

Problemy edukacji dorosłych w Polsce i na świecie

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Intercultural Competence Development for International Business Environment

Rozwój kompetencji międzykulturowych w międzynarodowym środowisku biznesowym

Słowa kluczowe: rozwój zawodowy, kompetencje międzykulturowe, zarządzanie międzykulturowe, globalne przywództwo, międzykulturowość, zarządzanie.

Streszczenie: Artykuł stanowi podsumowanie prac przeprowadzonych przez międzynarodowy zespół w ramach projektu *Interculturality: Rozwój kompetencji międzykulturowych dla międzynarodowego środowiska biznesowego*, finansowanego z programu Erasmus+, którego celem było opracowanie materiałów umożliwiających edukatorom rozwój kompetencji międzykulturowych u osób dorosłych w postaci programu szkoleniowego oraz kursu doskonalenia zawodowego CPD (ang. CPD – *Continuing Professional Development*), oferującego otwarte zasoby edukacyjne. Partnerzy z czterech krajów (Polska, Włochy, Hiszpania, Turcja), bazując na analizie literatury naukowej, wskazali główne zagadnienia i obszary składające się na kompetencje międzykulturowe, istotne dla osób pracujących w międzynarodowym środowisku. Ostateczne rezultaty projektu zostały osiągnięte poprzez analizę dostępnych na rynku europejskim szkoleń w zakresie rozwoju kompetencji międzykulturowych, konsultacje z przedstawicielami przedsiębiorstw funkcjonujących w międzynarodowym środowisku, identyfikację luk, opracowanie treści kursu szkoleniowego oraz pilotażowe testy wypracowanych rezultatów prac intelektualnych. Efekty przeprowadzonych prac podkreślają znaczenie posiadania kompetencji międzykulturowych w kontekście zarządzania organizacjami wielokulturowymi.

Key words: professional development, intercultural competences, intercultural management, global leadership, interculturality, management.

Abstract: The article presents the results of the work that has been carried out by an international team of partners from Poland, Italy, Spain, and Turkey as part of the Erasmus+ project entitled

Interculturality – Intercultural Competence Development for International Business Environment. The project aimed to develop materials enabling educators to improve intercultural competences of adults by means of a training program and Continuing Professional Development course which are offered as open educational resources. Main issues and areas that constitute intercultural competences, important for people working in the international environment, were identified on the basis of scientific literature analysis. The final results of the project were achieved through the examination of training courses dedicated to developing intercultural competences that are available on the European market, consultations with representatives of international enterprises, gaps identification, preparation of the training program as well as pilot testing of the developed materials. Project results and the work that has been done in the transnational partnership of the Erasmus+ project highlight the importance of developing intercultural competences in the context of managing multicultural organisations.

Introduction

Has it ever happened to you that when meeting people from other cultures you have had the problem of not understanding their behaviors and codes of conducts? Have you not experienced the feeling that, although mastering their mother tongue, you were not fully understanding them? And, under these conditions working with them tend to be difficult and annoying? Sound familiar? This is the playing field of intercultural competences.

The term intercultural competences, although widely described, is not clearly defined. In academic literature, in the context of intercultural competences, there are terms such as "multicultural competences", "global competences", "intercultural awareness", "global citizenship", "intercultural sensitivity", "cultural intelligence", "transcultural communication", "international communication" (Fantini, 2009, p. 457).

Nevertheless, the importance of these competences is not only not diminishing but is currently increasing. In this vein, recent research has discovered that intercultural competences seem to predict effectiveness of organizations playing in global contexts (Schelfhout et al., 2022).

It is not only a matter of academia, but big players have realized that they can only be successful if they play under the rules of interculturality, as Peter Brabeck, Chairman emeritus and Ceo of Nestle recognized in a public conference in 2021 for the EU Business School. Another example of a (broader) movement in this direction is the launching of a Multicultural Business and Equity Development Organization by Pepsico at the beginning of this year.

Seemingly, Global Organizations have been praising these competences during the last years. For instance, OCDE (2018) considered them as a key factor to develop an inclusive and sustainable world. On the other hand, the last report of UNESCO to reimagine education by 2050 considers that education systems should open to intercultural competences. Besides them, the increase in remote work (because of the pandemics)

would have accentuated this importance, as the World Economic Forum recently highlighted (Reuil, 2022).

And being a multicultural executive, working in a global market, is not enough to achieve success if you do not master intercultural competences as Ami Mathradas, President and COO of Avalara, confessed in a post on a famous digital magazine.

