

An Innovative Pedagogical Design of Intercultural Competence Development in Music Teacher Education

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Abstract: This is the second part of the longitudinal inquiry, which serves as basis revealing peculiarities of developing intercultural competence of prospective music teachers at university. The article discusses the results of the action research. The action research aimed to define and (practically) verify the strategies as well as methods of the (self-) development of intercultural competence. The aforementioned competence is particularly significant to prospective music teachers considering current changes in global society and perception of culture and educational environment. The long-term action research was conducted in the period of 2014-2017 and the sample of the research included 60 foreign Master's degree students, who chose studies at Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences (Music Education). The focus group discussion with participants in the process of education, music teacher educators, was used to analyse the research results. It showed that a highly significant role in development of intercultural competence is assigned to a higher education institution and internationalisation of a study programme. A targeted intercultural education is becoming a significant factor of intercultural competence improvement. The study confirmed that the strategies of the (self-) development of intercultural competence of prospective music teachers are efficient and successfully applicable in organising the (self-) development of intercultural competence of foreign students. The revealed educational preconditions make the basis for the development of intercultural competence of prospective music teachers. This study can be of interest to other researchers to further explore the possibilities of intercultural competence development at university.

Keywords: intercultural competence, pedagogical design, music teacher, university education.

Introduction

The concept of interculturalism stresses dynamic aspects of communication and actions of cultures; it not only states the situation but also suggests methods and strategy for the future action (Lustig, Koester, 2017). The developed intercultural competence would enable the person, first of all, to grasp the core of his/her national identity, become open and curious about other cultures, able to recognize the manifestations of behaviour based on the limits of other cultures, discover cultural commonalities and differences, and, second, shift the attitudes from ethnocentric points of view towards the ability to see the reality from the others' perspectives (Deardorff, 2015). However, it is rather complicated to transfer the criteria describing the intercultural competence from the theoretical level to practice (Danescu, 2015; Nolan, Hunter, 2012).

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 (Catalano, 2014; Soboleva, Obdalova, 2014). According to the researchers, the more varied conditions for students' integration into another culture are established, the better their intercultural competence is developed. However, in the context of real interactions positive learning outcomes alone are not ensured without applying special educational methods and techniques (Navaitiene, Racelyte, Rimkeviciene, 2015; Bednarz, Leoni, 2010).

K. Cushner (2009, 158), who investigated the efficiency of the period of prospective teachers' studies abroad, states that one of the ways to help teachers understand what challenges they are going to face while teaching the young generation in the global age, is to implement carefully structured study programmes that provide learners with intercultural experience. Students of such study programmes are forced to integrate into another culture and to apply the obtained knowledge in practice. Such method of teaching/learning consolidates intercultural and international awareness of prospective teachers and develops their intercultural competence (Chodzkiene, Barkauskaite, 2015).

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 (Rawlings, 2016; Pasquale, 2015). Activating educational methods (critical incidents, simulation games, scenarios, teamwork, reflective diaries) establish possibilities for better engagement of students into the process of education and favourable educational conditions for creating an intercultural dialogue in the real multicultural society. According to

E. Zylkiewicz-Plonska and E. Aciene (2014), the 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).

It is worth mentioning that the study subject of music is very distinctive and distinguished by specific methods of artistic-musical world cognition. They predetermine peculiarities of (self-) development of intercultural competence. 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. According to P. Marcheva (2016), it is necessary that pedagogic skills of prospective music teachers should be specified so that they could receive adequate preparation in the course of their university education. Sh. VanAlstine (2016) formulated the strategies to challenge prospective teachers' development, and to provide them with some concrete "steps" towards internationalizing the music lessons they were creating and teaching. Having overviewed the strategies for development of intercultural competence, it would be important to identify, which specific pedagogical strategies and methods are most appropriate developing and evaluating intercultural competence of foreign students, prospective music teachers (Lazaro, Martínez, 2017; Arostegui, Ibarretxe, 2016; Palmic, 2013; Koskarov, 2012; Southcott, Joseph, 2010; Addo, 2009).

The following *research questions* determine the general problems analysed in the research: how music has contributed to the development of intercultural competences in music teacher education? What factors and conditions would increase possibilities of (self-) development of intercultural competence of foreign students, prospective music teachers? What are the most effective and efficient pedagogical strategies, educational forms and methods within the process of developing intercultural competence of foreign students at university?

The aim of the study is to identify and verify the most important pedagogical strategies for the (self-) development of the intercultural competence of foreign students, prospective music teachers at university.

Methodology

Action research in intercultural competence development

During the action research attempts were made to reveal the influence of targeted intercultural education on improvement of their intercultural competence and to prepare methodological (technological) framework for educational activities.

