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Peculiarities of developing intercultural competence in music education Master's degree studies

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Abstract

The goals of Bologna process imposed new requirements for international collaboration in higher education institutions; to increase mobility of lecturers and students, social and academic openness and, thus, to faster internationalize studies. Such processes of study internationalization necessitate the need for training of competent music educators, who are able to communicate and work in various intercultural contexts. The article deals with the expression of intercultural professional competence of future music educators and its (self-) development in music education studies. The study included 30 foreign (Chinese) Master's degree students, who chose studies at Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences (Music Education). The research showed that the level of future music educators' (foreign Master's students) intercultural competence was not high. The results of the research indicate the importance of pedagogical impact integrating innovative learning activities into the process of studies in music education.

Keywords: Intercultural competence, music education studies, future music educator, foreign Master's degree student.

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1. Introduction

Considering requirements imposed by contemporary global labor market and developing relations with people from other cultural groups and their culture, it is understood that intercultural competence gains importance not only in individual's professional activity but also in the civic society in general (Arslan & Rata, 2013). The legal documents of the EU and Lithuania highlight international cooperation, the mobility of lecturers and students, social and academic openness, including the cultural sector.

Intercultural competence is a derivative of cultural competence, whereof content and structure discourse reveals interaction of two or more different cultures (Wintergerst & McVeigh, 2011). 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 (Paige & Goode, 2009). The analysis of scientific literature (Bennett, 2008; Mazlaveckiene, 2015) allowed to highlight the main levels of intercultural competence (self-) development: Cognitive (embracing knowledge and understanding of native and other cultures, cultural differences and similarities, cultural beliefs, norms, values, etc.); emotional (encompassing attitudes, feelings, emotions experienced towards native and alien culture); behavioral (application of knowledge, abilities, attitudes, intercultural experience in various cultural contexts); awareness and conceptualization of intercultural phenomena (ensuring application of knowledge and experience in various cultural contexts).

Intercultural competence, being an integral part of general competences, acquires different meaning and content in the professional context (Fantini, 2009). The professional intercultural competence of future music educators consists of knowledge, abilities, and value-based attitudes of the specific field, i.e. music education, which result in successful activities of music educators in (a) specific culture. The origins of this competence lie in the educator's musical culture, which also include artistic musical activity (Lasauskiene, 2010). Evaluation of own musical culture in the context of different musical cultures, its comparison with other musical cultures, learning from other cultures and communication with representatives of different cultures are significant. This supplements personal intercultural experience of music educators and develops their professional intercultural competence. It can also be noted that professional intercultural competence of music educators acquires specific features because of both peculiarities of artistic expression and their links with educational activities. Though the need for development of intercultural competence in higher education has been substantiated and comprehensively analyzed (Deardorff, 2015; Savvides, 2014; Virgailaite-Meckauskaite, 2011), the specifics and development of foreign students' (future music educators) professional intercultural competence in Master studies have not been widely analyzed.

1.1. Problem statement

The problem of the research is formulated as question: what intercultural professional competence of foreign students enrolled in the study programme of Music Education is like and what are possibilities (strategies) of development of future music educators' professional intercultural competence in Master studies.

1.2. Purpose of study

Purpose of study is to reveal the peculiarities of future music educators' (foreign Master's students) intercultural professional competence and its (self) development in music education studies.

2. Methods

2.1. Data collection

The research was done applying several methods – the analysis of literature and documents and a written form questionnaire. The questionnaire-based survey (open and closed questions) of foreign Master's students was devised on the basis of theoretical conceptions and intercultural competence models (Berardo & Deardorff, 2012; Williams, 2009; Zydziunaite & Bubnys, 2010), supplementing them with statements about expression of intercultural competence of future educators in musical activities. The research was performed in September-November 2015.

2.2. Data analysis

Quantitative data was analyzed using “MS Excel” program and descriptive statistics (absolute and percentage frequencies were calculated). The analysis of qualitative data was done through the transcription of texts and creation of categories; several categories, which were unified by one idea, were joined into a theme (Mayring, 2014).

