

THE NEED FOR CREATING AND DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCES AMONG INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

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Abstract

In this article authors present the development of intercultural competences as a part of study process. Organization of study process in the modern world is not confined within one institution or one country. Possibilities to study in different joint programmes or choose Erasmus courses are open for many students. Not only the language abilities, but also intercultural awareness and competences influence the quality of communication and level of understanding by the representatives of other cultures. Intercultural competences are one of the very important abilities that are also presented as the outcomes of new methods of education that should prepare students to cope with intercultural environment. Study process requires students to obtain various abilities (application of knowledge, research, special, personal, social). All these abilities are particularly important in conducting comparative research and adopting foreign experience. The article emphasizes that intercultural competencies in modern study process can be assessed on two levels: the level of intercultural communication and intercultural level of scientific research.

KEY WORDS: intercultural competences, lifelong learning, intercultural communication, intercultural research.

Anotacija

Šiame straipsnyje autorės teigia, kad tarpkultūrinių kompetencijų ugdymas yra dalis studijų proceso. Šiuolaikiniame pasaulyje studijų proceso organizavimas neapsiriboja tik viena institucija ar viena šalimi. Galimybės studijuoti pagal įvairias jungtines programas ar pasirinkti *Erasmus* mainų programos kursus prieinamos daugeliui studentų. Ne tik kalbos mokėjimas, bet ir tarpkultūrinis sąmoningumas bei kompetencijos turi įtakos komunikacijos kokybei ir padeda suprasti kitų kultūrų atstovus. Tarpkultūrinės kompetencijos – tai vieni svarbiausių gebėjimų, kurie priskiriami naujų mokymo metodų rezultatams, kurie parengia studentus veikti tarpkultūrinėje aplinkoje. Studijų procesas reikalauja, kad studentas įgytų įvairių gebėjimų (žinių taikymo, tyrimų, specialiųjų, socialinių, asmeninių). Visi šie gebėjimai yra labai svarbūs atliekant lyginamuosius tyrimus ir perimant užsienio šalių patirtį. Straipsnyje akcentuojama, kad tarpkultūrinės kompetencijos šiuolaikiniame studijų procese gali būti vertinamos dviem lygiais: tarpkultūrinės kompetencijos ir tarpkultūrinių mokslinių tyrimų.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: tarpkultūrinės kompetencijos, mokymasis visą gyvenimą, tarpkultūrinė komunikacija, tarpkultūriniai tyrimai.

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Introduction

Organization of study process in the modern world is not confined within one institution or one country. Possibilities to study in different joint programmes or choose Erasmus courses are open for many students. Not only the language abil-

ities, but also intercultural awareness and competences influence the quality of communication and level of understanding by the representatives of other cultures. Referring to J. Tomlinson (2002), in analyzing the intercultural space it is important not to look for cultural differences because “cultural activity can condition difference but it is not the same as to state that culture is based on difference” (ibid, p. 77), but to see how culture helps to create the meaning in the life of a person or community.

Globalization has big influence on the comprehension of cultures and on the transformation of their interactions. Referring to Z. Bauman (2007), J. Tomlinson (2002) and other authoritative globalization researchers, globalization creates qualitatively new interactions of cultures and new spaces of *globalized culture*. According to M. Castells (2005), globalization creates the culture of real virtuality – i.e., the integration of various ways of communication into interactive networking that creates interactive society and makes big influence on social, economical, political and cultural life of society. It is unique, therefore, its traditional analysis on the basis of comparison does not permit to trace its phenomenon.

The model of the development of intercultural competencies (Fennes, Hapgood, 1997) reveals the competencies as certain stages and forms of the development of the interaction with culture: ethnocentrism – a natural situation of a person who has not directly faced other cultures, who assesses the world according to the standards of his/her cultural groups and who is ready to defend them from other groups; the stage of awareness permits to perceive the presence of intercultural differences; the stage of understanding permits to understand the reasons of intercultural differences and their influence on others; in the stage of acceptance and respect one starts to understand cultural variety as a source and value of development; appreciation and valuing – when valuable opportunities that are absent in own culture are encountered; change – when the expression of new attitudes and skills characteristic neither to one’s own nor another culture appears, and, finally, intercultural competency – when one learns to act effectively not only preserving one’s identity, but also acknowledging the peculiarities of other cultures (cit. according to Vaičekauskaitė, Staškūnienė, 2013).

