

INFLUENCE OF INTERNATIONALIZATION PROCESSES IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

Internacionalizācijas procesu ietekme starpkultūru kompetences attīstībai augstākās izglītības iestādē

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Abstract. *Since integration and globalization processes are accelerating in the world, the demand to internationalize education and studies increases as well as parameters of the activities of higher education institutions change. International competitive ability of European higher education area, international mobility and high level of university graduates' employment as well as successful integration into international labour market are the main aims of Bologna process. Bologna declaration, various documents of conventions (European convention of higher education institutions, Salamanca) and communiqué documents (of Prague; Berlin; Bergen) related to the declaration devoted to the creation of common European Higher Education Area raise the necessity of higher education policy emphasizing internationalization, the conception of lifelong learning. The documents mentioned above emphasize the development of European dimensions and content internationalization in study programmes, training of a flexible, mobile, constantly improving and public active specialist who will integrate into the competitive labour market, mobility of the academic community and international cooperation. The development of intercultural competence becomes a more topical subject of the research taking globalization processes into consideration. That is why it is important to understand the influence of internationalization processes in the institution on the development of Master's degree (MA) students' intercultural competence through their experience gained in the study process. **The aim of the research** presented in this article is to discuss the influence of internationalization processes in the institution on the development of MA students' intercultural competence. **A scientific problem question** raised in the research is how MA students telling their life story reveal the experience gained in the process of higher education internationalization which influenced the development of their intercultural competence.*

Keywords: *internationalization of higher education, development of intercultural competence, globalization.*

Introduction

The aims of Bologna process raise new requirements of international cooperation for higher education institutions, i.e. to increase mobility of lecturers and students, social and academic openness, to implant European levels in the study process and on that ground to rapidly internationalize studies. The aim is to involve students (especially Master's degree (MA) students and PhD students) in the teams of more experienced investigators (lecturers and scientists), international

research and projects which are being implemented as well as in the presentation of the results of scientific research in a foreign language in international conferences and databases. Students' direct communication and cooperation with students, lecturers and scientists from other countries is encouraged. Specific processes, procedures and programmes of study internationalization (exchanges of students and lecturers, joint degree and double degree study programmes, international research, teaching of languages, etc.) become a usual part of the activities of modern higher education institutions.

Internationalization processes in the higher education and labour market mentioned above, without specific subject competences (academic and research) and common ones (abilities of information, teamwork, project activities, communication, etc.), seek to **develop intercultural competence** in study programmes which enables investigators (including MA students and PhD students) to work in the intercultural academic and (or) professional area.

The aim of the research presented in this article is to discuss the influence of internationalization processes in the institution on the development of MA students' intercultural competence. **A scientific problem question** raised in the research is how MA students telling their life story reveal the experience gained in the process of higher education internationalization which influences the development of their intercultural competence. In order to achieve the aim of the research, the qualitative research was chosen, i.e. the research data was collected with the help of the biographical interview which was conducted in two universities of Lithuania in March and April (2010). The received data is analyzed invoking *subjective-interpretive – constructivist conception* (Berger, Luckmann, 1999; Denzin, Lincoln, 2003), the development of MA students' intercultural competence elements is seen through the experience of the research participants. The importance of social construction perspective arises, since we acknowledge that everyday life is reality which is interpreted by people. The reconstruction of the past arises as a situation of consciousness which is expressed in the verbal form of narration. Therefore the reported experience how MA students gained and developed intercultural competence in the higher education institution as well as life events which were forgotten and remembered at present acquire meaning which can provide new knowledge for the further development of intercultural competence and internationalization processes in higher education institutions.

24 MA students from Šiauliai university and Vytautas Magnus university participated in the research. An in-depth interview was used to reveal the experience of the research participants developing intercultural competence in the context of higher education internationalization.