2.3. Participants

The sample of the research is objective (criteria-based sampling). The sample consists of 30 foreign (Chinese) 1st – 2nd year Master's degree students, who had chosen studies at Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences (Music Education). Foreign students graduated from Bachelor studies in their home universities (in China).

2.4. The research ethics

The research ethics was grounded on the principles of goodwill, voluntarism, confidentiality, explicit informing and respect for the dignity of an individual (Miller et al, 2012).

3. Results

Table 1. The results of qualitative content analysis

Category	Theme
Knowledge of peculiarities of own and different musical culture	The understanding of the concept of intercultural professional competence
Ability to understand, analyze and compare different musical cultures	
Ability to interpret (perform) and evaluate music of own and other countries	
Ability to communicate with representatives of other cultures	
Knowledge of foreign language	The factors influencing intercultural professional competence of future music educators
Influence of study content and methods	
Influence of relations between lecturers and students	
Importance of intercultural experience and personal	

qualities

Need to learn other cultures

The motives for choice of studies abroad

Professional curiosity

Wish to study and work in a different culture

The conducted content analysis of the responses of foreign Master's students (future music educators) to open questions of the questionnaire highlighted the qualitative categories, which may be subdivided into 3 groups (themes) (see: Table 1).

3.1. The understanding of the concept of intercultural professional competence

The first questions of the questionnaires aimed to reveal future music educators' (foreign Master's students) understanding of general and professional intercultural competences. According to the students, general intercultural competence embraces abilities, which are relevant for the majority of professional activity spheres: *"international communication and collaboration", "personal and professional contacts", "work in the context of different cultures", "ability to behave in various intercultural situations"*. Research participants stated that a music educator, who wants to improve and successfully adapt in contemporary society, has *"to protect and nurture national musical culture", "to accumulate knowledge of peculiarities of other musical culture", "to communicate with people, students and teachers of other cultures", "to be interested in everything", "not to close up", "to be curious and open"*. According to the foreign participants of the research, *"<...> only then you become a part of this culture"*.

The analysis also revealed that foreign Master's students also were able to identify a close link between musical activities and culture: *"learning of music cannot be separated from the culture of that country. This embraces engagement in socio-cultural and musical life"*. Future music educators determine intercultural professional competence as ability *"to understand peculiarities of own and another (alien) musical culture", "to understand, analyze and compare different musical cultures", "to interpret and evaluate music of native and other countries", "to possess artistic and aesthetic(al) meaning"*. It can be stated that understanding of own musical cultural identity, which is closely related to personal and social identity, serves as fundamental for intercultural professional competence of future music educators. Hence, Master's degree students from abroad, who study in Lithuania, firstly mention the factor of culture as the determining factor within the formation of their intercultural (professional as well as general) competences.

3.2. Self-assessment of intercultural professional competence

During the research foreign Master's students were provided with the list of abilities of intercultural professional competence. The respondents were requested to self-assess the level of expression of each ability using a 4-point scale (from "completely achieved" to "completely unachieved").

The results show that the majority of future music educators (foreign students) evaluate their knowledge of own culture (cultural community) peculiarities as very good and good. About two-thirds of the research participants state that they seek to learn other musical cultures (deep understanding and knowledge of culture, including contexts, role and impact of culture and others' world views). The research results demonstrated that only half of the students can perform (interpret) music compositions of different culture. It also appeared that only more than one third of the students indicate that they are prepared to self-dependently analyze, evaluate, relate and compare different musical cultures.

A deeper study of the data showed that less than a half of the Master's degree students from abroad, who study in Lithuania, indicate that they encounter difficulties communicating with university teachers and students, feel uncomfortable and lack self-confidence. Such situation may be resulted in

by insufficient Master's students' command of a foreign language. Only a third of research participants can discuss in English on various matters of professional activity with study colleagues and lecturers. Foreigners mark their poor skills of professional English language (reading and understanding, preparation of texts as well as knowledge of scientific foreign language) as a negative factor, which significantly reduces the level of development of their intercultural competence. According to the foreign students: *"I am able to communicate on general themes, I may use dictionary or outside help – a colleague, who speaks English better. But knowledge of professional or scientific foreign language is not enough yet"; "It is a particularly complicated activity – to self-dependently prepare a scientific presentation, publication, the Master thesis project in English"*. Therefore Master's degree students from abroad face problems studying specialized scholarly literature in foreign languages, joining international scientific research as well as taking part in conferences and international courses.