Assuming that intercultural competences are a set of skills (see for instance: the Japan Intercultural Institute), it should be possible to assess them and document their progress (Krajewski, 2011, p. 13). Literature analysis summarizes intercultural competences as a set of diverse skills of people working in an international environment, denoting the ability to understand the perspective and approach of representatives of other cultures. Having intercultural competences makes it possible to communicate effectively with people from different parts of the world, based on knowledge of the norms, customs, and beliefs they profess (Rozkwitalska, 2011, p. 25).

Intercultural competences also require the ability to accept differences, even in the case when the value system existing in a given culture is fundamentally different from that which functions in our native environment, and communication is one of the main challenges in this area (Brett et al, 2006, p. 86). But communication is much more than mastering a language; as Bennet (2003, p.237) stated *"the person who learns language without learning culture risks becoming a fluent fool"*.

That is why knowing the principles of intercultural communication and the ability to communicate effectively in culturally diverse environments enables the overcoming of communication barriers, alleviating existing conflicts, and contributes to the creation of an ecosystem of harmonious, effective cooperation (Samovar, Porter, McDaniel, 2011, p. 8).

Hofstede et al. (2010) approached the study of culture in organizations from a global perspective, arguing that intercultural cooperation was the only way to ensure the survival of organizations. But, possessing intercultural competences is an extremely important issue not only in the context of managing a contemporary organisation. In the era of globalization, intercultural communication becomes everyday life for many people, not always resulting from goals or professional obligations. Therefore, intercultural competences are nowadays not only an important element of adult vocational education, but also a key area of interest of public and government institutions in order to counteract manifestations of racism, social injustice, and conflicts of a national, racial, religious, or ethnic nature (Carreño Bolivar, 2018, p. 120–135).

The increasing activity of enterprises in foreign markets engages leaders of multicultural teams in the implementation of tasks to achieve common goals. The development of an enterprise towards internationalization usually results from the desire to accelerate the growth of the enterprise value, enable it to develop in many directions, and facilitate access to significant resources (Daszkiewicz, Wach, 2012, p. 84). Due to foreign expansion, organisations gain the opportunity to achieve such a level of profitability

or efficiency that would be impossible or very difficult to achieve locally or nationally. The internationalization of enterprises also means that not only products, services, materials, or other resources move globally, but also civilization and cultural patterns cross borders, forcing the need for people of different cultures to adapt to new rules and working conditions. People managing multicultural teams must take into account cultural differences, tolerance towards otherness, cultural sensitivity, and identification of differences in their activities (Burkiewicz, Knap-Stefaniuk, 2018, p. 68). Increasingly frequent international and transnational activities of enterprises contribute to a greater demand for tools that improve the skills of employees, trainers, mentors, and adult educators, including courses developing intercultural competences.

In pursuing the goals of the "Europe 2020" strategy, according to which the promotion of smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth, including key adult competences, requires the provision of high-quality education and training, four partner countries (Poland, Spain, Italy, and Turkey) have developed comprehensive educational materials as part of the *Interculturality* project funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union.

Research methodology

The first stage of the research part of the project was the analysis of literature, which was aimed at adopting a unified definition of intercultural competences. Subsequently, the authors developed a tool, an online form, to collect data in two key areas: (1) identification of training courses on the development of intercultural competences available on the European market, and (2) identification of gaps in training programs. After the initial identification of the training courses, the authors carried out an in-depth analysis of jointly selected 8 training courses (two from each country), which included: the training name, website address, training description and its program, the target group of participants, training methodology, and key success factors.

Then, 8 interviews (two in each country) were conducted with representatives of enterprises operating in an international environment. The respondents were asked about the training courses conducted within their organisation in the field of development and management of intercultural competences, their key success factors, their strengths and weaknesses, as well as expectations related to the return on investment in future staff training.

Identification of training courses and gaps in their programs (in the form of an analysis of materials available on the internet) and conducting interviews (both in-person and remotely, via e-mail, phone calls, and online communicators) took place simultaneously in Poland, Spain, Italy and Turkey in September and October 2020.

Based on the results of the research work, the authors developed the training content on the development of intercultural competences for the international business environment, taking into account the identified gaps.

