

The Adjustment of Students from Lithuania to the Socio-Cultural Environment of the United Kingdom

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crossref <http://dx.doi.org/10.5755/j01.sal.0.23.5488>

Abstract. Every year a considerable number of Lithuanian school-leavers enter higher educational institutions in the UK. Their decision to study in an English speaking country not only provides them with the opportunity to master their competences in a multicultural academic environment, encompassing studies and participation in various extra-curricula activities, but studying in the UK also exposes them to a completely different academic culture. This presents challenges which occur due to unfamiliar social and cultural life spheres, as well as forcing the students to encounter the phenomena of *diversity* and *otherness*.

The paper aims to identify the most important components of the Intercultural Communicative Competence (further—ICC) necessary for one’s successful adjustment abroad, to be more precise, the students’ knowledge, skills and attitudes that helped them feel comfortable in the UK socio-cultural environment. In order to achieve the aim set, the preconditions for ICC to be developed in foreign language curricula of secondary education in the Republic of Lithuania are studied. Further to it, a framework of ICC to be mastered at the foreign language lessons from theoretical perspective is reviewed. Finally, the data obtained via the diagnostic survey is discussed. The analysis is based on the reflections presented by 73 respondents of Lithuanian origin who have recently been studying and residing in the UK. The reflections encompass comparative self-assessment of the respondents’ three basic ICC components, i.e., their English proficiency in social contexts, their command of English for specific and academic purposes, and their culture-specific knowledge within two periods of their lives, i.e., before leaving for the UK and while getting adapted to the environment of the UK. Unfortunately, the results reveal, that Lithuanians’ adaptation is grounded at emotional level relying more on motivation, personal character traits and language proficiency rather than intercultural knowledge and skills.

Keywords: *Lithuanian school-leavers, self-assessment, Intercultural Communicative Competence, adjustment to the culturally new environment.*

Introduction

It was in 2004 that the Republic of Lithuania joined the EU. This year was a turning point for the country, accelerating the development of relationships in a plethora of international, social, economic, political, academic and cultural fields. Taking advantage of the opportunity to study abroad, many Lithuanian school-leavers have given their preferences to universities in the UK which are famous for their long-lasting traditions, high quality of studies, and research.

According to the data obtained from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), within the period of eight academic years (2002/3–2010/11) the number of Lithuanians studying at UK universities has reached roughly 4,000 people (see Figure 1).

Describing them in terms of degree choice in the 2010/11 academic year the majority of them (3,395) were First degree students, 340 represented Postgraduate students, 90 were involved in Postgraduate research, and the remaining 165 accounted for other undergraduates.

Integration into the new socio-cultural context, including the academic environment, highlights several breakthrough aspects related to the shifts in incoming students’ mindsets

and their abilities to adjust to the surrounding environment. Under the theories of Bennett (1986), Weaver (2000), the stage of adjustment indicates signs of adaptation to a new culture within the long developmental process (cf. Wintergerst and McVeigh, 2011, p. 101), which covers some transitional stages to be passed through before adaptation issues become resolved. The scholars emphasise the fact that

crossing borders opens a gap between one’s existing internal competencies and the competencies necessary to function in a new environment (Shaules, 2007, p. 19).

Bearing in mind that successful “functioning” might encompass a great number of a person’s competences, we limit ourselves to the discussion of effective and appropriate communication (Spitzberg, 2010) which defines the person’s Intercultural Communicative Competence or, ICC in short, (Fantini, 2000, p. 26). It encompasses the features of one’s linguistic, communicative and intercultural abilities as potential clues to the socio-cultural understanding of a new environment. Although ICC has become the 21st century citizen’s key competence (Deardorff, 2009), due to the complexity of the nature of the competence, there has been a great variety of interpretations either of its structure or content.

The aim of this paper is to identify the most significant structural and content components of the Intercultural Communicative Competence that contributed to the Lithuanians' successful adjustment to the socio-cultural of the UK.

To achieve the above aim the following **objectives** will be accomplished:

- the preconditions for ICC to be developed in foreign language curricula of secondary education in the Republic of Lithuania will be studied;
- theoretical insights about the ICC to be mastered at the foreign language lessons will be reviewed;

- the components of the ICC necessary for successful adaptation to the academic and socio-cultural contexts in the UK will be identified, on the basis of the diagnostic survey results presented by the Lithuanians studying and residing in the UK.

Research methods encompass the analysis of the legal documents of the Republic of Lithuania for one's ICC to be developed and review of the scientific literature related to the target competence; as well as the statistical analysis of the data obtained via the diagnostic survey and processed by the *SPSS* software programme installed in the *www.apklausa.lt* system.

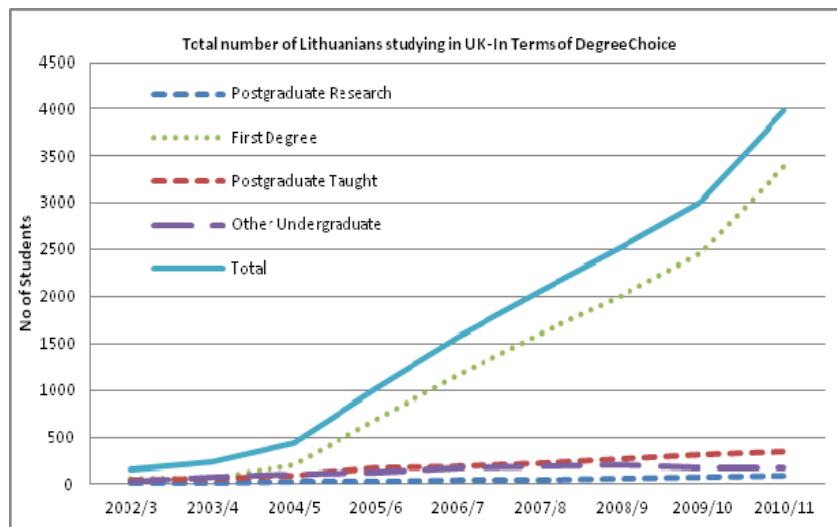


Figure 1. The total number of Lithuanians studying in the UK (Source: HESA Student Record © British Council)