The majority of students point out that they have had not enough opportunities to communicate with foreigners before their Master studies in Lithuania and that insufficient attention and time were allocated to improvement of their professional foreign language skills during Bachelor studies in their national universities. Thus, it is possible to conclude that the level of the expression of intercultural competence of future music educators (foreign Master's students) is not high because the insufficient level of skills of professional EU language dominated.

3.3. Motives for choosing studies abroad

Learning about a specific culture is the most frequent learning method applied going to another country, which is also mostly supported by international education professionals. Answering the open questions in the questionnaire form, the foreign students acknowledged that their knowledge of Lithuanian musical culture was scarce: *"We did not have any prior knowledge of Lithuania and its musical culture<...>; even now we lack deeper awareness"*. However, internal motives, which encouraged their choice of studies abroad, enabled them to faster adapt to cultural specifics of the host country: *"I wanted to travel and to see new countries most of all", "to learn other cultures", "to familiarize with system of music education and music teacher training", "to study and work in Europe", "to learn more foreign languages"*. It is obvious that the motives of the majority of foreign students are mostly conditioned by the cultural and professional context.

The written comments of almost all the foreign Master's students indicated that abilities to communicate with representatives of other cultures (lecturers, tutors, peers) and to adapt to different communication styles and behaviors, new cultural environment are among the most complex and hardest abilities to acquire. This is a very important factor, which predetermines openness to otherness and to different cultures. After all, studies abroad do not involve only physical change of environment. It embraces overstepping of geographic, cultural, social, intellectual and emotional boundaries. According to the foreign students, *"<...>having arrived in Lithuania everything was very new (fresh air, small population). However, the most difficult thing was to adapt, to freely communicate and to avoid conflict situations (in the student dormitory in particular)"*.

Generalizing experiences gained by the foreigners, knowledge, gained by coming to the different culture or by staying in it, becomes very important, because it helps avoiding deep conflicts and misunderstandings when communicating with representatives from different cultures. The internal factors that influenced the development of intercultural professional competence included experience of musical activity and communicating to people of other cultures, as well as willingness to become a music educator.

3. 4. Factors influencing intercultural professional competence of future music educators

Educational system, which empowers students' studying, embraces competency-based, psychological, didactic, organizational, sociocultural and material conditions. Comparing new intercultural experience obtained in Lithuania with acquired in their home country, future music

educators (foreign Master's students) most frequently singled out cultural studies and innovative learning activities, which help to develop their professional intercultural competency: "*<...> particularly enjoyed preparation and presentation of thematic music projects. This was a particularly new experience<...>we were allowed to choose musical compositions for the project ourselves (this would have never happened in our country)*", "*now I understand why it is impossible to perform musical compositions by Lithuanian composers well without being aware of Lithuanian musical culture. Therefore, cultural studies have to be one of the most important study subjects learning abroad*". Results of the research revealed that within development of intercultural professional competence of Master's degree students, educational aids (project methods, experiential, reflective, problem, collaborative learning) become very important. Application of the project method arose the students' interest in educational activities, changed their attitudes towards the significance of music education studies. Activating, interactive learning methods, according to foreign students, are one of the most motivating factors to study.

The role of university teacher is also important: "*I experienced the importance of personal relation, understanding with the teacher. Wonderful that our university teachers (music performers) themselves took part in the project presentations – concerts – as equal partners*". However, future music educators would prefer more intercultural studies classes, more intercultural events organized at university and more possibilities to participate in thematic music projects. Referring to communication (relations, interaction) of university teachers and students, the prevalence of contemporary learning paradigm is highlighted in the responses of Master's degree students from abroad, who study in Lithuania: "*The communication between students and lecturers in Lithuania is very open, close and sincere. During individual classes university teachers encourage expression of opinion, discussions and reflections*". It is clear that foreign students, who study in Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences, encounter new kind of academic activity organization, new learning methods and roles of university teachers and students.