Constant interaction of cultures takes place in all times, because any culture is not a closed system. According to C. Geertz (2005), culture points out people’s aspirations to understand them and create their communities. Various cultural differences inevitably exist. Intercultural dialogue in the process of the realization of study programme is one of the most important preconditions of the success in achieving the aim of different international academic projects. Dialogue with partners of projects should have a very clear structure, the main elements of which are: cultural differences (getting to know each other, establishing the respective

attitude towards each other (communication without pressure, finding a compromise) and predicting interference (social, economical, legal). Having evaluated intercultural dialogue, the process of communication and scientific research should be useful for all partners of projects: cultural-historical similarities (historical past, teaching traditions, communication culture – hospitality, openness); ability to accept variety (the enduring value of the project – unique learning experience in the context of the good experience of another country formed in the process of the research); using students' professional interests (the motives, possessed experience and adaptation in new environment are evaluated).

The first objective in modern study process – to help a student to understand the contents and expression of intercultural communication, the second – to help a student to understand the specifics of intercultural research.

Both these objectives are interrelated. It would be a complicated task to act in another cultural environment while conducting empirical research without the competencies of intercultural communication. All study programs (bachelor, master, doctor) include ability of research as the main objective. Academic process is considered as scientific collaboration between a teacher (research supervisor) and a student, therefore, intercultural competencies are obligatory.

1. Lifelong Learning policy towards supporting the development of key competences

Knowledge and skills have become the driving force for growth and employment in modern societies. The European Council, after the meeting in 2000 in Lisbon, established the strategic policy goal for the EU to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world by 2010. Being competitive demands developing lifelong learning strategy in society, which supports extending knowledge, gaining skills and competences. “Lifelong learning has become a necessity for all citizens. We need to develop our skills and competences throughout our lives, not only for our personal fulfillment and our ability to actively engage with the society in which we live, but for our ability to be successful in a constantly changing world of work”, said Ján Figel, Member of the European Commission responsible for Education, Training, Culture and Youth since 2004 to 2009.

Lifelong learning is defined as all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence, within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective (European Commission, 2001, p. 33). Individual motivation to learn and the variety of learning opportunities are the ultimate keys in implementing lifelong learning successfully. It is essential to

raise the demand for learning as well as its supply, especially for those who have benefited least from education and training so far. Everyone should be able to follow open learning pathways of their own choice, rather than being obliged to follow predetermined routes to specific destinations. This means, quite simply, that education and training systems should adapt to individual needs and demands rather than the other way round (Commission of the European Communities, 2000, p. 10–11).

In 2003 the European Commission published 'Extended Lisbon List (European Communities, 2003, p. 8–12), which contains a collection of fifteen skills, allowing working and enjoying life with the goods available in the European civilization. The acquisition of these skills is a key element for the full existence and to further development of European knowledge society:

- literacy (basic skills);
- arithmetic skills (basic skills);
- basic level of general knowledge (basic skills);
- ability to express themselves (social skills);
- ability to accurately appraise the situation and solve problems (social skills);
- ability to take the initiative (social skills);
- organizational skills (social skills);
- ability to manage the work of others (social skills);
- ability to further learning, self-development (social skills);
- ability to cope with people from different cultures (intercultural skills);
- ability to work with people from different cultures (intercultural skills);
- ability to use foreign languages (intercultural skills);
- ability to use computer (ICT skills);
- ability to use the Internet (ICT skills);
- ability to use scientific equipment and technological tools (scientific/ technological skills).

In the European Union policy there are also frequent references to the issue of “key competences” in the recommendations of the European Parliament and the European Council. They are defined as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to the situation. Key competences are those that all individuals need for personal fulfillment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment (Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council, 2006)

Eight key competences were established, which include:

- communication in the mother tongue;
- communication in foreign languages;

- mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology;
- digital competence;
- learning to learn;
- social and civic competences;
- sense of initiative and entrepreneurship;
- cultural awareness and expression.

“Cultural awareness and expression” includes knowledge of local and regional, national and European cultural heritage and their role in the world. Skills include the ability to relate on own creative and expressive points of view to the opinions of others and to identify and realize social and economic opportunities in cultural activity. Competence relates to understanding of one’s own culture and a sense of identity can be the basis for the respect and an open attitude towards cultural diversity.

2. The need for developing intercultural competences

The category of intercultural competences is being analyzed mainly by the representatives of social science, as psychologists, sociologists, educationalists, language teachers or those who work in the field of economy or business.

Preparing for living in multicultural society and giving the possibility for students to create interpersonal contacts are the key elements in education. Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pędich (2007, s. 38) emphasizes that although the development of intercultural competence is a long-lasting process and naturally it is a part of language teaching, the whole school system is responsible for developing intercultural attitudes. Intercultural competences are needed not only in the case of undertaking studies or job abroad. It is also essential to create and develop intercultural competences for people who are living in multicultural society in own country. Additionally, for those who are travelling for touristic reason and more often in the case of family relations contact with culturally different people has become an integral part of the experience of modern man (Aleksandrowicz-Pędich, 2009, s. 134).