Development of MA Students' Intercultural Competence in the Context of Internationalization

Internationalization, first of all, is understood as a reaction to globalization and as a strategy of higher education institutions in the global environment (Knight, 1994,1999; Beerkens, 2004; Wende Van der, 1997). The conception of

internationalization was formulated by many authors but Knight's (1999, 2003, 2006) conception is widespread and universally applied in different countries, cultures and education systems. It defines internationalization as the process of integrating an international, intercultural and global dimension into the purposes, functions and delivery of higher education.

According to Knight (1999, 2003), Fielden (2006), Wende van der (1997), **internationalization strategy** includes: 1) projects of international cooperation and development; 2) interinstitutional agreements and network; 3) international / intercultural dimension of the study process; 4) curriculum and research; 5) post-lecture activities which take place in the higher education institution; 6) the mobility of the academic staff through exchange programmes, expert, consultative and scientific work; 7) gathering of foreign students' groups; 8) student exchange programmes; 9) joint / double study programmes; 10) branches in foreign countries, etc.

Soderqvist (2002), Knight (1999, 2003, 2006) and international agreements (Sorbona declaration; Bologna declaration; Prague communiqué; Berlin communiqué; Bergen communiqué) show that internationalization of higher education is related to the quality of higher education. It means that international cooperation and exchange programmes of students, lecturers and scientists will become a norm and will provide a possibility to learn from each other, compare and generalize the best conceptions and practical experience, understand the multicultural environment, learn foreign languages, etc. Intercultural competence is a complicated construct which is developed all man's life, that is why a student's experience brought to Master Degree studies is a very important part of education and an information source. In accordance with many authors (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984; Knowles, 1975, etc.), students' experience in the education process is an essential learning source. Developing intercultural competence in the higher education institution, it is important to pay attention to a person's experience (formal, spontaneous) which is determined by the present culture and acquired in the family, kindergarten, at school, communicating with friends, etc.

Building an interactive model of the development of MA students' intercultural competence in the context of internationalization, the following aspects become very important: 1) the significance of the process of socialization (family, school, groups of contemporaries, etc.) developing intercultural competence; 2) implementation of both institutional internationalization of universities and ethnic diversity policy; 3) integration of new learning and evaluation strategies and methods oriented to the development of competences into the study process.

In order to successfully implement institutional internationalization and ethnic diversity and to develop MA students' intercultural competences, it is necessary to have a productive pedagogical model. Since intercultural competence, its development and evaluation in the higher education is a multidimensional, interactive, complex and multiple construct, it would be difficult to present one diagram of such a model. With reference to various literature, an interactive

model of the development of intercultural competence in the context of internationalization is presented (Picture 1), in which skills and knowledge are not the only purpose of education since the improvement of a student’s personality, alternation of his values and attitudes are also of great importance. Moreover, MA students’ intercultural competence is mostly developed outside the sphere of formal education, i.e. although the significance of education and evaluation strategies developing intercultural competence is great, experiential learning in real situations, being in another cultural context, is essential forming and developing elements of MA students’ intercultural competence: knowledge, abilities, attitudes, cultural consciousness and sensitivity.