Psychological conditions (creation of positive climate, feedback, educational interaction between the lecturer and student) comprise one of the prerequisites for (self-) development of foreign students' professional intercultural competence. The research participants see room for improvement in their personal qualities: "*<...> we do our best to perform assignments on time and carefully but we still lack self-dependence, creativity and emotionality in musical activities<...>and openness to innovations suggested by university teachers*". The assessments of personal features and skills of foreign Master's students can be explained by the fact, that the change of personal qualities and attitudes (openness to intercultural learning and to people from other cultures, curiosity and discovery, respect valuing other cultures and cultural diversity) needs the longer period of time as well as more intensive intercultural learning.

4. Discussion

Intercultural competence is defined as an outcome of learning and personal (self-) development under certain pedagogical conditions and positive experience (Dalib, Harun & Yussof, 2014; Chodzkiene, 2013; Jae-Eun, 2013; Krajewski, 2011; Niculescu & Percec, 2015; Norviliene, 2014). Therefore, learning from other cultures and communication with representatives of different cultures are regarded as a very important factor in the development of intercultural competence.

A contemporary music educator takes on the role of a native culture nurturer as well as that of a conveyor of alien musical culture, which requires development of his/her intercultural professional competence. The research data confirmed the prerequisite that influence of musical culture is becoming a significant factor for (self-) development of professional intercultural competence of future educators – foreign Master's students, who chose studies at Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences (Music Education).

However, intercultural professional competence has to be developed through adequate modeling of the process of education, i.e., introduction of educational strategies and methods (project methods, reflective, experiential, problem, cooperative learning, and other activating learning methods). The results of the research indicate the importance of pedagogical impact integrating innovative learning activities into the process of studies in music education. According to the foreign participants of the research, activating methods (intended for independent musical project activity as well as teamwork, discussions, giving and evaluating tasks of the project type too) are one of the most motivating factors for music education studies. The obtained knowledge and competences being in a different cultural medium comprise the foundation for professional and personal growth as well as (self-) development.

Therefore, intercultural communicative competence is necessary seeking successful communication with representatives of other cultures (Lustig & Koester, 2010). This competence may be determined not only as sufficient base of linguistic knowledge but also as ability to efficiently express oneself. The authors of similar works (Ceseviciute & Minkute–Henrickson, 2002) state that knowledge of other cultures and foreign language skills do not make an individual competent in an intercultural way, whereas ability to speak a foreign language does not predetermine successful communication if appropriate understanding about various cultural differences is missing.

It is worth mentioning that the study subject of music is very distinctive (musical art is considered to be a certain means of language and communication) and distinguished by specific methods of artistic-musical world cognition (not in terms of linguistics or natural sciences but from esthetical-spiritual perspective). However, aiming at attainment of better professional, academic and scientific results, accessing a new culture, communication with representatives of other cultures, is necessary to enhance professional foreign language (English) skills of foreign Master's students (Chinese) learning at Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences.

The case of professional intercultural competence (self-) development of music educators chosen for analysis is only one in the context of professional training. The limitation of this research is that the non-probability sample was chosen and the obtained results cannot be generalized but they are useful disclosing the possibilities and variety of (self-) development of professional intercultural competence.

5. Conclusions

The development of intercultural competence is not a new and unconventional phenomenon in contemporary higher education institutions. During the research various but single features of expression of professional intercultural competence were observed among future music educators (foreign Master's students). Almost all the participants in the research evaluate own cultural awareness as very good and good. They envisage a close link between the musical activity and culture and state that they seek and are able to learn peculiarities of other musical cultures. Own personal qualities, according to the future music educators, need improvement, whereas the majority of foreigners evaluate their foreign language knowledge as average or not very good.

Developing intercultural professional competence of future music educators' educational means (innovative methods) a gaining particular significance. The role of university teacher is also important as the content of the study subject, the chosen methods and strategies of education. Activating and assessment predetermine what professional intercultural competence a future music educator aims to develop.

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