This article is devoted to describe and examine the topic of “intercultural competences” in the aspect of lifelong learning. The aim of teaching foreign language is to enable people to communicate with those who speak different languages. Apart from teaching four language skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening), more frequently the fifth one is mentioned. This is an intercultural awareness and sensitivity. For communication and understanding each other, people do not

only need to speak the same language, they also need to know their culture. Imperfect knowledge of the language in international relations has frequently less impact on process of communication than errors resulting from lack of intercultural competence (Bandura, 2011, s. 36). Sometimes we may have the impression that we speak the same foreign language, but we do not understand each other. We speak the same words, but we understand and use them in a different cultural context. This is the consequence of being brought up in a diversified cultural environment. To conclude, speaking foreign language is the first and basic element to get into contact with people from different countries. But what is even more important is to communicate and exchange the information and ideas. Knowing and understanding cultural dimensions, conditions and circumstances have a crucial impact on the quality of contact and interpersonal communication with foreign people.

Current approaches to Foreign Language Teaching (FLT) have shifted from aiming at proficient linguistic competence to highlighting the importance of achieving intercultural competence (González Rodríguez, Borham Puyal, 2012, p. 107). But unfortunately, it seems that the intercultural element is not common while teaching foreign languages at European universities. On the base of the results of the research, which was conducted by Ewa Lewicka-Mroczek at The University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Warsaw, it appears that only 2 out of 36 students declared that good knowledge of English means to have high language competence and knowledge of the culture of this country (Lewicka-Mroczek, 2009, s. 246). Additionally, the respondents claimed that the least important competence is the language ability and good knowledge of the culture of the language area.

It means that it is important and essential to talk and write about the necessity of intercultural elements in foreign language classes, as many people do not consider intercultural competences as a value in learning language and having successful conversation in FLT. Additionally, it is significant to design and deliver new working methods which will be used to develop intercultural awareness and competences among students. Giving examples of exercises which may be used by foreign language teachers to create and lead a creative intercultural workshop, is an essential tool to make them conscious and well equipped with working methods. As the result, it should influence foreign students' intercultural competences.

3. Intercultural competences – theoretical approach

What are intercultural competences? Which elements do they consist of? Mike Byram understands intercultural competence as an ability to leave the position of being in the center, the adoption of new points of view, of being willing to interact with people from other European and non-European cultures (Byram, Risager,

1999, p. 4). The key element in gaining intercultural competences is the willingness to have contact with people from different cultures. It shows readiness and an open attitude which one has towards others. Without free will, curiosity and open mind it would be hard to start experiencing otherness in the context of being together, communicating and trying to understand each other.

Students should not only be aware of similarities and differences between the target culture and their own cultural background but also that they should establish a 'sphere of interculturality' by learning to observe the world from the perspective of others, thus decentring their own perspective (Skopinskaja 2003, p. 40–41). Participating in this "sphere of interculturality" makes students more aware of existing different cultural perspectives, different points of view about the same phenomenon. That not always the perspective of "we" is the only one and right, but there are other people who have different opinion, and from their cultural perspective they are also right. Additionally, having the possibility of experiencing "interculturalism" makes students more conscious of their own identity, culture and values. To explain the above (Byram, 2008) underlines the importance of enhancing in learners a "critical cultural awareness" since FLT should contribute for better understanding of other people and cultures. He also suggests that FL learning should be a comprehensive and deep process leading to critical reflection and consequently to intercultural communicative competence. Instead of intercultural competence, sometimes the term intercultural communicative competence is used in this thesis. They both means similarly the same however "intercultural communicative competence" emphasises the practical element of being in contact and communicating to each other. At the basis of intercultural awareness is an intracultural consciousness, which mainly concerns own identity and native culture (Aleksandrowicz-Pędich, 2006, s. 75). One of the best way to be more familiar with own culture is to contact, cooperate and confront with other cultures, which give us possibility to relate to the difference.

During the process of formulating learning objectives, there are distinguished: the key qualifications, language aims and educational objectives of teaching language in which it is distinguished the intercultural competence of student that is needed to her or his functioning in multilingual and multicultural modern world. Intercultural competence is reflected in (Komorowska, 2009, s. 18–19):

- noticing the similarities and differences between own culture and the culture of a society whose language is the subject of study;
- ability to analyze new cultural phenomena, including traditions and behaviors those of other communities;
- ability to perceive other people and their cases through the eyes of the members of other cultures and understand their point of view, which una-

ble to recognize their cultural traditions in contrast to the own community tradition and the knowledge of own historical roots;

- use this knowledge to obtain more objectified image of own culture, customs, traditions and ways of thinking;
- tolerance and the ability to have peaceful contact with the representatives of other culture;
- ability to deal with the contact with the representatives of other cultures and ethnic groups, including coping cross-cultural misunderstandings.

