

THE IMPORTANCE TO CAREERS OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION: A STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The current tendencies in global society are clear: the internationalisation of studies in HEIs, the expansion of the labour market, foreign employees with a different cultural background in almost all organisations, etc. A successful professional life depends on the readiness of people to be *open* to global changes and innovation. Intercultural communication may lead to *openness* and a better preparation for a future career. This form of communication strengthens a positive attitude towards new trends in the labour market, global business, immigrants and foreigners. In addition, intercultural communication can be used to promote the local culture to others, and to become familiar with remote cultures. This article reveals the importance of intercultural communication for careers, and presents students' perspectives. According to the results of the survey, intercultural communication is beneficial for personal development: it strengthens qualities such as self-esteem and confidence, and can form new abilities such as critical thinking, problem solving and teamwork. This type of communication provides students with more opportunities to study abroad, and ensures a competitive advantage in business. As students noted, intercultural communication should be practised constantly, and its beneficial aspects have a positive impact on the broader world-view, cultural awareness and career prospects.

KEY WORDS: *communication, intercultural communication, competence, career.*

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Introduction

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

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

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and professional activities depends on people's readiness to be *open* to global change and innovation. The changing professional world, and global demographic and market trends, encourage individuals to develop new competencies. Competence in intercultural communication should be acquired, because nowadays people need to work closely with other people whose cultural background is different to their own.

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

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

The aim is to ascertain if intercultural communication is important for careers, and how intercultural communication can be practised by students.

To achieve this aim, the following tasks were formulated:

- Define the concept of intercultural communication.
- View positive aspects of intercultural communication.
- Present the results of a survey revealing students' views on the benefits of intercultural communication.

Methods: theoretical analysis, survey, synthesis, generalisation.

1. Intercultural communication *opens* global society

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

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

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

2. Intercultural communication in business

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

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

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

3. The importance of intercultural communication to a career

It has been mentioned that a competence in intercultural communication is relevant to future entrepreneurs. As a matter of fact, acquiring competencies should be initiated in secondary schools, and continued in higher education institutions. 'Effective communication is one of the preconditions for successful cooperation and activity; therefore, the ability to communicate effectively in an intercultural context is an integral part of the

profile of a modern specialist' (Cesevičiūtė, 2004). This problem is relevant to Lithuania, which is currently integrating into European and global business societies. Communication and intercultural communication competencies are the most important competencies for a modern specialist (Buinevičiūtė, Lepaitė, 2003).

A review of the essence of intercultural communication reveals many advantages of intercultural communication for careers. Many scholars (Bukantaitė, 2004; Merkys *et al.*, 2004; Tutlys, Butkienė, 2010; Kalninytė, 2011; Storey, *et al.*, 2019) emphasise the need for future entrepreneurs to develop a competence in intercultural communication. Higher education institutions have to recognise that the competence of intercultural communication cannot be ignored when studying. Confidence in intercultural awareness and intercultural communication guarantee higher achievements by students and are a better preparation for future career planning, which can help to create better job opportunities. International education and study programmes abroad provide opportunities for career development, and the possibility to acquire a wide range of cultural and professional practices (Arthur, 2000). According to the author, our global world is now a mixture of people and cultures. To be successful and productive, personally and professionally, one must become 'a global citizen', competent in communication and intercultural communication between different cultures, and capable of analysing problems at a global level.

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

Table 1. The benefits of intercultural communication for young specialists / entrepreneurs

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

Source: Compiled by the author.

4. Students' attitudes towards intercultural communication

The study was completed between March and April 2020. The target audience was first-year and second-year students from two higher education institutions in Klaipėda, Lithuania ($n = 176$ students).