Main findings from research works

Thanks to the analysis of the literature, the authors developed a unified definition of intercultural competences for the *Interculturality* project: a set of diverse skills of people working in an international environment, meaning the ability to understand the perspective and approach of representatives of other cultures, which allows for effective communication and acceptance of differences, based on knowledge in the scope of their norms, customs, and beliefs. As part of the analysis of training programs and interviews with company representatives, the authors confirmed that there are many courses on the European market developing competences included in the intercultural competence set, but none was identified as having an interdisciplinary approach, including both theoretical and practical parts. Based on the findings of the research, the authors defined five overarching goals of the training course and developed a training program framework consisting of four modules, for which learning outcomes were defined, specifying the practical skills acquired through active participation in the training course (Table 1).

Overarching goals:

1. To enable adult educators through a CPD course to develop intercultural competences in adult learners.
2. To provide a methodological framework to boost the key competences and intercultural skills of adults.
3. To minimize cultural disconnections which impact performance, by helping target groups and beneficiaries in international business environment.
4. To foster target group and beneficiaries for intercultural development continuum which involves the view of the business world realizing with intercultural lands.
5. To develop a multilingual learning platform providing open and instant access to the full suite of project's outputs, including the eLearning space, the mobile app to support the access to the CPD course.

Table 1. Learning Outcomes

Module 1 – Overview of Key Cultural Drivers and Their Impact On Global Leadership
Learning Objectives
<p>The learner will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) define cultural drivers and develop an understanding of how culture affects leadership, 2) develop an increased awareness of the relationship between culture and leadership, 3) improve the capacity to be a good leader but understand the impact of culture on human behavior in their organisations, 4) develop an understanding of the meaning of multidimensional leadership – both local and global.

Learning Outcomes		
Knowledge	Skills	Attitudes
The learner knows and understands the definition of culture and global leadership.	The learner is able to illustrate the relationship between culture and leadership in her/his own company.	The learner is able to manage the key concepts of culture as a global leader.
The learner understands global leadership principles.	The learner is able to illustrate the advantages of a global leadership in own company.	The learner can apply global leadership principles to foster equity among the different cultures.
Module 2 – Cross-Cultural Management		
Learning Objectives		
<p>The learner will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) know the definition of perceptions, stereotypes and expectations across cultures, 2) be able to describe challenges and tips to function in the multicultural team properly in an organisation, 3) be able to illustrate ways of managing change, ambiguity and conflict across cultures, 4) know the practical tools and strategies for leading more effectively across cultures that will support effective management of a multicultural team and solving problems related to cultural differences that may occur in an international business environment. 		
Learning Outcomes		
Knowledge	Skills	Attitudes
The learner knows and understands the definition of perceptions, stereotypes and expectations across cultures.	The learner is able to analyse the influence of perceptions, stereotypes and expectations on international business environment.	The learner is able to manage the team where problems related to cultural differences caused by perceptions, stereotypes and expectations occur.
The learner knows and understands the tools and strategies for leading more effectively across cultures.	The learner is able to adapt the tools and strategies for leading more effectively in their organisations.	The learner is able to apply the tools and strategies for leading more effectively in multicultural teams.
The learner knows and understands the theoretical basis of managing change, ambiguity and conflict across cultures.	The learner is able to illustrate ways of managing change, ambiguity and conflict across cultures.	The learner can apply managing change, ambiguity and conflict across cultures.

Module 3 – Global Leadership		
Learning Objectives		
<p>The learner will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) get to know global leadership dimensions and styles, intercultural competences and communication, 2) identify the components of global leadership and they will be able to assess their skills for effective global leadership. 		
Learning Outcomes		
Knowledge	Skills	Attitudes
The learner knows and understand the concept of global (intercultural) leader.	The learner is able to realize if his/her company follows the definition.	The learner is able to propose ways of implementing the new concept in his/her company according to his/her possibilities.
The learner knows and understand the desirable attributes and dimensions of a global (intercultural) leader.	The learner is able to compare (and identify the differences) if the leadership style in his/her company meets the desirable attributes and dimensions of a global leader.	The learner is able to define courses of action to reduce the gaps between the model and the leadership style of his/her company.
The learner knows and understand the intercultural competence (perception management, relationship management, self-management) of global (intercultural) leadership.	The learner is able to identify the specific traits of the intercultural competence for global leadership in his/her company (perception management, relationship management, self-management).	The learner is able to design a plan of change in the area that in his/her company is furthest away from the model.
Module 4 – E-Leadership and Multicultural Teams		
Learning Objectives		
<p>The learner will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) know the definition of the matrix management across borders, therefore he/she will be able to describe challenges and tips to manage the system properly in an organisation, 2) be able to illustrate the roles and responsibilities of a (virtual) leader (the (virtual) global leadership), 3) know the self-assessment tools needed by successful leaders, as the Campbell Leadership Descriptor, the EFQM Excellence Model, to provide support to innovation activities, more flexibility and communication. 		

