

(Self-) Development of Foreign Master's Degree Students' Intercultural Competence through Music Activity

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Abstract: The trends in international development of higher education are best reflected by international openness. The process of study internationalisation necessitates globally engaged and interculturally competent music teacher education. The article deals with the peculiarities of developing professional intercultural competence of foreign Master's degree students (future music educators) through musical project activities. The paper aims to highlight the character of pedagogical impact integrating innovative learning activities and to reflect on features of improving foreign students' intercultural competence. The sample of the research, which was carried out in 2014-2016, consisted of 24 foreign (Chinese) Master's degree students, who chose studies at Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences (Music Education). The research was done applying several methods: the analysis of scientific literature and documents, students' written reflections and qualitative content analysis. The results of the qualitative research revealed that application of educational strategies related to development of intercultural competence of Master's degree students became very important. The most important strategies of development of intercultural competence, based on musical activities were highlighted and verified by an educational (music performance) project. It was determined that (self-) development of intercultural competence was largely affected by the internal factors, such as musical abilities, value-based orientations, artistic experiences and experience of cultural activity. The research revealed the possibilities of integrating intercultural competence, one of significant objectives of personality development, into the curriculum of music teacher education.

Keywords: intercultural competence, future music educator, educational project, music activity, university education.

Introduction

Relevance of the research. The legal and political educational documents of the EU and Lithuania *Education and Training in Europe 2020* (Education and Training..., 2012), *Key Competences for Lifelong Learning* (Key Competences..., 2006), *The National Education Strategy for 2013 – 2022* (Valstybinė švietimo..., 2010) orient the process of education towards development of general competences. Intercultural competence, being an integral part of general competences, acquires different meaning and content in the professional context (Deardorff, 2015). The aforementioned competence is particularly significant to music educators evaluating current changes in global society and perception of culture and educational environment.

At present music educators have to be ready to communicate and collaborate in the multicultural society, to create intercultural relations as well as to conduct research on the existing educational environment, to critically evaluate and to creatively improve it from the perspective of cultural, artistic and educational needs. Musical art is considered to be a certain means of language and communication and the meaning of music is associated not only with the individual's personal experience but also with the cultural environment and context. Therefore, learning from other cultures and communication with different cultures are regarded as a very important factor in the formation of intercultural competence. As for the educational significance of intercultural competences of teachers, it is equally important to understand the opportunities of their development in contemporary higher education.

The main aspects of intercultural education embrace the necessity of learning about oneself as a cultural being, becoming aware of culture and its elements, culture-specific learning, development of adaptation to culture, and learning to learn (Wintergerst, McVeigh, 2011; Paige, Goode, 2009). The analysis of scholarly literature allowed to highlight the main levels of intercultural competence development: cognitive (knowledge and understanding of native and other cultures); emotional (attitudes, feelings, emotions experienced towards native and alien culture) and behavioural (application of knowledge, abilities, attitudes, cultural experience in various cultural contexts). In the field of educational science, attempts have been made to disclose the methodology of intercultural competence (self-)development

has been designed different tools for intercultural competence measurement and assessment have been created (Savvides, 2014; Williams, 2009).

Expression of intercultural competence within the context of teacher training has been analysed in the works by foreign and Lithuanian authors: purposeful intercultural education of college teachers has been investigated (Niculescu, Percec 2015; Navickienė, 2014), teachers' attitude towards intercultural competence expression has been analysed (Odag, Wallin, 2015; Norvilienė, 2014), preconditions for its (self-) development at university have been established (Mazlaveckienė, 2015; Krajewski, 2011), the possibilities of intercultural competence development using methods of experiential learning in a different cultural context (Gerulaitienė, 2013) have been explored. Such learning is the closest to real intercultural slash situations and problems, therefore these conditions are likely to result in development of skills, application of knowledge, and emotional reactions in the real context. The development of intercultural competence has been analysed in the context of internationalization of studies (Jon, 2013; Virgailaitė-Mečkauskaitė, 2011) and socio-educational factors determining teachers' intercultural communicative competence have been compared in the European context (Chodzkienė, 2012).