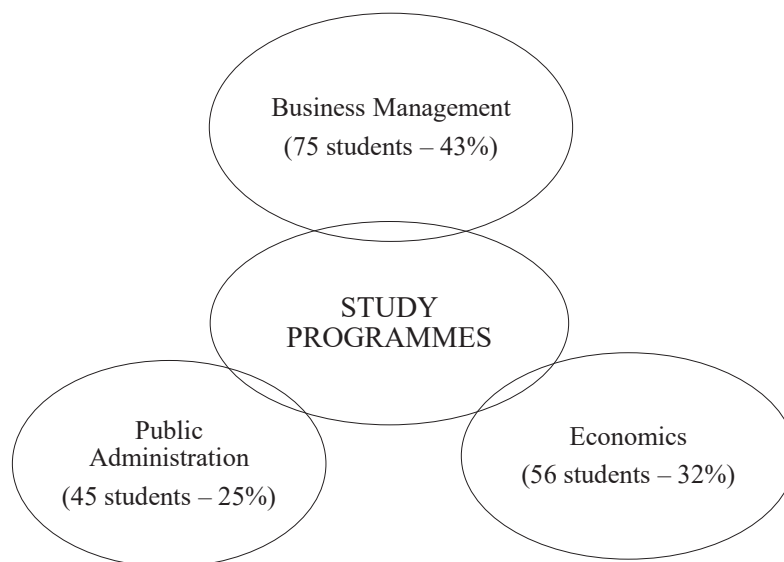


Figure 1. The distribution of participants

These participants were selected intentionally, because first-year and second-year students have the subject of Professional English in their study curriculum. This subject is related to a future (international) career and intercultural communication. Moreover, students become familiar with national and international business and its characteristics, and develop foreign language communication skills, taking into account cultural and intercultural differences.

An online questionnaire was prepared for students because of the Covid-19 situation. This option was the best way to reach students and to receive their answers. The questionnaires were sent out by email, and were available online: www.apklausa.lt. The questionnaire form consisted of several questions to help achieve the main objective: to investigate if students acknowledge the importance of intercultural communication and its benefits to careers. The questions were in English, because it was an opportunity for students to develop their skills and knowledge of Professional English (Business English, level B2). The results of the survey were processed with Microsoft Excel and the averages presented.

Students were provided with a list of areas where intercultural communication can be practised. The list was created after reviewing the scientific sources and studies by various authors. The main areas were as follows: education, travel, personal development, and employment. Each area consisted of subgroups representing more alternatives where intercultural communication can be used/practised (see Fig. 2).