Without knowing own identity and culture (within its traditions, customs, rituals, symbols, heroes, values etc.) it is rather impossible to teach elements of intercultural competences. High awareness of own cultural identity is required for all participants of intercultural communication, without it hard to talk about the emergence of a deeper relationship (Piegzik, 2006, s. 61). That is why it is so crucial to develop “native cultural competence” to enable students to be a partner while having contact and communicating with the representative of other culture. The key element before developing intercultural competences while foreign language teaching is the process of formation native cultural identity, which may take place at other lessons.

3.1. Elements of intercultural competences

To understand intercultural competences better, we should pay more attention to the elements (mainly three: knowledge, skills, attitudes) that constitutes the term. Intercultural competence is the body of knowledge and skills to successfully interact with people from other ethnic, religious, cultural, national, and geographic groups. When someone has a high degree of intercultural competence, they are able to have successful interactions with people from different groups. People must be curious about other cultures, sensitive to cultural differences, and also willing to modify their behavior as a sign of respect for other cultures (Chen, Starosta, 1996, p. 79).

The knowledge of other cultures; ability to manage our own emotions in new cultural situations and taking appropriate action were the key elements of intercultural competence indicated by L. Aleksandrowicz-Pędich (2006, s. 11). The same three elements are mentioned by E. Bandura (2007), within the extension of the meaning of the third one. The intercultural competences include elements such as knowledge, attitude, ability to interpret and acquire knowledge about the culture and its use, but also critical cultural and civic awareness. The knowledge and the skills are essential in intercultural circumstances, but both may be observed in the

attitude, which is the most crucial from the perspective of having and being in intercultural contact and relation. According to E. Bandura (2007, s. 25) intercultural competence is defined as a knowledge of the similarities and differences between the lifestyles and beliefs characteristic for different cultures and the ability to apply this knowledge in practical communication.

In one of the well-known models of intercultural competences, constructed and designed by M. Byram (1997, p. 56) five elements are distinguished:

- the knowledge about the own culture and other cultures;
- attitudes: e.g. curiosity, openness, willingness to refrain from valuing cultures;
- ability to interpret, explain the manifestations of other culture and relate it to one's own;
- ability to gain the knowledge about culture;
- critical cultural awareness to evaluate values and ideas in the native and foreign culture.

In this model we may notice that more attention is given to intercultural abilities, skills, attitudes and awareness, instead of knowledge. Intercultural competences are broadly defined as an accumulation of skills, which results from the knowledge and attitudes towards different cultures. Possessed information and attitudes (attitudes include such elements as: knowledge, emotions, behavior) are manifested in action and can be observed in peoples' behavior. Behavior while intercultural contact can be examined and assessed in the aspect of person's intercultural skills. So, who is competent in an intercultural sphere? Those who have the knowledge, positive emotions, are skillful and can behave and act healthily in an intercultural environment. To sum up, intercultural competences consist of knowledge and skills which enable us to have an intercultural contact, but also attitudes towards other cultures.

In general the essence of intercultural competences can be summed up as the ability to work/interact well across cultures. So, intercultural competence is the fundamental acceptance of people who are different to oneself outside one's own culture/the ability to interact with them in a genuinely constructive manner which is free of negative attitude (e.g. prejudice, defensiveness apathy, aggression etc. / the ability to create a synthesis, something which is neither 'mine' nor 'yours', but which is genuinely new and would not have been possible to combine our different backgrounds and approaches (Schmid, 2009).

To sum up, intercultural competence means the ability to cope well in intercultural interpersonal relations with the representatives of other cultures and to function fully in culturally different environment.

3.2. Implementation of intercultural competences into teaching

Most research done about intercultural communication starts by listing out the barriers. A. Jones and X. Quach (2007, p. 27–29) pointed five main barriers preventing people from having effective intercultural communication: ethnocentrism, stereotypes, prejudice, language and nonverbal communication. Intercultural education is an essential strategy for coping with these phenomena. The skills to overcome such barriers are normally regarded as intercultural competences (Fennes, Hapgood, 1997, p. 46). In reflecting upon intercultural competences and intercultural learning, we can observe that the process of acquiring such competences involves overcoming ethnocentrism, acquiring the ability to empathize with other cultures, acquiring the ability to communicate across cultural boundaries and developing a means to cooperate across cultural boundaries. The developmental model posits a continuum of increasing sophistication in dealing with cultural difference, moving from ethnocentrism through stages of greater recognition and acceptance of difference (Bennett, 1993, p. 25). This model presents that intercultural awareness can be learned through learning and teaching.