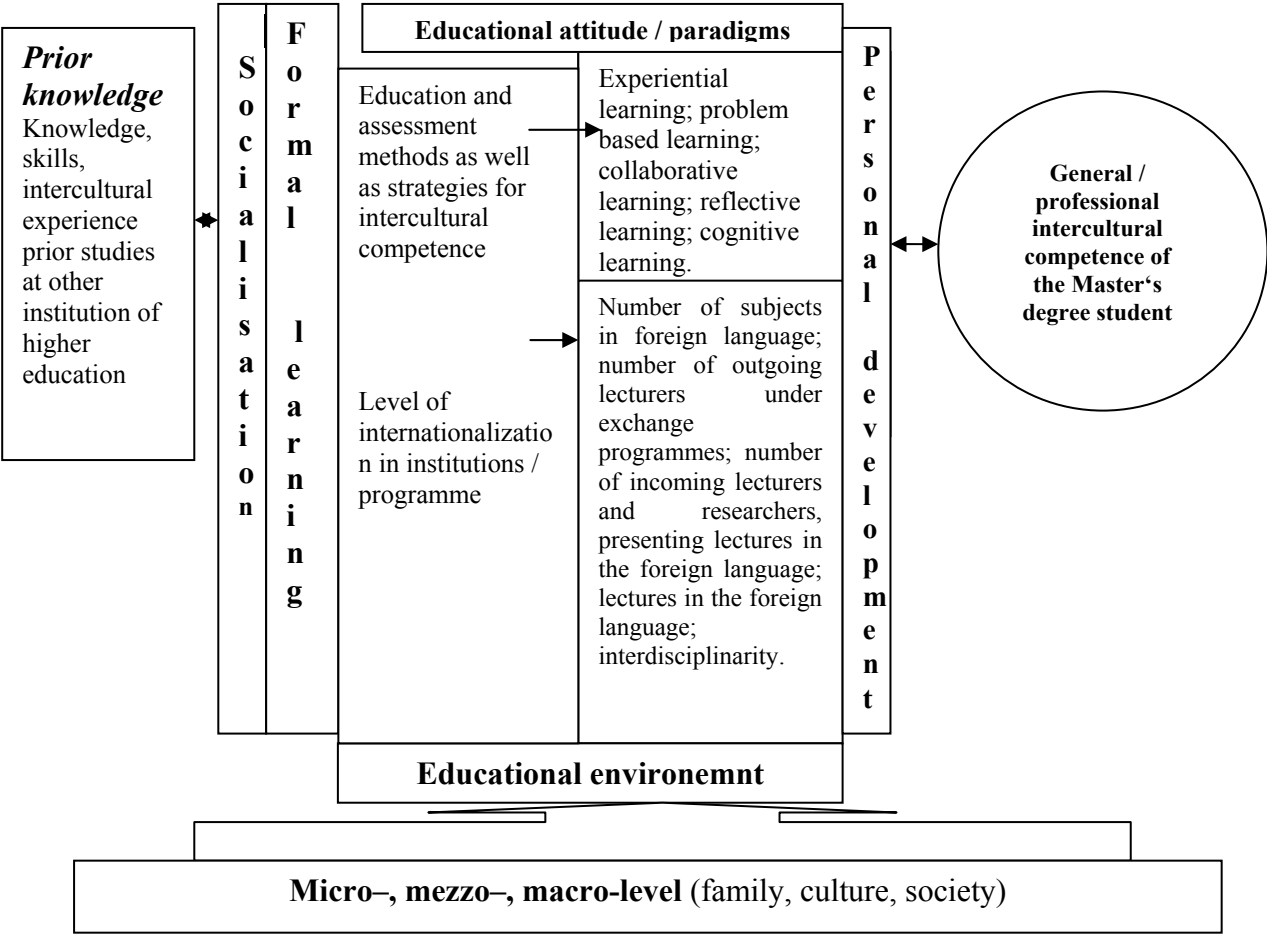


Figure 1. **Interactive model of the development of intercultural competence in the context of internationalization**

The development of MA students’ intercultural competence based on strategies of experiential learning, problem learning and another education does not offer particular generalized truth but shows the diversity of problems, attitudes, values that MA students face. That is why it is possible to state that intercultural competences are developed since students gain abilities to solve intercultural problems, improve the ability to make a decision, the level of their tolerance

increases. Learning, starting from a problem, enables a student to look for information, transfer and adapt formal theoretical knowledge in practical activities (Brockbank, McGill, 1998).

Role of Higher Education Institutions Determining the Relationship between Institutional Factors of Internationalization and Development of MA Students' Intercultural Competence

In this part of the article it is important to perceive the influence and significance of the institution(-s) in the context of the development of MA students' intercultural competence describing two institutional cases which determine the relationship between institutional factors of internationalization and the development of MA students' intercultural competence.