Learning Outcomes		
Knowledge	Skills	Attitudes
The learner knows and understands the definition of the matrix management.	The learner is able to apply the scheme of matrix management to own company.	The learner is able to manage the challenges of matrix management across borders.
The learner knows and understands the definitions and uses of the Campbell Leadership Descriptor and the EFQM Excellence models.	The learner is able to illustrate what the Campbell Leadership Descriptor and the EFQM Excellence Models are and adapt them to their organisations.	The learner is able to apply the Campbell Leadership Descriptor and the EFQM Excellence models successfully to foster leadership in own company.
The learner understands (virtual) global leadership principles.	The learner is able to illustrate the advantages of a (virtual) global leadership in own company.	The learner can apply (virtual) global leadership principles to foster equity among the employees, and a higher rate of emotionality.
The learner defines the main elements of an action plan to take the needed steps and boost innovation in own organisation.	The learner can create an action plan.	The learner can monitor the implementation of the action plan within a company/ organisation.

Source: own study.

Structure and content of the developed materials

The *Interculturality* training course has been developed as an online Continuing Professional Development course addressed to people working in international environments with the aim of developing intercultural competences. The training course takes into account learning outcomes, motivational factors, knowledge, skills, and competences necessary to face the challenges and opportunities in multicultural environments, as well as gaps identified in the research phase. It is a general approach to interculturality, starting from its characteristics, motivation, and context, to further explore and apply tools for managing and overcoming problems related to cultural differences. In particular, the course is intended for adult educators, teachers, and mentors of people for whom intercultural communication is a permanent element of their professional work. By using the developed materials, the course participant will acquire or improve competences that are essential and necessary to function in an international business environment. Four modules, which course participants can use both on computers and mobile devices, are placed on the open-access internet platform.

Module 1 – Overview of Key Cultural Drivers and Their Impact On Global Leadership, is devoted to the influence of local culture on the style of leadership. According to the literature on the subject, it was found that the basic mistake of the leaders is to be guided by the ethnocentric perspective, which may lead to misunderstandings, aversion, and even hostility. To prevent this, they should change their approach to one that includes social insight, an understanding of different societies, and global business direction. Module 1 is designed to enable participants to gain knowledge about cultural codes in business environments.

The next part of the course, **Module 2 – Cross-Cultural Management**, is focused on the description of the key elements of intercultural management that can determine the effectiveness of working in multicultural teams: perceptions, stereotypes, and expectations of people from different cultures. The module also covers the topics of change management, intercultural communication, communication barriers, ambiguities, and conflicts between cultures, as well as offers practical tools and examples of strategies for operating in a diverse multicultural environment. This module describes the definitions of stereotypes and expectations in different cultures. Course participants can identify and describe challenges when working in multicultural teams within an organisation and suggest tips on how to properly manage and overcome challenges in the work environment. The concepts presented in Module 2 aim to identify ways to deal with various circumstances in the international business environment, such as ambiguity, conflict management, and change in members of intercultural teams.

Module 3 – Global Leadership, is devoted to the diversity of global leadership styles. Topics such as communication skills and intercultural competences are covered with an emphasis on the development of personal skills. The module takes into account the characteristics of the GLOBE project (The Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness), presents the types of interpersonal communication, the importance of a global communication strategy, possible ways to develop effective leadership, and basic skills increasing the competitiveness and effectiveness of leaders.

In **Module 4 – E-Leadership and Multicultural Teams**, authors cover the most important issues related to organisational culture and discuss the topics of effective (virtual) global leadership, leadership responsibility, equality among employees, its roles, challenges, and solutions. The module also provides an overview of effective leadership self-assessment tools such as the Campbell Leadership Descriptor, the EFQM Excellence Model, and the basics needed to create an effective action plan. The scope of the knowledge includes, in particular, the definition of cross-border management, enabling course participants to describe the challenges and tips related to system management based on the specifics of a given organisation.

The authors of the course developed materials in English, then translated them into their national languages: Polish, Spanish, Italian and Turkish, and subjected them to a pilot testing process.