Facilitating cross-cultural communication becomes the target of foreign language teaching. It is strongly accented, both in the foreign language course methods, as well as in the European education policy. This demands the students' awareness that there is a close relationship between culture and the language in which that language is formed. It reflects the specific manner in which the representatives of the culture perceive themselves, other people and the world. Additionally, while teaching foreign languages, it is important to emphasize the role of intercultural awareness in the process of communication with native speakers and those who are representatives of other culture. Building educational programs, which aim at the process of acquiring intercultural competences by students, we should bear in mind the following elements: knowledge, skills, emotions, behavior towards cultural difference.

Gaining knowledge – at this stage an intellectual sphere of students and their cognitive curiosity is being developed. Learning about other countries and their cultures should include: learning about the factual data, history, geography, political system, language, religion, national symbols and attempts to interpret works of art in the context of different national culture. This information is available in the following media: in the guidebooks, on the websites, on television programs, in the press. Many interesting information can be found out in the literature, painting, film, music that express the essence and content of national cultural symbols, heroes, rituals and values. Those elements of knowledge should enable students to adapt easily towards new and rapidly changing conditions.

Acquisition of skills – knowledge is not enough, students need the skills for analyzing and interpreting the observed phenomena and different behavior of the representatives of different cultures. They also need to have the skills of foreign language speaking enriched by the ability to understand different cultural contexts. At this point, there is a clear need to support the teachers who will equip students with the necessary tools for the interpretation of other cultures and their own identity.

Emotions in intercultural contacts – each meeting with a person who comes from different culture can be a source of stress, resulting from the fact of new (cultural) situation. In today's educational strategy, it is important to develop an open attitude towards cultural diversity and encourage understanding the variety in a cultural sense. The aim of intercultural contact is to promote tolerance for difference, from commonly known, behavior which is accepted in the home culture. Additionally, while developing intercultural competences the teachers should decrease the level of interpreting the phenomena only through the lens of students' own culture.

Actions – to obtain mature behavior towards foreigners it is necessary to adopt an objective attitude of not critical observers who do not put on a pedestal their own culture, but recognize it as one from the many existing in the world. Training of tolerant behavior requires direct contact with representatives of different cultures and the willingness of both sides, to have contact, communicate and learn from each other. Moreover, the actions should be well designed by a teacher who has a great knowledge and experience in the context of participants' culture. There are many questions about the methods of teaching intercultural competences. There are, however, different opinions as to what the best methods of enhancing intercultural competence might be. Some scholars complain that few FL teachers have a deep understanding of the importance of culture teaching as a means of fostering the acquisition of intercultural skills, and contend that this should be one of the pedagogical challenges of FLT. There seems to be a consensus as to the need to nurture cultural responsiveness in FL educators so that they can make classrooms 'culturally sensitive places to learn' (Porto, 2010, p. 47). Three from the above mentioned elements (knowledge, emotions, and actions) are the main categories of building human attitudes, in this case, to the representatives of other cultures. It is therefore necessary to emphasize the role and mission, which should have European higher education system to create tolerance, mutual understanding and dialogue of people from different cultures. There is also a great mission on behalf of the teachers who should not teach intercultural competences, but they should create sufficient circumstances for the students to interact and learn from each other.

Hanna Komorowska (1996, s. 112) claims that intercultural competence can be defined in the aspect of four ranges of knowledge:

- *savoir-etre* – the ability to get rid of ethnocentric attitudes;
- *savoir-apprendre* – cognitive ability to analyze cultural phenomena previously unknown;
- *savoir-knowledge* of different cultural phenomena and basic knowledge of the world: geography, history, economy and the arts;
- *savoir-faire* – ability to properly conduct themselves in situations of contact with people from other cultures.

In case of teaching foreign students, one of the most important elements of the intercultural competences is '*savoir-etre*'. It is crucial to lose ethnocentric attitude in case of having current interpersonal contacts with the people coming from host and other foreign cultures. Moreover, '*savoir-apprendre*' is crucial because it enriches foreign students within the ability to cope with previously unknown cultural phenomena. While studying abroad students have to face many new situations that may surprise, which are not understandable from the perspective of home culture. That is why intercultural training is necessary in foreign language teaching, as an element that prepares students to have a real contact with those who come from other cultures.