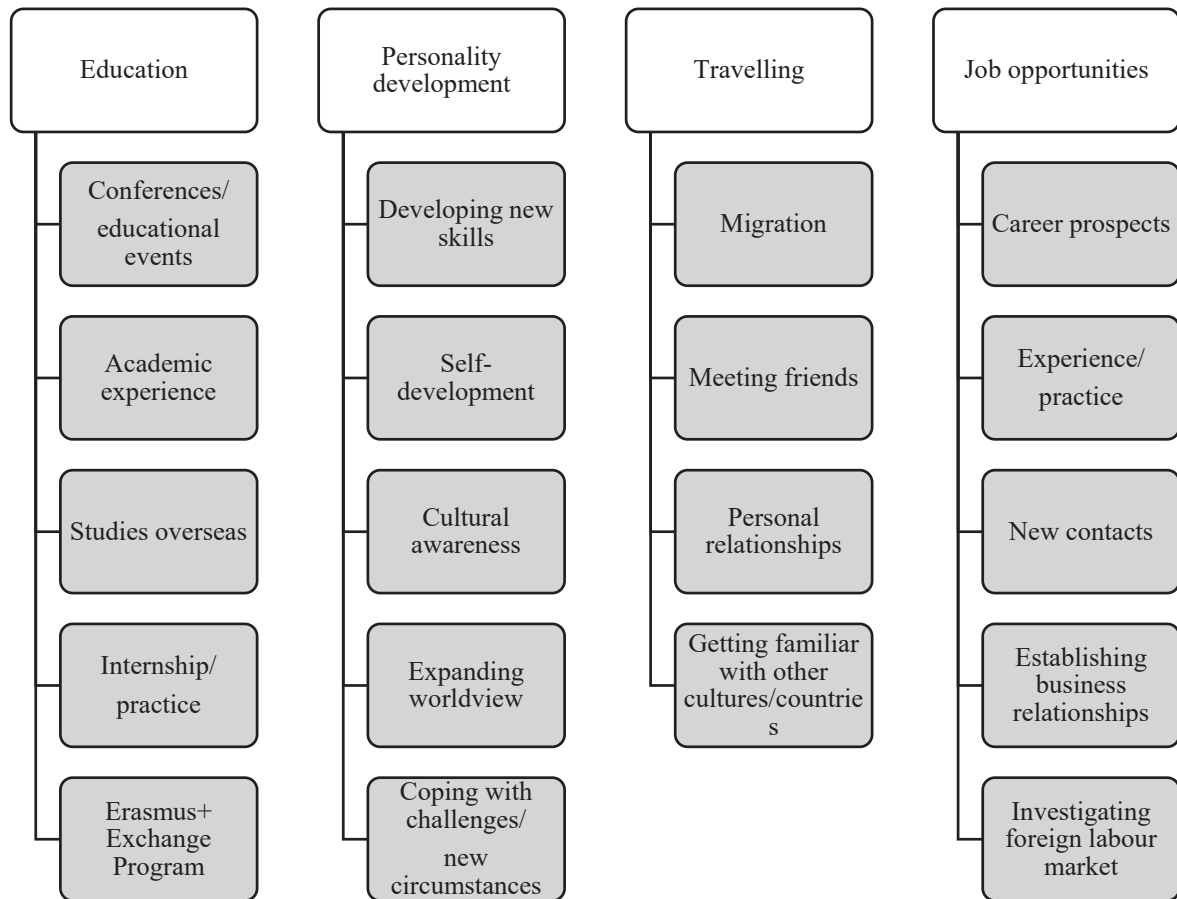


Figure 2. The use of intercultural communication

Source: Compiled by the author.

Respondents had to choose areas where the use of intercultural communication is important. The most frequently specified areas (average) are shown in the diagram below (see Fig. 3).

The majority of respondents (average 4.57) relate the use of intercultural communication to future job opportunities. They understand the importance of intercultural communication in global business, and link their future career prospects to intercultural communication.

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

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

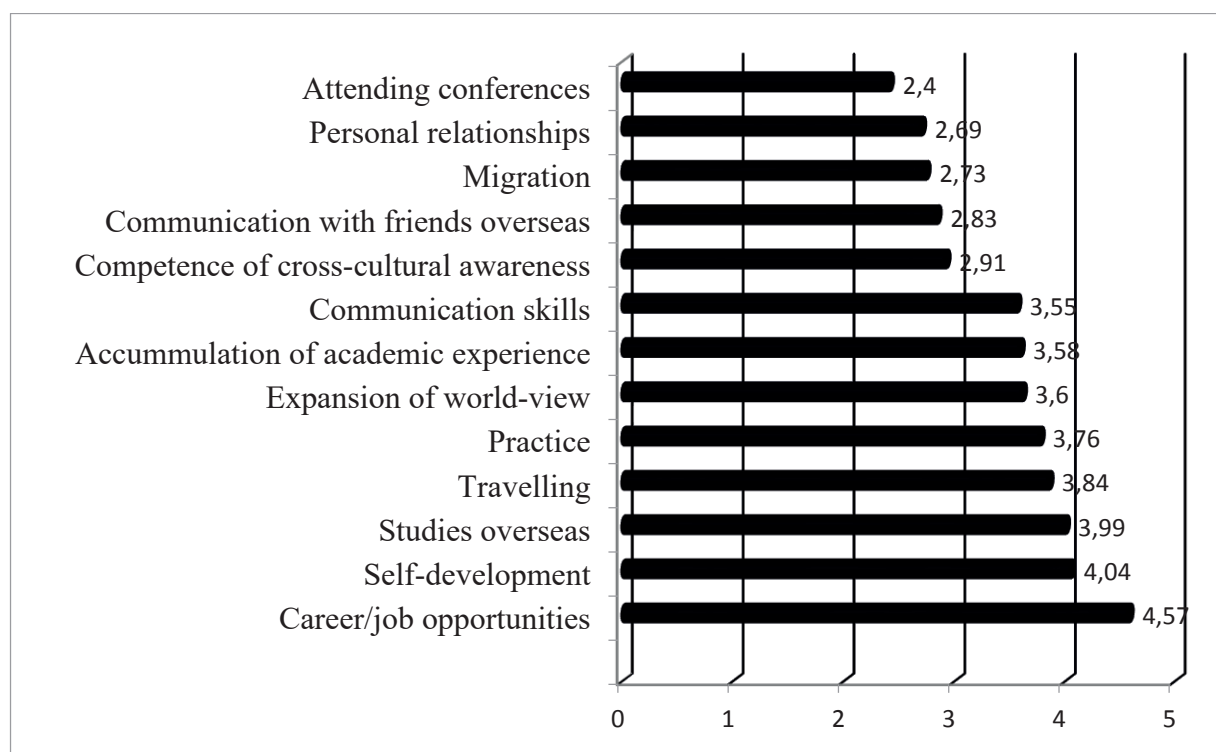


Figure 3. Areas of use of intercultural communication

The students see intercultural communication as being beneficial for *education: studies overseas* (average 3.99), *gaining academic experience* (average 3.58), *internship/practice* (average 3.76), and *attending conferences/educational events* (average 2.4). This is evidence that students understand the benefits and significance of intercultural communication for their studies locally and overseas. They want to acquire greater academic knowledge, gain experience, and have possibilities to attend internships or practice. Reviewing the alternatives included in the education group, one is still missing. The students did not select the Erasmus+ Exchange Programme. The reasons may be the short period of studies (participation in the Erasmus+ programme is possible from the second year of studies), or the participants in the survey (students) did not see any prospects of studying abroad for a short period of time (one semester).

