvelgti tyrimai ir jų rezultatai atskleidė, kad tarpkultūrinė komunikacija suvokiama kaip vienas iš būtinų įgūdžių, padedančių plėsti švietimo ribas, renkantis ir tęsiant studijas užsienio švietimo įstaigose, tenkinant darbdavių reikalavimus, kurie vis papildomi nuolat kuriant tarptautines organizacijas. Organizacijų ir įmonių vadovai pripažįsta, kad tarpkultūrinė komunikacija suteikia naujų galimybių ir padeda spręsti vietos bei tarptautines problemas, kylančias dėl naujos aplinkos, naujų reikalavimų ir nuolat besiplečiančių galimybių.

Daugelio mokslininkų ir tyrėjų teigimu, globalioje visuomenėje ryškėja naujos tendencijos. Verta paminėti darbo rinkos plėtimąsi tarptautiniu mastu, neribotas galimybes keliauti po pasaulį dėl įvairių priežasčių, įvairių kultūrų atstovų įdarbinimą įmonėse ir pan. Sėkminga ir veiksminga profesinė veikla priklauso nuo žmonių pasirengimo *atsiverti* pasauliniams pokyčiams ir inovacijoms. Intensyvėjant gyvenimo tempui, tenka taikytis prie naujų aplinkybių ir naudoti tarptautiniu mastu pripažintas priemones priimant globalius iššūkius. Šis straipsnis atskleidžia tarpkultūrinės komunikacijos svarbą pasaulinėje visuomenėje. Toks bendravimo būdas veikia šiuolaikinio gyvenimo kokybę, formuoja teigiamą požiūrį į naujas darbo rinkos tendencijas, pasaulines įmones, imigrantus ir užsieniečius. Be to, tarpkultūrinė komunikacija gali būti pasitelkiama, siekiant populiarinti vietos kultūrą ir susipažinti su kitomis. Įvairių šaltinių analizė ir tyrimai suteikia vertingų faktų, kad tarpkultūrinė komunikacija teigiamai veikia kasdienio ir profesinio gyvenimo kokybę bei sukuria konkurencinį pranašumą darbo rinkos specialistams.

Remiantis teorinėmis išvalgomis, atliktas studentų nuomonių dėl tarpkultūrinio bendravimo naudos tyrimas. Siekiama išanalizuoti studentų požiūrį ne tik į tarpkultūrinio bendravimo kompetencijos naudą, bet ir jos taikymo galimybes. Tyrimas baigtas 2020 m. kovo – balandžio mėn. Tyrimo imtis – dviejų Klaipėdos (Lietuvos) aukštųjų mokyklų pirmųjų ir antrųjų studijų metų studentai ($n = 176$ studentai), atstovaujantys Verslo vadovybos (75 studentai), Ekonomikos (56 studentai) ir Viešojo administravimo (45 studentai) studijų programoms.

Tyrimo rezultatai atskleidė, kad, studentų nuomone, tarpkultūrinė komunikacija naudinga, didinant savi-garbą ir pasitikėjimą, ugdant naujas kompetencijas, studijuojant užsienyje ir valdant karjerą versle. Daugelis respondentų (vidutiniškai 4,57) tarpkultūrinio bendravimo naudą sieja su būsimois įsidarbinimo galimybėmis. Jie supranta tokio bendravimo svarbą pasauliniam verslui ir savo būsimo karjeros perspektyvas sieja su tarpkultūrinio bendravimu. Respondentai mato tarpkultūrinio bendravimo teikiamą naudą ir jos praktikavimo galimybes šiose srityse: asmenybės ugdymas, tiksliau, saviugda (vidurkis – 4,04), studentų pasaulėžiūros plėtra (vidurkis – 3,6), naujų įgūdžių ugdymas (bendravimo įgūdžiai) (vidurkis – 3,55), tarpkultūrinis sąmoningumas (vidurkis – 2,91). Studentai mano, kad tarpkultūrinė komunikacija naudinga švietimui (savišvietai): studijuojant užsienyje (vidurkis – 3,99), įgyjant akademinės patirties (vidurkis – 3,58), stažuojantis / atliekant praktiką (vidurkis – 3,76) ir dalyvaujant konferencijose / švietimo renginiuose (vidurkis – 2,4). Tai atskleidžia, kad studentai supranta tarpkultūrinio bendravimo naudą ir reikšmę savo studijoms gimtoje šalyje ir užsienyje. Ma-

noma, kad jie siekia įvairiapusių mokslo žinių, įgyti patirties ir / ar atlikti praktiką vietos ar užsienio įmonėse. Paskutinė studentų nurodyta tarpkultūrinio bendravimo naudojimo sritis susijusi su keliavimu. Populiariausi tokie pasirinkimai: bendravimas su draugais, gyvenančiais užsienyje (vidurkis – 2,83), migracija (vidurkis – 2,72) ir keliavimas dėl asmeninių priežasčių (asmeninių santykių) (vidurkis – 2,69). Dauguma atsakymų susiję ne tik su draugų lankymu, bet ir su migracija. Pastaroji problema aktuali Lietuvos jaunimui, svarstančiam apie geresnes įsidarbinimo ar gyvenimo galimybes ateityje, studijoms pasibaigus. Studentai parodė, kad tarpkultūrinis bendravimas yra naudingas ir jis būtinas būsimame profesiniame bei asmeniniame gyvenime.

Apibendrinant galima teigti, kad studentai žino ir aiškiai supranta konkretaus bendravimo būdo – tarpkultūrinio bendravimo – teikiamas galimybes. Esant tokiam bendravimui, informacija gali būti teikiama be jokių apribojimų ir kliūčių tarptautinėje švietimo bei profesinėje aplinkoje. Tarpkultūrinė komunikacija leidžia studentams geriau pasirengti savo būsimai profesinei karjerai arba tęsti studijas užsienyje. Studentai, kaip būsimi specialistai, pripažįsta būtinybę gerinti, puoselėti ir praktikuoti tarpkultūrinį bendravimą, siekdami profesionaliau prisistatyti ir įsidarbinti kaip kultūriškai kompetentingi specialistai. Kitaip tariant, studentai turi būti tikri dėl savo pasirengimo būsimai profesinei veiklai, jie turi gebėti atsiverti, kartu ir „atverti visas duris“. Tarpkultūrinė komunikacija lemia sveiką konkurencingumą darbo rinkoje ir užtikrina profesinės karjeros valdymo sėkmę. Šis bendravimo būdas lemia savirealizaciją vietos ar tarptautinėje darbo rinkose ir sukuria geresnes įsidarbinimo galimybes. Šiandien darbdaviai linkę rinktis daugiau kompetencijų turinčius kandidatus, tokių kaip gebėjimas kalbėti užsienio kalba (kalbomis), kultūrinis sąmoningumas ir lankstumas.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: *bendravimas, tarpkultūrinis bendravimas, kompetencijos, karjera.*

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