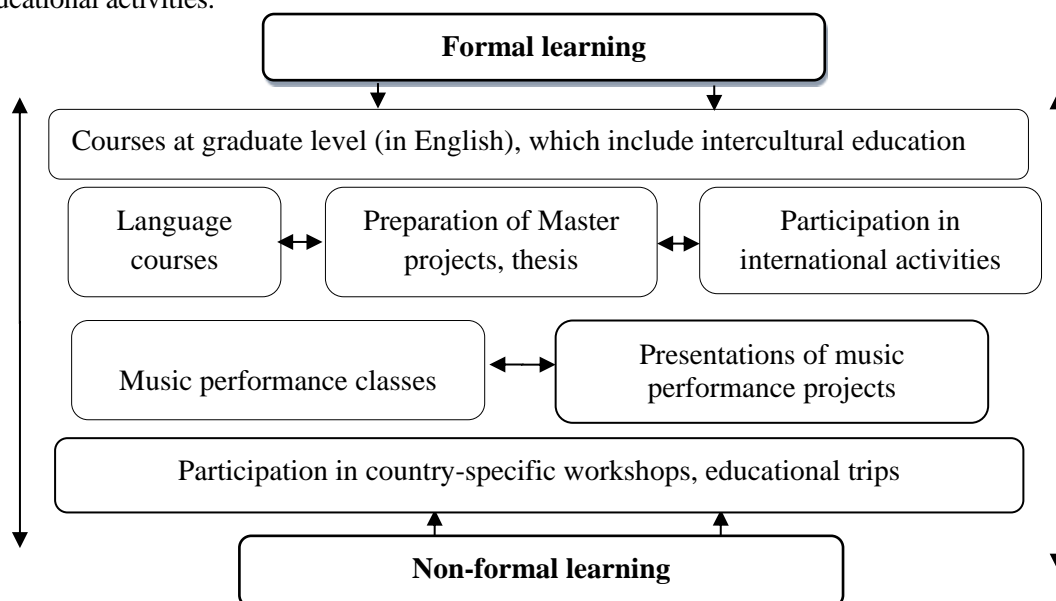


Figure 1. The structure of the intercultural education program (compiled by the author).

The action research enabled the author to constantly observe acquisition of intercultural competences "from inside", together with other teacher educators to analyse and reflect possibilities of using various strategies

and methods of intercultural education and evaluation, to formulate themes and to design assessment tasks as well as to evaluate an educational effect received not only during the action research but in other non-formal education activities. Being one of the music teacher educators in the study programme of Music Education, the author of this article initiated and implemented short-term (3-4 months or one university term) music performance projects (Lasauskiene, 2017).

A complex *Intercultural education program* was designed to provide its participants (foreign students) with an opportunity to combine the theoretical part of the program with the practical one. The *Intercultural education program* structure is visualized in the figure 1 and is explained in some detail below (Figure 1).

Determining the content of the action research, the following was taken into consideration:

- *all Master-level modules* (in English) that include intercultural education (“Variety of World Musical Cultures”; “Cultural and Social Discourses of Music Education”; “Lithuanian Ethnic Music in the Context of World Cultures” and others), which created favourable conditions for acquiring knowledge of Lithuanian history and culture, intercultural communication principles, peculiarities of education systems and educational methods;
- *intensive language courses* (English and Lithuanian), where the students acquired basic knowledge and skills of the language. Seeking to attain higher academic results and to join the new culture, linguistic competence becomes essential. Furthermore, the foreign students are encouraged to form language-tandems with Lithuanian and other international students;
- *preparation of Master projects and thesis*, which created conditions for acquisition of researcher competences. Teachers’ research competence is one of the main aspects of concern in teacher education on Master’s level. Music teacher education is interdisciplinary studies which combine two areas (music and education), therefore research becomes a complex process requiring competence to use artistic expression forms and methods of social sciences research (Baneviciute, Kudinoviene, 2017);
- *participation in international projects of Erasmus+ and Nordplus Higher Education* (“Teacher Education” and “Music Education”) and international scientific conferences, which established conditions for gaining knowledge of various programs of international scientific cooperation, research culture in Lithuania and abroad, what enabled foreign students to join a team of more experienced researchers, to communicate and collaborate with university teachers and students from other countries;
- *the programme of the study module of “Music Expression”* (Piano, Singing, Choral conducting) (in English), which enabled students to expand their knowledge of Lithuanian and world musical cultures, theories and practices of music interpretation, traditions of teaching/learning methods, to realise own creative powers as well as to apply musical abilities and skills;
- *presentations of music performance projects* “World music” and “Intercultural Dialogue. Different Cultures – One World”, which established favourable conditions for linking studies in music and culture, for comparison different musical cultures from intercultural perspectives, for improvement of musical (subject-specific) competences as well as induced students’ self-involvement in musical project activities (Lasauskiene, 2017);
- *participation in country-specific workshops, educational trips* on the history of Lithuania, culture, visiting the main objects in Lithuania included into the cultural heritage, organising and participating in the national evenings, observation festivities, sightseeing trips that allow to analyse, understand and interpret different cultural context, to compare the host country with the native one, to discover similarities and differences. Students have a chance to fully engage in the life at university, and to join arts or other activities.