According to researchers, the constructivist paradigm and the applied strategies of experiential learning, problem-based learning, collaborative learning, reflexive learning and cognitive learning should be prioritised in the development of intercultural competence (Cushner, Mahon, 2009). However, scientific research revealed that in most frequent cases the development of intercultural competence is organised inconsistently, the choice of study subjects with foreign languages of instruction is poor, the number of lecturers able to deliver courses in foreign languages is small and methods of teaching and learning are rigid. One of the methods which guides the teaching approaches to the interactive way of learning is the *project method* (Mohedo, Bújez, 2014). According to B. Bitinas (2006, 171), teacher's professional activity embraces development of educational project and its practical implementation.

Despite the abundance of studies on intercultural competence, Lithuania lacks research in the influence of musical activities on development of professional intercultural competence of future music educators. Moreover, the specifics and development of intercultural competence of foreign Master degree students have not been broadly researched (Zhang, 2016). Similarly, there is not enough in-depth research on the opportunities of development of intercultural competences at universities through the project method. Though the need to develop intercultural competence in higher education is justified and comprehensively analysed, so far the questions of what kind of intercultural competence is necessary for the activities of a music educator and what content, structure, conceptions of its building should be appropriate for it, have not been clarified. The description of intercultural competence of music educators lacks not only the conceptual theoretical framework but also more widely applied examples of research methodology and practice.

The problem of the research is formulated as the following research questions:

- in what way and what impact the musical activity can exert on intercultural competence of future music educators (foreign Master's degree students) and to what extent this impact can be optimised?
- what are the possibilities of its (self-)development at university?
- what are the most important strategies (directions) connected with future music educator intercultural competence by means of musical activity?

The object of the research: peculiarities of developing intercultural competence of foreign Master's degree students in music activity.

The aim of the research: to reveal possibilities of (self-) development of intercultural competence of foreign Master's degree students – future music educators – applying the project method.

Research objectives:

1. To reveal the character of educational innovations promoted in musical projects, highlighting the perspective of development of intercultural competence.
2. To reveal foreign students' personal experience of intercultural competence and possibilities for the development at university.

3. To highlight the tendencies of future music educators' professional intercultural competence expression in educational project.

Research methods: analysis of scientific literature and documents, educational project, written student reflections, qualitative content analysis.

Methodology

Educational project in professional intercultural competence development. The educational project was treated as an educational process based on a new (or relatively new, but relevant) idea, initiated by the researcher and implemented with common efforts of the researcher and process participants (Bitinas, 2006, 172). An educational project, being one of the key methods of academic cognition and education, is the one which makes it possible to test in practice, evaluate and ground new educational ideas.

Taking into consideration the fact that the origins of intercultural competence lie in the musical culture of a future music educator, which also embraces artistic activities, activation of culturally meaningful musical and concert activities (development of musical educational projects and their presentation for the communities of the university, city or country) as well as efforts to increase mastery (professional excellence) in music interpretation are likely to influence intercultural competence of foreign Master's degree students learning in Lithuania.

A music educator assumes both roles of own culture nurturer and conveyer of foreign culture. Evaluation of own musical culture in the context of another musical culture and communication with representatives of various cultures is of significance as well. This supplements personal experience of foreign students, their cultural judgement, develops their intercultural competence. Such an idea allowed to determine the direction of the educational (music performance) project and to organise the project of 18 months (Semester 1 to 3). The author of the article was a coordinator of the project. The educational (music performance) project aimed to foresee, to more precisely determine and to practically assess some strategies for development of intercultural competence of prospective music educators.

The following **strategies** for optimisation of influence of musical activity were chosen: a) *accumulation of music knowledge of own and other musical cultures*; b) *development of abilities to interpret and evaluate music within a different cultural context*; c) *stimulation of more meaningful cultural experiences*; d) *encouragement of students to reflect and self-assess their own activities* (Figure 1).