Lithuanian universities pay a special attention to the development of internationality, the basis of which is Bologna process which started in 1999, striving to create the area of European higher education and research. Therefore, the conception of the integration of internationalization as an international, intercultural, global dimension into the purposes, functions and delivery of higher education becomes a constituent part of the strategy of university activities.

Analyzing the data received during the research, it was noticed that institutional factors of internationalization were discussed in the theory influence the development of MA students' intercultural competence. As a result, 2 institutional factors / cases of internationalization which determine the development of MA students' intercultural competence were analyzed during the research (case of Šiauliai university – the implementation of the project ARIADNE in Šiauliai university internationalizing study programmes; case of Vytautas Magnus university - study programmes were advanced integrating strong practical and experiential factors of internationalization).

Case 1. Analyzing the results of the research it emerged that the development of MA students' intercultural competence depends on institutional factors of internationalization. The case of Vytautas Magnus university (Case 1) is peculiar in such a way that the participants of the research study the advanced study programme in which factors of internationalization allowing MA students to develop intercultural competence dealing with real problems, facing representatives of other cultures during studies are integrated. External (institutional) factors and study programmes themselves developing factors of internationalization and MA students' intercultural competence distinguished by the participants of the research will be discussed in the empirical part of the article.

The participants of the research, belonging to Vytautas Magnus university, present the same institutional factors which were previously discovered in the literature (language learning policy, institutional multilingualism, number of credits assigned to foreign languages, number of lecturers presenting lectures in the programme, lectures are delivered in the English language when Erasmus students join the group, etc.). Although it is important for higher education institutions to take all the opportunities provided by the European Union and its countries

cooperating with foreign partners and actively participating in the international programmes, such as SOCRATES – programme of higher education and its sub-programme – ERASMUS, the participants of the research, evaluating the opportunities provided by their institution to use finances of these programmes and not only to increase professional competence but also to extend skills of other languages and take over various cultures, estimate institutional conditions allowing them to participate in *international programmes*, to study or perform internship in foreign institutions and organizations:

“Of course the institution gives a lot if it can offer Erasmus or other programmes. Although, as far as I remember, very few students from our course went out under the programmes. Now I see a lot of changes, Erasmus days are organized. Much effort is put in this work and there are a lot of incoming people”. Naglė (24 years old).

The implementation of **foreign language policy** in the university is an institutional factor which determines students’ preparation not only for Master’s degree studies but also for studies in foreign institutions. *Linguistic preparation of students* is declared as one of the greatest values of the University in the strategic plan of Vytautas Magnus university (2007-2011), that is why the task to create an optimal system of foreign language learning combining students’ wishes and abilities as well as requirements of professional activities and international communication is set. The participants of the research positively evaluate the implementation of language learning policy in Vytautas Magnus university and present their experience acquired in Bachelor’s Degree studies of the university:

“There were very good conditions in the university, you pay 250 Litas and every day you have courses of the foreign language. I learnt both French and Spanish. Vytautas Magnus university has a politics that a student has to pass 4 levels of a foreign language.” Mantas (23 years old).

One more institutional factor creating good conditions to involve students in international cooperation is ***the announcement and spread of international events and information***:

“We organize an intercultural day in our institution where intercultural experience of other students is presented to our students. We share both positive and negative things. I administrate the web site, where people have to write their reflections when they come back. It is inevitable to share experience, as Department of international relations does everything in order to announce and spread this information. It is a part of work because other people will not know how to acquire this experience”. Berta (25 years old).

In spite of external (institutional) factors, *(internal) factors of study programme internationalization* have a big influence. The participants of the research distinguished 5 latter factors: 1) the usage of a foreign language during studies; 2) experience with incoming foreign lecturers; 3) the involvement of Erasmus students in the study process; 4) interdisciplinarity of the study programme; 5) participation in international scientific conferences.