The strengths of the intercultural education program are: a) it consists of all Master-level modules, which comprise the curriculum of the Master degree programme in Music Education; b) it provides continuous and systematic accompanying measures over a long period of time (2-year Master studies abroad); c) it uses an innovative, learner-centred pedagogical design that combines individual and cooperative learning and applies – among others – experiential and reflective learning as well as the musical project activities and presentations of music performance projects (Lasauskiene, 2017; Dehmel, Li, Sloane, 2011). The program’s value lies in its ability to provide teacher educators with innovative activities they can use in their own teacher education courses (Catalano, 2014).

Participants. The sample of the research embraced of 60 foreign (Chinese) Master's degree students, who had chosen studies at Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences (Music Education) (Table 1). The duration of foreign students' academic experience differs: from two semesters (students enrolled in 2016/2017 academic year) to four semesters (students studied or have been studying in the academic years of 2014-2016 or 2015-2017).

Table 1

Participants (n)

Foreign student group	Number of students	Presentations of projects	International activities
Group 1 2014/2016	24	10	3
Group 2 2015/2017	14	6	-
Group 3 2016/2017	22	12	1
Total	60	28	4

Table 1 shows that only half of the foreign students (n=28) prepared and implemented music performance projects because not all the university teachers-initiated project activities and presentations of music performance projects. Only several foreign students participated in activities of international projects and conferences (due to insufficient foreign language skills and limited financial capacities of the university).

The sample of experts consisted of 13 music educators teaching in the study programme of Music Education implemented in Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences. There were 9 women and 4 men, who had a range of teaching experience from 10 to 28 years.

Data collection and data analysis. One qualitative case research using focus group discussion with participants in the process of education and music teacher educators was employed to analyse the efficiency of strategies, methods and forms of development of foreign students' intercultural competence as well as to assess the results (Thomas, 2014).

The focus group discussion was used as a method, which may embrace a bigger number of informants' responses and reflect as broad as possible range of attitudes to advantages and disadvantages of educating intercultural competence in a higher education institution. The focus group was applied as an independent research method seeking to reveal how a teacher understands and assumes the essence of the problem, its perspectives, how differences in attitudes are handled and agreement is reached. The focus group was formed planning and conducting the action research, projects (discussion of results) in the beginning and the end of each semester. The discussion lasted 1-1.5 hours. The received data were processed applying the method of descriptive content analysis (Silverman, 2013).

Individual reflective diary (Bednarz, Leoni, 2010) was chosen as intercultural competences assessment method in order to identify the students' intercultural competence expression tendencies through their reflections. Completing a portfolio of intercultural competence was one of the important tasks learning the study modules (at the beginning and the end of every course).

Results and Discussion

Analysis of focus group discussions

Generalising the results of the action research it can be stated that through different activities various situations are modelled, where the main focus is laid on the development of intercultural competence and which promote expression of foreign students' intercultural competence. The activities pre-planned by the university teachers supplemented each other and were interwoven. The most successful activities were observed in the situations, where the educators had foreseen a clear goal, specific and measurable objectives, had thought over educational methods and activity observation (evaluation, self-evaluation, reflection).

Analysing the process of the action research, the discussions with the teacher educators revealed the opinion that targeted development of intercultural competence can be implemented in the programme of any study module (not only in music education) as well as during other activities of formal and non-formal education. During theoretical lectures, seminars and practicums of various study modules, according to the educators, the abilities "to analyse and adequately understand different cultural

contexts”, “to discover similarities and differences in cultures“, “to interpret and compare cultural phenomena“, “to flexibly react to new situations that occur due to cultural diversity“, as well as “to apply new knowledge in real situation” are developed.

During the action research reflections, self-evaluation and evaluation of students’ intercultural competence were foreseen. Some educators followed the agreement, whereas the others did it only partially, i.e. they organised educational activities but did not assign a big significance to self-evaluation and evaluation of intercultural competence. The discussions with university lecturers revealed spontaneous and intuitive application of individual student reflections and other methods encouraging reflection without dedicating specific time for this activity in the study process. Group reflection, as a means that promotes reflective teaching/learning and serves as foundation for experiential learning embracing various forms of dialogue (debate, discussion), was rarely used during the lectures, seminars and practicums.