The knowledge about the culture of the host country, we can also get as a tourist, as a result of participant observation. Travelling enriches us with the knowledge about the country and its culture, but also equips us with some basic skills, which are required for being abroad, as: doing shopping, asking for the way, travelling, booking a room, ordering food etc. These skills are connected both to the language skills, but also to intercultural skills.

The formation of intercultural competence of students is worth noting if there is too much focus on the transfer of knowledge about other cultures. What is important is to equip stakeholders in the process of learning with tools for skillful interpretation of a foreign culture. A perfect example of a tool for trying to understand the culture that is different from your own can be a tool built on the basis of: five cultural dimensions of Geert Hofstede, the nine dimensions of Project GLOBE or by Fons Trompenaar's seven dimensions.

While building training, methods or tools for developing intercultural competences, the following elements should be implemented into teaching foreign language:

- introducing basic theoretical information about the term culture, the specificity of cultural similarities and differences, but also about intercultural communication;

- support students in gaining knowledge about their own culture and country in case of enriching and making them aware about their identity;
- implementing the students with the methods and tools for analysing and interpreting phenomenon of cultural difference;
- developing ability to understand and tolerate different behavior, traditions, customs etc. in term of culture;
- giving the opportunities for students to experience of cultural differences by e.g. playing simulation games.

To sum up, the elements of intercultural education while foreign language classes are necessary because they develop students' knowledge, skills and competences and enable gain attitude of understanding, respecting and tolerating the differences, which is the basic condition towards harmonious development of the modern, intercultural societies.

The knowledge in foreign language related to the first objective in modern study process – to help student to understand the contents and expression of intercultural communication.

According to Dž. Baraldsnes (2012) without the estimation of cultural differences there might be misunderstandings in the process of communication. For example, the person A deciphers information in one context, referring to attitudes acceptable to people in his/her culture. The person B deciphers information referring to other attitudes. The person A and the person B decipher the same message in a different way, therefore, the effectiveness of the process of their communication is very low (see Figure 1).

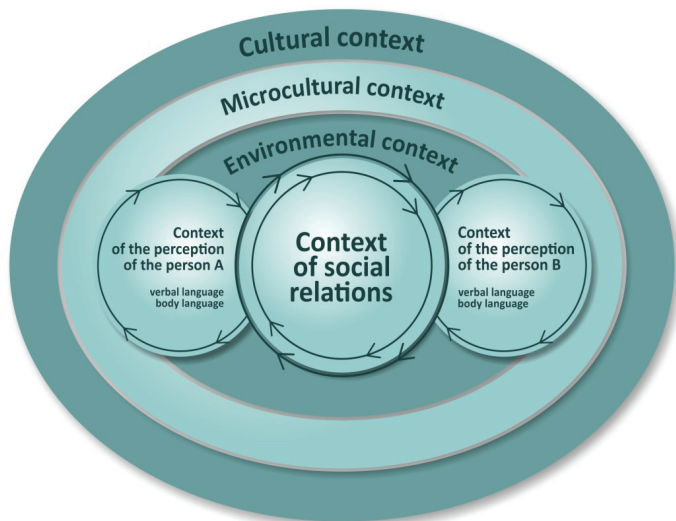


Figure 1. Context of communication (Baraldsnes, 2012, p. 72)

D. Baraldsnes (2012, p. 73) comments on the obstacles enlisted by L. Barna (1996) that interfere with effective intercultural communication:

Precondition of similarities. People naively expect that people of other countries are the same like them (or at least similar to them), therefore, communication should not be complicated (see Figure 2).

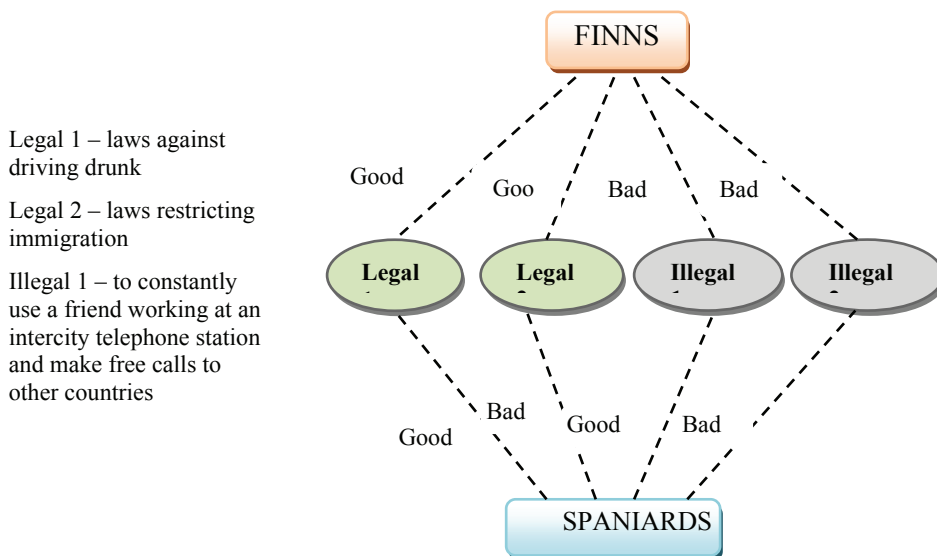


Figure 2. Different perceptions of social problems (Lewis, 2002)