In order to internationalize study programmes of higher education institutions, the attention is paid to the international aspect of the content of subjects which, first of all, is closely related to reading foreign scientific and methodical literature.

The following factors of internationalization in the programme are also of great importance (Knight, 1999, 2003, 2006), i.e. *incoming lecturers presenting lectures in the foreign language and the organization of studies involving Erasmus students*. According to the respondents, these factors influence the development of their intercultural competence, professional knowledge and foreign language:

“Studying for Bachelor’s and Master degrees I met foreign lecturers. The process of teaching was performed in the English language. We had to perform presentations in the foreign language. I have a foreign lecturer who presents the whole course in the English language this semester. The same person delivered lectures last semester. In the first semester there was one Lithuanian lecturer who presented lectures in the English language as there were Erasmus students in the group. At present more lectures are presented in English if there are Erasmus students. In Šiauliai university we had the lecture of *Intercultural education* which was presented in the English language since there were Erasmus students in the group. The subject wasn’t compulsory but we chose it.” Tomas (23 years old).

Moreover, according to the participants of the research, a very important factor of internal (study programme) internationalization is *interdisciplinarity of studies* which can be understood as internationalizing studies and pedagogical activities since it is directly related to interchange and mobility, intercultural competence, interdisciplinarity and other aspects of the development of the study quality:

“On the whole, in Master Degree studies students analyze not only the situation of Lithuania but also the situation of the European Union. For example, studying economics, we have to know the context of both Lithuania and foreign countries. At present we are writing a master thesis, comparison must be included in it. If you want to write a better thesis, comparison is necessary.” Perlina (24 years old).

Generalizing the analysis of the case of Vytautas Magnus university, it is possible to state that the university is strong in such a way that it pays much attention not only to the implementation of external (institutional) factors but also to the intensification of internal (internationalization of the study programme) factors.

Meanwhile, the case of Šiauliai university differs from the case of Vytautas Magnus university in such a way that intensifying the internationalization of study programmes through project activities not the creation of the environment of real problematic intercultural situations through practice and experiential learning (integrating foreign lecturers, Erasmus students into the study process, etc.) is chosen but the creation of simulation tasks devoted to independent and team work as well as the presentation and evaluation of problem-based, project-based tasks.

Case 2. Another institutional factor of good experience developing MA students' intercultural competence can be project ARIADNE which was implemented in Šiauliai university. It was devoted to develop competences of international scientific cooperation of MA students studying at Šiauliai university and Klaipėda university. In order to develop these competences in the project ARIADNE, several study modules (which students could choose) were prepared and methods of traditional and new education and evaluation were joined: 1) distance learning; 2) integrated learning of foreign language and subject; 3) work in the classroom providing for a direct contact of lecturers and students; 4) reflective practices of learning (diaries, reflective magazines); 5) the creation of competence folder (portfolio); 6) the analysis method of critical cases and scenarios; 7) methods of new non-traditional evaluation (self-evaluation, competence folder). Since selecting the participants of the research, their experience and participation in this project were taken into account, those MA students, who have had the distance module *International communication of science* characteristic of intensive development of foreign intercultural competence in the distance environment were selected. Analyzing the theoretical literature and the results of the research, MA students, having completed the module *International communication of science* in the distance environment, notice that distance learning is a flexible learning method helping them to acquire knowledge and abilities which are necessary in order to successfully study at the university as well as not to lose touch with work and the geographical area. Moreover, it ensures independent learning and planning of students' time (Bromme, Hesse, & Spada, 2005):

“Obviously, the presentation of the module and accounting for it was a new thing. Distance learning was new experience. At first, it was strange but when you get accustomed, it becomes interesting, attractive. You perform tasks when it is convenient for you, you are at home, you independently organize your work, you do it how it is necessary for you. When it is a necessity, you perform a task and send it; when you need, you open and read texts, various material presented there.” Jolita (35 years old).