The university teachers acknowledged that there is not enough time for reflections and individual communication with each student. Therefore, collaboration and experiential learning are not very common in music teacher educators’ practice: *“The most vivid positive experiences are related to preparation of musical educational projects. This is a good opportunity for students to learn a lot independently. Usually students eagerly engage in musical activities. The methods of “open lesson” and “public concert” were particularly useful in studies of music-related study subjects: the students listen to music compositions interpreted by study colleagues and express their opinion or write a review, present recommendations what and how should be improved. However, international students are not active during lectures and are unwilling to discuss”*.

Following the research data, it can be stated that the university teachers gave the best evaluation of the international students’ knowledge of intercultural competence related to types of cultures and intercultural differences, peculiarities of communication style, specific features of education system and their abilities to compare and interpret cultures. Presenting all the topics in the courses, seminars and music classes, tasks for comparative analysis of Lithuanian and other cultures as well as cultural communities were given to the students asking them to discover information of those issues independently. Performing music, the students were encouraged to get acquainted with information that reveals the country’s cultural and historical context. The history of art plays an irreplaceable role there. The music teacher educators’ statements prove the efficiency of such strategy: *“The international students were not aware of the Lithuanian culture at all. Learning to interpret compositions of Lithuanian composers, the students were surprised and fascinated by wonderful, specific, emotional, spiritual and majestic music created by Lithuanian composers. I think that it was through music and its performance that students got engaged into socio-cultural acquaintance with Lithuania”*.

During the action research the improvement in foreign students’ attitudes, another important element of intercultural competence, was observed. The educators noticed that *“the international students’ critical self-evaluation and evaluation of own competences, openness to innovations (new learning methods, techniques and study subjects”*. Project activities and presentations of projects international students were provided with an opportunity to involve in common activities with other students, whose cultural background is different from theirs. Such intercultural dialogue not only communicating but also acting jointly serves as best foundation for building attitudes of respect and openness and a source of understanding specific cultural information and socio-linguistic awareness.

While conducting the action research, the foreign students had direct contacts with representatives of other cultures (university teachers, professional artists, students from other countries, researchers). Thus, the action research program created opportunities for direct implementation of experiential intercultural learning. The music teacher educators think that *“international students are satisfied professionally and personally after their experience in the Nordplus and Erasmus intensive courses and international scientific conferences”*. However, they also acknowledge the necessity to have more activities and events of this kind: *“It was the first experience of intensive courses like that. Chinese students met a lot of interesting music pedagogy professors from different countries with a different outlook on music education and approach into music as universal language”*. The responses of the teacher educators disclose that not only institutional experience but also any other educational environments outside the university acquire utmost significance developing intercultural competence. Hence, intercultural competence has to be analysed and evaluated not only from the perspective of specific formal teaching/learning.

The conversations with music teacher educators show that a targeted choice of methods that promote students' activity (project assignments, learning through cooperation), foreign students successfully developed their values of "curiosity and desire to discover", "openness" and "responsibility". The foreign students faced certain challenges "reflecting and analysing own activities and those of others, solving related problem-based issues". The educators noticed that the students (Chinese) are "modest", "curious", "diligent", "sincere", sometimes "sentimental" and "not always punctual". Though Chinese students evaluate their foreign language skills rather low, seriously learning students significantly improved their English language skills at the end of their studies: "All the classes are held in English and this is not easy for Chinese students. It is good that they were provided with opportunities to additionally improve English language skills as well as to study Lithuanian".

Generalising it can be stated that the analysed case of development of intercultural competence of prospective music teachers (international Master programme students) is one of several cases in the context of preparing Masters in Education, which facilitates understanding the variety of intercultural competence and possibilities for its development at university. Nurturing intercultural competence of students, prospective music teachers, it is important to envisage broader perspectives for personality education, development of personal and professional values and attitudes.

Conclusions

- Development of intercultural competence in higher education should embrace nurturance of general, professional and subject-specific competences combining forms of formal, non-formal and informal forms in the process of education. An important role in intercultural competence is assigned to a higher education institution and internationalisation of a study programme not only during lectures, which include intercultural education, but also through presentation and evaluation of independent project activities and presentations of projects. Following the research results, it can be stated that targeted intercultural education of foreign students is becoming a significant factor of intercultural competence development.
- The revealed educational preconditions make the basis for the development of intercultural competence of foreign students, pre-service music teachers and further scientific investigation. The implemented action research can encourage university teachers not only to perceive the process of music teaching and learning as an activity of developing musical skills, but also to envisage more extensive possibilities of the development of prospective teachers' intercultural values.

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