The educational project content was based on music performance project "*Intercultural Dialogue. Different Cultures – One World*", which established favourable conditions for linking studies in music and culture, for comparison different musical cultures from historical, social and cultural perspectives, for improvement of musical skills and abilities as well as induced students' self-involvement in the musical project activities. The project group students have prepared individual music performance projects (Lasauskienė, 2012). They were provided with a general theme only (music of Lithuanian composers M. K. Čiurlionis, B. Dvarionas, S. Vainiūnas) and each student could individualise it with regard to his/her opportunities and needs of artistic self-expression. The foreign students selected, performed and publicly presented their individual projects (in a project final concert). These enabled students to expand their knowledge of Lithuanian musical culture, to realise their own musical creative powers, to expand possibilities of cultured communication and collaboration as well as to apply their musical abilities and skills.

The intercultural competence was also developed in other study modules of Master's degree studies in Music Education ("Variety of World Musical Cultures", "Lithuanian Ethnic Music in the Context of World Cultures") but particular attention to it was devoted to it in the study module of Musical Expression (Piano, Singing). During rehearsals, educational and cultural trips attempts were made to create conditions for acquisition of experience related to (self-) development of intercultural competence in the process of both formal and non-formal education. Teacher-student cooperation was enhanced by partner-like performance at the final project presentation concert. The music performance project of the students was publicly presented to the academic community of Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences and in other concert halls of the country.

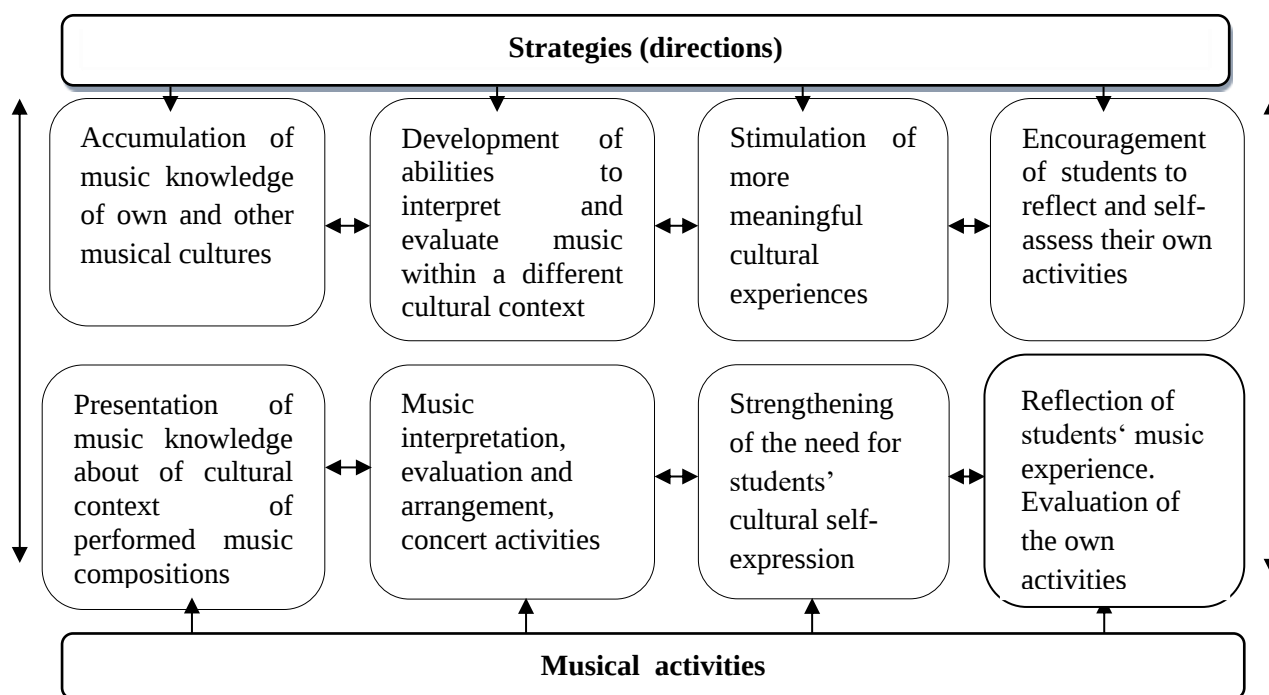


Figure 1. The strategies (directions) for optimisation of influence of musical activity on intercultural competence of future music educators.