Testing process and its results

The materials developed by the authors (training modules, platform, mobile application, and the Continuing Professional Development course plan) were subjected to pilot tests consisting of two phases. **The first phase of testing** took place in parallel in all partner countries in July and August 2021 and involved 20 adult educators, trainers, coaches, and mentors (5 in each country). Its purpose was to assess the usefulness and adequacy of the materials to the needs of the target group, which assessed their quality through evaluation questionnaires. The questionnaire consisted of six questions with answers on a scale of 1–4 (1 – the lowest value, 4 – the highest value) and one open-ended question:

1. How would you rate the overall quality of the continuous professional development course?
2. How would you rate the overall quality of the Interculturality mobile application?
3. How would you rate the overall quality of the open educational resources created?
4. How useful is the continuous professional development plan/handbook to implement the Interculturality training material?
5. How valuable is the training course enabling adult educators to work with adult learners, team leaders, and managers with a focus on intercultural issues in a business environment?
6. Will you use the knowledge and skills gained during the training in your personal life?
7. What improvements/additions do you suggest?

When analyzing the results of the questionnaires regarding the first phase of pilot testing, it was found that the overall quality of the developed materials is very high. The vast majority of test participants assessed the materials as very good or good. On a scale of 1 to 4, none of the participants rated the materials at 1 or 2. The grades of 3 were single, which allowed the conclusion that only small changes that the participants indicated in the comments should be implemented. After introducing the corrections, **the second phase of testing** was started, which, analogically to the previous one, was aimed at assessing the usefulness and adequacy of the developed materials. It was carried out simultaneously in all partner countries from September to November 2021, and it involved a sample of 60 final beneficiaries (15 in each country), adults working in a multicultural environment: business owners, managers, team leaders, and lower-level employees. The questionnaire consisted of six questions with answers on a scale of 1–4 (1 – the lowest value, 4 – the highest value) and three open-ended questions:

1. How would you rate the overall quality of the educational material and the mobile application?
2. How valuable is the training in helping you gain new knowledge and skills on intercultural issues in the business environment?
3. How valuable is the training material in helping you introduce intercultural competences in your daily tasks?

4. How valuable is the training material in helping you understand intercultural issues at work?
5. How would you rate the content of the educational material:
 - a) Module 1
 - b) Module 2
 - c) Module 3
 - d) Module 4
6. How would you rate the Interculturality mobile application:
 - a) Usability
 - b) Contents
7. What are the most positive aspects (strengths) of the Interculturality training materials?
8. What are the most negative aspects (weaknesses) of the Interculturality training materials?
9. Do you have any other comments?

When analyzing the results of the questionnaires regarding the second phase of pilot testing, it was found that the overall quality of the training program and the online platform is very good. The vast majority of test participants assessed the materials as very good or good. On a scale of 1 to 4, none of the participants rated the materials at 1. The grades of 2 were single, which allowed the conclusion that only small changes, which the participants indicated in the comments, should be implemented.

After completing both phases of the pilot testing, the materials were subject to final substantive, graphic, and linguistic verification, which resulted in the finalization of the results of the *Interculturality* intellectual work, available as open educational resources for adults who want to raise their intercultural competences and develop within a complex multicultural business environment.

Conclusions

Managing a multicultural team requires leaders to learn to work effectively with cultural diversity, to be able to interact with people, regardless of their background, and to deal with conflicts effectively. Cultural diversity within an organisation can be a key factor in developing creative, innovative and effective teams. However, it can also be a frequent cause of misunderstandings that have a negative impact on the achieved results. Diversity in itself is therefore not a success factor. In order to benefit from the internationalization of the organisation's operation, it is also necessary to have the ability to manage multiculturalism and develop the intercultural competences of heterogeneous team members. It should be noted that intercultural competences are an important element of adult vocational education, not only because of their positive impact on communication, relationships, and the ability to perform tasks by employees but also because of the benefits of promoting attitudes of acceptance of difference and diversity in contemporary organisations. Their leaders must learn to use the most effective type of intercultural management, which is intercultural cooperation,

based on the assumption that cultures can interpenetrate and complement each other through the use of appropriate values, making cultural diversity an invaluable tool for the development of an organisation. By developing intercultural competences, both managers, leaders, and lower-level employees will not only contribute to the success of their organisations but will also benefit from them in their personal life, because possessing them enables effective action and quick understanding of other cultures.

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