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

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

Conclusions

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

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

According to the survey, students know and understand clearly the possibilities offered by a specific type of communication, intercultural communication, which eliminates limitations and obstacles in international educational and professional settings. Intercultural communication allows students to be better prepared for their professional future, or to continue their studies abroad. As future entrepreneurs, students recognise the need to improve, develop and practise intercultural communication, if they want to present themselves in a more professional way and be recruited as culturally competent professionals. The results obtained from the survey prove that intercultural communication is important for a career from a student's perspective. Career and job opportunities are interlinked with intercultural communication, and that leads to establishing business relationships and researching the labour market. In addition, intercultural communication also plays an important role in travelling for educational reasons (conferences, mobility, events, studies, etc) and self-development (cross-cultural awareness, self-esteem, confidence, coping with challenges, etc).

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TARPKULTŪRĖ KOMUNIKACIJA: KARJEROS VALDYMO VEIKSNYS

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Santrauka

Šiuolaikinę visuomenę galima apibūdinti kaip atvirą, globalią. Kiekviena visuomenės veiklos sritis (švietimas, darbo rinka, gyvenimo būdas ir pan.) turi savų ypatumų, tačiau galima pamatyti, kokie veiksniai lemia sėkmingą veiklą globaliame pasaulyje. Šiame straipsnyje tarpkultūre komunikacija skiriama kaip būtinas sėkmingos profesinės veiklos ir nuolatinio tobulėjimo atviroje visuomenėje veiksnys. Toks bendravimo būdas turėtų būti priimtinas jauniems žmonėms (studentams), siekiantiems išsilavinimo, profesinės karjeros

ir planuojantiems sėkmingą ateitį. Teigiama, kad jaunimas (studentai) yra svarbiausias elementas, siekiantis išnaudoti visą švietimo sistemos potencialą nacionaliniu ir tarptautiniu lygmenimis, galintis patenkinti darbdavių lūkesčius, vis labiau siejamus su tarptautine veikla ir pasaulinės visuomenės kompetencijomis. Profesinės galimybės susijusios ne tik su vidaus darbo rinka, neatmetamos ir migracijos alternatyvos. Apžvelgti tyrimai ir jų rezultatai atskleidė, kad tarpkultūre komunikacija suvokiama kaip vienas būtinų įgūdžių, padedančių plėsti švietimo ribas, renkantis ir tęsiant studijas užsienio švietimo įstaigose, tenkinant darbdavių reikalavimus, kurie vis papildomi dėl nuolat besikuriančių tarptautinių organizacijų. Organizacijų ir įmonių vadovai pripažįsta, kad tarpkultūre komunikacija suteikia naujų galimybių, padeda spręsti vietos ir tarptautines problemas, kurių kyla dėl naujos aplinkos, naujų reikalavimų ir nuolat besiplečiančių galimybių.

Daugelio mokslininkų ir tyrėjų teigimu, globaliai visuomenei būdingos naujos tendencijos. Verta paminėti darbo rinkos plėtimąsi tarptautiniu mastu, neribotas galimybes keliauti po pasaulį dėl įvairių priežasčių, įvairių kultūrų atstovų įdarbinimą įmonėse ir pan. Sėkminga ir veiksminga profesinė veikla priklauso nuo žmonių pasirengimo *atsiverti* pasauliniams pokyčiams ir inovacijoms. Intensyvus gyvenimo tempas verčia prisitaikyti prie naujų aplinkybių ir naudoti tarptautiniu mastu pripažintas priemones sprendžiant globalius iššūkius. Šis straipsnis atskleidžia tarpkultūrinės komunikacijos pasaulinėje visuomenėje svarbą. Toks bendravimo būdas lemia šiuolaikinio gyvenimo kokybę, formuoja teigiamą požiūrį į naujas darbo rinkos tendencijas, pasaulines įmones, imigrantus ir užsieniečius. Be to, tarpkultūre komunikacija gali padėti populiarinti vietos kultūrą, supažindinti su kitomis. Įvairių šaltinių analizė ir tyrimai suteikia vertingų įrodymų, kad tarpkultūre komunikacija daro didelį teigiamą poveikį kasdienio ir profesinio gyvenimo kokybei, sukuria konkurencinį pranašumą darbo rinkos specialistams.