Linguistic differences. When communicating in a language that is not appropriately mastered yet, people think that a word, phrase or sentence has the only one meaning – namely the meaning they intend to express (see Figure 3). A Japanese will say in words only a small part of what he/she thinks, meanwhile an American says more than he/she has in mind.

Other criteria cannot be ignored: Incorrect interpretation of body language, prejudice and stereotypes, evaluation tendencies, big anxiety and stress.

In intercultural communication three forms of *adaptation* should be evaluated: psychological, sociocultural and working (Karaliūtė, Tarpkultūrinio (...)).

The concept of intercultural competencies becomes even more relevant under the influence of the processes of globalization. According to Z. Bauman (2007), people move even when physically they remain in the same space. Cultural identity cannot be identified to the territory of the country or geographical territory anymore.

Intercultural competency is person’s ability to communicate and interact with the representatives of another culture, group or community, therefore, it cannot be

explained as an isolated phenomenon. Intercultural competencies are an integral part of general competencies, general activity of a social worker in the community (see Figure 4).

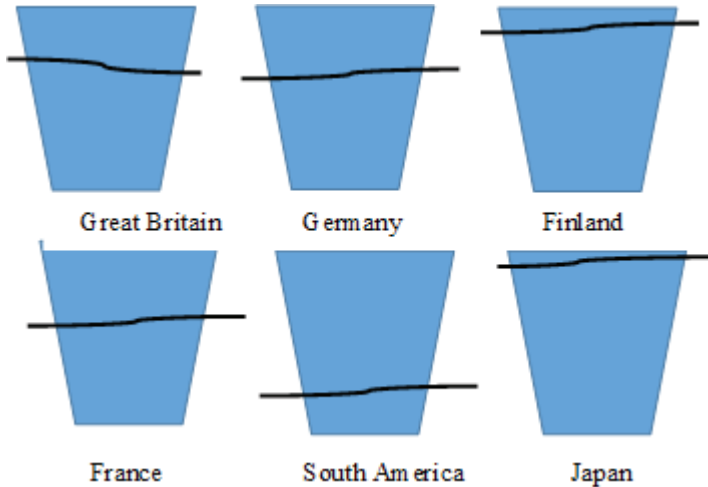


Figure 3. Icebergs of speech and thinking (Lewis, 2002)

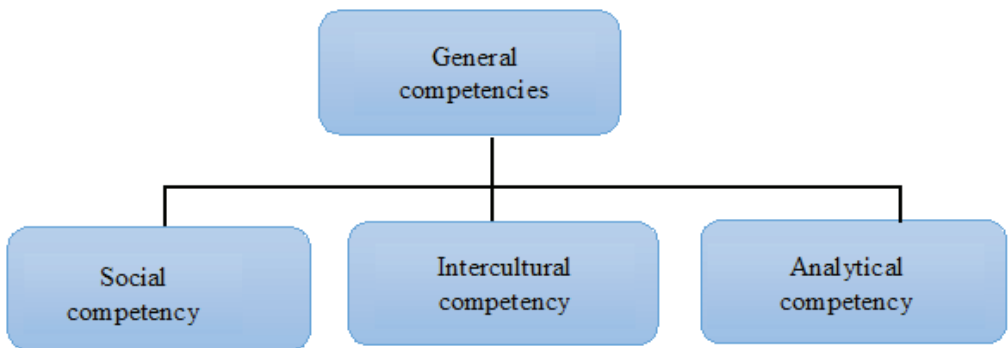


Figure 4. Essential competencies of a social worker to act in the community (Sadauskas, Leliūgienė, 2010, p. 59)

The second objective in modern study process – to help a student to understand the specifics of intercultural research.

The document “Salzburg Recommendations” indicating the guidelines of PhD studies in Europe approved by the European University Association (EUA) in 2010 indicates the importance of intercultural cognition in training young researchers and emphasizes the importance of the development of Intercultural Research Competencies (EUA CDE News. Implementing the Salzburg principles.

December 2010, Issue 10). The aim of the joint master study programme – to train specialists ready for professional practical activity and scientific research on community, national and international levels, able to act under undefined and complex circumstances, rendering assistance to people in the life process in the situation of congenital, acquired and senior age disability.