The research shows that information technologies create powerful tools which help to learn together, cooperating (Bryant, Khale, & Schafer, 2005; Schellens & Valcke, 2005). During the implementation of the project ARIADNE, the following principles were realized in the modules of distance learning:

Interactive and communicative approach. Presenting the sources for the independent work, the interaction between a student and a lecturer as well as the interaction among students who perform tasks together was ensured. Furthermore, the feedback which allowed to evaluate the efficiency of presented topics and tasks, their practical availability was also ensured. In order to realize this principle, the possibility to express your opinion about every topic was provided, i.e. “Forums” were used:

“I didn't participate in forums so actively. If the group expressed the opinion, I also did the same. But I didn't discuss a lot. Perhaps, because we are not students of full-time studies. We didn't participate actively because other students

were constantly in the forums but we didn't have time. It is a privilege for those who do not have a family, do not work, they are constantly in the internet, they can communicate, on the whole, they like forums. We are elder, we have work, a family, so we do not participate in forums and do not communicate so actively as others." Jolita (35 years old).

The development of metacognitive competences. Improving a metacognitive learning competence, the students who studied the module *International communication of science* filled in reflective diaries and magazines as well as the competence folder where they evaluated the level of their competences and presented learning strategies. The diaries were devoted to the evaluation of progress of every month and the identification of knowledge gap:

"The acquired knowledge is necessary, this experience is positive. When you find out something new, it becomes your knowing, a part of your speciality. If you need, you know where to find out something what you don't know. While you don't face these things in life, work, they are forgotten and they aren't used. When you need to use them, all the acquired information and experience is consolidated. When I completed the module *International communication of science* a greater curiosity to find out more information about other cultures appeared, I listened to my friends living abroad about their experience, cultural peculiarities." Jolita (35 years old).

Summarizing the analysis of cases of both universities (Vytautas Magnus university and Šiauliai university), it is possible to state that in order to create a positive relationship between institutional factors of internationalization and a successful development of MA students' intercultural competence, it is necessary to intensify the internationalization of study programmes not only through the presentation of lectures of the internationalized content and references to the scientific literature in a foreign language to students but also through the creation of simulation tasks devoted to independent and team work as well as the presentation and evaluation of problem-based, project-based tasks.

Conclusions

During the research, questions about the influence of internationalization processes carried out in the institution on the development of their intercultural competence encouraged informants to talk about the biographical events, reveal the importance of the experience acquired during the studies and distinguish external (institutional) and internal (study programme) factors of internationalization which develop MA students' intercultural competence. The reported experience how MA students gained and developed intercultural competence as well as life events which were forgotten and remembered at present acquire meaning which can provide new knowledge for the further development of intercultural competence and internationalization processes in institutions. The comparison of experience of several cases (MA students from Vytautas Magnus university and Šiauliai university) applied in the research allowed to understand academic and cultural differences, reveal what factors of internationalization in higher education

institutions influence the development of a separate person's intercultural competence.

Referring to the case of Vytautas Magnus university, much attention is paid not only to the implementation of external (institutional) factors: 1) participation in international programmes; 2) foreign language policy intensifying international dimension; 3) the announcement and distribution of information providing students with more possibilities to involve in international activities, but also to the intensification of factors of study programme internationalization (internal ones): 1) the usage of a foreign language during studies; 2) experience with incoming foreign lecturers; 3) the involvement of Erasmus students in the study process; 4) interdisciplinarity of the study programme; 5) participation in international scientific conferences contributing to the development of MA students' intercultural competences through the creation of learning conditions to solve various real intercultural problems. What concerns the case of Šiauliai university, the experience of project activities is of great importance intensifying the internationalization of study programmes not only through the presentation of lectures of the internationalized content and references to the scientific literature in a foreign language to MA students but also through the creation of simulation tasks devoted to independent and team work as well as the presentation and evaluation of problem-based, project-based tasks.

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