Remiantis teorinėmis išvalgomis, atliktas studentų nuomonių dėl tarpkultūrio bendravimo naudingumo tyrimas. Siekta išanalizuoti studentų požiūrį ne tik į tarpkultūrio bendravimo kompetencijos naudą, bet ir šio bendravimo išnaudojimo galimybes. Tyrimas baigtas 2020 m. kovo–balandžio mėn. Tyrimo imtis – dviejų Klaipėdos (Lietuvos) aukštųjų mokyklų pirmųjų ir antrųjų studijų metų studentai ($n = 176$ studentai), studijuojantys pagal Verslo vadybos (75 studentai), Ekonomikos (56 studentai) ir Viešojo administravimo (45 studentai) studijų programas.

Tyrimo rezultatai atskleidė, kad, studentų nuomone, tarpkultūre komunikacija naudinga stiprinant savigarbą ir pasitikėjimą, ugdant naujas kompetencijas, studijuojant užsienyje bei valdant karjerą versle. Dauguma respondentų (vidutiniškai 4,57) įžvelgia tarpkultūrio bendravimo naudą, susijusią su būsimoji įsidarbinimo galimybėmis. Jie supranta tokio bendravimo svarbą pasauliniam verslui ir savo būsimoji karjeros perspektyvas sieja su tarpkultūriu bendravimu. Respondentai tarpkultūrio bendravimo teikiamą naudą ir praktikavimo galimybes mato šiose srityse: asmenybės ugdymas, tiksliau, saviugda (vidurkis – 4,04), studentų pasaulėžiūros plėtra (vidurkis – 3,6), naujų įgūdžių (bendravimo) ugdymas (vidurkis – 3,55), tarpkultūris sąmoningumas (vidurkis – 2,91). Studentai mano, kad tarpkultūre komunikacija naudinga švietimui (savišvietai): studijoms užsienyje (vidurkis – 3,99), akademinės patirties įgijimui (vidurkis – 3,58), stažuotėms / praktikai (vidurkis – 3,76) ir dalyvavimui konferencijose / švietimo renginiuose (vidurkis – 2,4). Taigi studentai supranta tarpkultūrio bendravimo naudą ir reikšmę savo studijoms gimtoje šalyje bei užsienyje. Manoma, kad jie siekia įvairiapusių mokslo žinių, įgyti patirties ir / ar atlikti praktiką vietos ar užsienio įmonėse. Paskutinė studentų nurodyta tarpkultūrio bendravimo naudojimo sritis susijusi su keliavimu. Populiariausi pasirinkimai: bendravimas su draugais užsienyje (vidurkis – 2,83), migracija (vidurkis – 2,72), keliavimas dėl asmeninių santykių (vidurkis – 2,69). Daugelis atsakymų susiję ne tik su draugų lankymu, bet ir su migracija. Pastaroji problema aktuali Lietuvos jaunimui, svarstančiam apie geresnes įsidarbinimo ar gyvenimo galimybes ateityje, po studijų. Studentų nuomonės atskleidė, kad tarpkultūris bendravimas yra naudingas, tad jį būtina nuolat puoselėti būsime profesiniame ir asmeniniame gyvenime.

Apibendrinant galima teigti, kad studentai žino ir aiškiai supranta konkretaus bendravimo būdo – tarpkultūrio bendravimo – teikiamas galimybes. Taip bendraujant informacija gali būti teikiama be jokių apribojimų ir kliūčių tarptautinėje švietimo bei profesinėje aplinkoje. Tarpkultūre komunikacija leidžia studentams geriau pasirengti savo būsimai profesinei karjerai arba tęsti studijas užsienyje. Studentai, kaip būsimi specialistai, pripažįsta būtinybę gerinti, plėtoti ir praktikuoti tarpkultūrij bendravimą, jei nori pro-

fesionaliau prisistatyti ir būti įdarbinti kaip kultūriškai kompetentingi specialistai. Kitaip tariant, studentai turi būti tikri dėl savo pasirengimo būsimai profesinei veiklai, jie turi gebėti atsiverti, kartu „atverti visas duris“. Tarpkultūre komunikacija lemia sveiką konkurencingumą darbo rinkoje ir užtikrina profesinės karjeros valdymo sėkmę. Šis bendravimo būdas pagerina savirealizaciją vietos ar tarptautinėje darbo rinkoje ir sudaro daugiau galimybių įsidarbinti. Šiandien darbdaviai linkę rinktis daugiau kompetencijų, tokių kaip gebėjimas kalbėti užsienio kalba (kalbomis), kultūrinis sąmoningumas ir lankstumas, turinčius kandidatus.

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

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