Participants. The sample of the research consisted of 24 foreign (Chinese) Master's degree students (all future music educators), who chose studies at Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences (Music Education). Educational project was implemented from September 2014 to December 2015. The duration of the educational project was three semesters (Semester 1 to 3).

Methods. Data collection. Semi-structured reflection in writing (at end of the semester) was applied in order to analyse the personal experience of foreign students, to reveal possibilities and peculiarities of educating intercultural competence by applying the project method as well as to define and assess innovative learning activities and educational effect during the project integrated to the study programme of Music Education (Bolton, 2010). The students wrote reflections as responses to the provided open questions: "What did I experience implementing the goals of the project? What personal meaning does intercultural competence have to me? What qualities of intercultural competence did I acquire, develop or further improve while preparing the musical project? The research participants were free to choose the number of such situations to describe and to provide specific examples.

Data analysis. The content of the written reflections was analysed on the basis of qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2014). The analysis was aimed at distinguishing meaning units of categories and sub-categories. They are summarized in the table below.

Results and discussion

Upon the analysis of the foreign students' reflections on intercultural competences developed during the project, three qualitative categories – accumulation of students' music experience, development of students' participation in cultural activity and personality (self-) development – were determined (Table 1).

In the category "Accumulation of students' music experience" three sub-categories were singled out: *presentation of music knowledge*, *development of the ability to interpret and evaluate music* and *stimulation of more meaningful artistic experiences*. According to the opinion of foreign Master's degree students learning in Lithuania, a music educator, who seeks to improve and successfully adapt in contemporary multicultural society, has "to protect and nurture national culture", "to accumulate knowledge of other countries", "to learn cultural, academic and social life of other countries", "to respect own national identity and that of other countries", "to be interested in everything", "not to retreat into oneself", "to be inquiring". The participants in the research envisage a close link between the art of music performing and culture, therefore, the intercultural competence of a music educator is understood as a derivative of cultural competence (Berardo, Deardorff, 2012): "interpreting the music

by Lithuanian composers, I much better understand different cultural contexts". According to the foreign students, "intrinsic motivation", "a wish to improve" and "to continuously improve own intercultural competence" are of utmost importance.

Table 1

Results of analysis of the foreign students' written reflections

Category		
Accumulation of students' music experience	Development of students' participation in cultural activity	Personality (self-) development
Sub-category		
Presentation of music knowledge	Self-involvement in cultural activities	Stimulation of artistic self-expression
Development of the ability to interpret and evaluate music	Experience of cultural activity	Evaluation and improvement of own personal qualities
Stimulation of more meaningful artistic experiences	Experience of communicating with representatives of other cultures	Reflection and evaluation of own activities

The following sub-categories were singled out in the category "**Development of students' participation in cultural activity**": *self-involvement in cultural activities*, *experience of cultural activity* and *experience of communicating with representatives of other cultures*. It should be noted that participation in musical cultural activities is important to representatives of all occupations in music. However, it plays a specific role in the spread of intercultural competence of a music educator (Wang, 2016). Involvement in socio-cultural activities is linked with activities that focus on personal and professional needs: to improve musical abilities, to envisage unsuspected insights in musical activities, to share experience with others, to better understand oneself and environment, to envisage the links between cultures of native country and foreign ones, to perform significant educational roles. Master's degree students from abroad notice that "*interpretation of music compositions and participation in musical cultural activity (projects, events, concerts) as well as in educational trips in Lithuania, communication with students and teachers from other countries established an opportunity to learn Lithuania and its culture as if "from inside"*". Targeted establishment of educational conditions for real contact of foreign students with another culture (for example, encouragement of independent involvement of students into cultural activity), application of various strategies for learning the country seeking to integrate them into the process of cultural awareness of the country are likely to have an impact on intercultural competence of prospective music educators (foreign Master degree students).