To explain intercultural competencies in the research context *constructivist approach* that does not oblige to look for absolute definition of a competency is convenient. Constructivist paradigm emphasizes learning in natural social activity – communicating, solving problems (Virgailaitė-Mečkauskaitė, 2011). Therefore, holistic approach towards competencies as an overall potential of a person is forming (Lepaitė, 2003).

E. Virgailaitė-Mečkauskaitė (2011, p. 44), referring to foreign authors (Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey and Wiseman, 1991; Grunzweig and Rinehart, 1998; Dear-dorff, 2006), focuses on a three-dimensional model of intercultural competency where the following components are distinguished: cognitive (knowledge about cultural differences), emotional (motivation and willingness to act in intercultural situations) and behavioural (skills and abilities related to intercultural situations). It would be difficult and meaningless to distinguish the main elements characteristic to intercultural competency in this structure because a competency is a person's ability to perform a certain activity referring to the possessed knowledge, skills, personal features and experience. Competency means the sum total of necessary knowledge, skills, values, personal features and experience.

The expression of the structure of intercultural competencies can be revealed referring to the concept suggested by R. Laužackas (2005). The bigger part of intercultural competency is made up of, according to R. Laužackas (2005), “known but not formalized part of competency” and “possessed part of competency, but a person is unaware of it” (Figure 5).

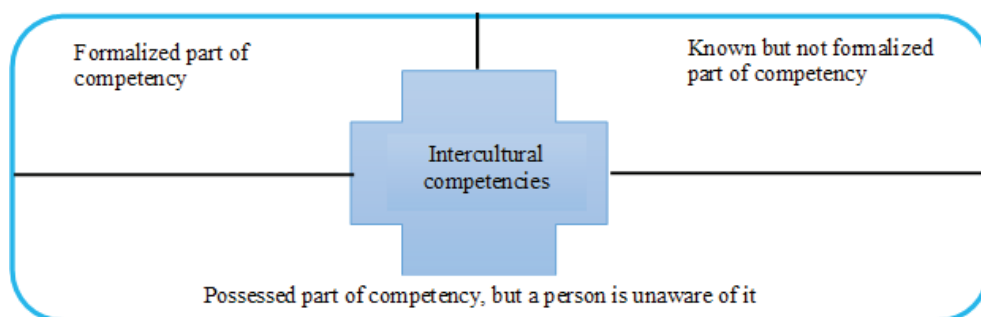


Figure 5. Structure of intercultural competencies (Laužackas, 2005, modified Vaičekuskaitė, Staškūnienė, 2013)

A teacher could help a student to recognize these segments of intercultural competency using supervision and approaches of reflectivity. According to A. Barzelis, L. Barcytė (2009), one of the innovative experiential education methods that can be applied in the process of the development of intercultural competency is Service Learning. This method of education – learning and reflection joins academic plane of education to meaningful serving the community. As educational methodology it belongs to the category of experiential education. It also corresponds to the concept of social work studies.

Conclusion

Organization of study process in the modern world is not confined within one institution or one country. Possibilities to study in different joint programmes or choose Erasmus courses are open for many students. Not only the language abilities, but also intercultural awareness and competences influence the quality of communication and level of understanding by the representatives of other cultures. The article revealed that intercultural competencies in modern study process can be assessed on two levels: the level of intercultural communication and intercultural level of scientific research.

Teacher's role in the process of intercultural communication is of dualistic character: to help a student abroad (mediator, teacher, enabler, consultant) and internationalization at home (ability to organize the process of sharing experience using such methods as distance learning, problem-based learning, service learning, case studies, etc.). Therefore, a teacher always raises the question to students: What are the components of the contents of intercultural competencies acting in another cultural environment, in the process of cultural communication and scientific research?

It confirms the theoretical insights by E. Virgailaitė-Mečkauskaitė (2011, p. 70) – to assess learning abroad through cultural dimension. The role of a teacher as a mediator during scientific research process that could be performed in another cultural environment is to help students organize and manage the process of the preparation of bachelor, master or doctor thesis and develop intercultural research competencies. Continuing the scientific statements by E. Virgailaitė-Mečkauskaitė (2011, p. 70–71), a student in the study process abroad goes through intellectual/ thinking aspirations and experiences emotions and feelings that in case of every student differently transform into personal comprehension and interpretation of culture. Teachers' role in this process is important as much as it empowers a student to strive for positive result from the aspects of both the quality of the research and modeling of his/her professional career. It creates preconditions to think that

students will be able to consolidate intercultural communication and research competencies gained in the process of studies in lifelong learning strategy.

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