The collected data reveal that application of the project method in the process of intercultural competence development is evaluated favourably: "*I really liked preparation of the thematic educational project "Intercultural Dialogue. Different Cultures – One World" and its preparation for community of university and city*"; "*project assignments (to independently choose and perform compositions by Lithuanian composers) were interesting and encouraged intercultural education in the real sense of this word*". It can be assumed that active concert activities encouraged students to get acquainted with musical culture of another country as if "from inside", i.e. through the experience of musical activity. The participants in the research ask for "*more musical cultural events, projects, educational trips*".

The person's affective evaluative attitudes should be considered the core component of intercultural competence as they determine transformations in the person's self-awareness and character of personal involvement and participation in the education process (Chodzkienė, 2012). The category "**Personality (self-) development**" contains three sub-categories: *stimulation of artistic self-expression*, *evaluation and improvement of own personal qualities* and *reflection and evaluation of own activities*. The educational policy organised in a targeted way allows to identify the highlighted influence of a positive emotional evaluative component of foreign students, which promotes students' openness to another culture: "*Having arrived here we kept whooping out of surprise: what blue sky and how vast it is here, what marvellous clouds, how much snow is here in winter, what abundance of forests and how few*

people!'. It can be assumed that learning another country occurs through the values internalised in foreign students' native culture, which enable them to link and compare values, attitudes and behaviour patterns of own culture with those of alien one as well as to discover and acknowledge differences (Wintergerst, McVeigh, 2011). The students evaluate their own personal qualities as requiring improvement: <...> *we do our best to complete assignments on time and diligently but we still lack skills of independence, creativity, openness to innovations, self-assessment, reflection on own activity and behaviour*'. The Master's programme students from abroad mentioned that *"the biggest problem is inborn modesty and reticence. The insufficient command of the foreign language was an obstacle"*.

The results of qualitative content analysis highlighted the idea that preparation and presentation of musical projects bring in the cooperation between students and teachers: *"extremely frank, close, sincere and collegial collaboration with teachers, artists and musicians"*; *"teachers create positive atmosphere, motivate and encourage an interest in the idea of the project"*. Partner-like cooperation (based on dialogue, frankness, collaboration) with the teachers allowed the students' initiatives and personal self-expression to unfold.

Generalising it can be noticed that students of higher education acknowledge the educational importance of intercultural competence; therefore, it is advised to improve the content of university subject module introducing means of (self-) development of intercultural competence.

Conclusions

- The most important strategies (directions) connected with future music educator intercultural competence by means of musical activity are related to the following: a) accumulation of music knowledge of own and other musical cultures; b) development of abilities to interpret and evaluate music within a different cultural context; c) stimulation of more meaningful cultural experiences; d) encouragement of students to reflect and self-assess their own activities. Application of strategies related to the development of intercultural competence during the educational project helped fix various features connected with the development of the intercultural competence discussed above.
- Following the research results, it can be stated that participation of foreign students in the educational (music performance) project "Development of Intercultural Competency Through Music Activities" has given a new impetus to new spheres of professional intercultural competence and has had influence on development of a systemic integral attitude towards intercultural competence and opportunities for its development in contemporary higher education.
- The prerequisites for development of intercultural competence in the educational project were established combining activating teaching and learning methods and emphasising the significance of student reflection and self-assessment. The implemented educational (music performance) project can encourage university teachers to perceive the process of music teaching and learning not only as an activity of developing musical skills, but also envisage more extensive possibilities of the development of students' intercultural values.

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