Theoretical Background of the Intercultural Communicative Competence

Since the early 1980s, the pressing need to communicate real meaning in real situations and “to adapt the use of English to the ways people in any culture interact” (Gebhard, 2006, p. 64) has prompted a paradigm shift in English teaching as a foreign or second language:

many language teachers, teacher educators and researchers have expressed the belief that the primary aim of second and foreign language acquisition is to enable “cultural backgrounds in a multicultural world (Lázár, 2007, p. 5).

The latter idea has been endorsed by the documents of the European Council, including the “Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment” (CEFR) stating that

it is a central objective of language education to promote the favourable development of the learner’s whole personality and sense of identity in response to the enriching experience of otherness in language and culture (CEFR, 2001, p. 1).

In line with the legal documents of the EU, the people responsible for foreign language teaching policy in the Republic of Lithuania paved the way for the necessary

changes in the legal framework in favour of the development of ICC, as well as made many significant alterations in the education system to develop fully-fledged citizens who are competitive in the context of the EU.

General Trends in Foreign Language Policy

Since the first years of the Restoration of Independence in the country (1990) the education system of the Republic of Lithuania has been undergoing the reform grounded upon the four democratic principles once pointed out by Jacques Delors “learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be” (Delors, 1996, pp. 20–21). Lithuania’s accession to the EU (2004) was the second major factor that contributed to the introduction of significant changes in both the education system in general and policy of foreign language teaching. The demand for enabling young people to acquire competences necessary in the light of rapidly changing society have been taken into account and reflected in a number of national documents. The “National Education Strategy 2003–2012” (NES; Švietimo gairės, 2003, p. 21) transferred the general meaning of the national policy on education—“to educate the youth of the country [to be] able to preserve their national identity and, on the other hand, [to be] open for a polylogue with the world cultures” (ibid., p. 22–23). Other national documents, such as “Language Education Policy

Profile” (LEPP; “Kalbų mokymo politikos aprašas”, 2006) designed by the foreign language educators of the Republic with the assistance of the representatives of the Council of Europe focused on the implementation issues of the national strategy of foreign language teaching, curriculum and methodology. Much emphasis was put on the sociocultural content of language learning and development of linguistic, communicative and intercultural competences (LEPP, 2006, p. 106). More detailed plans for competence development have been drawn in “General Programmes for Secondary Education. Languages” (GP). Their recent edition (2011) points out the importance of Intercultural Competence as

a learner’s ability to envisage linking points between the native and the target language cultures and mediate, recognise the type of culture and use the most suitable strategies in communication, overcome stereotyping in relationship (GP, 2011, p. 84).

As a contribution to fostering the development of learners’ linguistic competence, “The Descriptor scheme of foreign language proficiency levels” (Order of the Minister of Education and Science No. ISAK-687, 6 April 2009) was introduced. Consequently, the levels of foreign language proficiency related to the CEFR started being implemented via the foreign language subject syllabi, orientated at learners’ achievement of either B1 or B2 according to the CEFR (GP, 2011, p. 87) by the time the pupils leave school. Thus, from the legal point of view the way for learners’ ICC to be developed at secondary schools was paved. Then, the national goals for foreign language teaching required teachers to develop working methods that would enable them to master their learners’ linguistic, communicative and intercultural competences.

The Concept of Intercultural Communicative Competence from the Perspective of Language Educators

M. Byram acknowledges the fact that although language teachers are mostly valued for improving the learners’ linguistic competence (Byram et al., 2004, p. 31), the current shift in paradigms in foreign language teaching make them face a number of completely new challenges, among them—to develop learners’ ICC and increase their capacity for intercultural communication and cooperation on a lifelong basis (Little et al., 2007, p. 17). Therefore, we aimed at disclosing the structural components and their content details within the target competence.

According to many scholars, the structure of ICC encompasses the components of knowledge, skills, and attitudes

held together by a critical engagement with the foreign culture under consideration and one’s own (Byram et al., 2004, p. 65).

In this understanding, the duality of the nature of ICC becomes evident when the knowledge of the native culture is in constant balance with the ability to see and understand the culture of the host country from its people’s perspectives (Chodzkiene, 2012, p. 31). Due to changing views on culture in relation to foreign language teaching-learning, the **knowledge of one’s own culture** has also become an aim in foreign language learning (Fenner, 2006,

p. 43). C. Schachinger and M. Taylor also argue that the starting point in this challenging conception of intercultural teaching-learning could be the learners’ own cultural background and experiences, their roots, their personal reality which shapes them and reminds them where they come from, as well as what they have lived and encountered (Schachinger and Taylor, 2000, p. 37). This idea is also supported by D. Deardorff and other American scientists who state that the role of identity in intercultural competence is often considered to be the core to this concept (Deardorff, 2009, p. xii). A. Geof and his colleagues (2006, p. 2) add the component of citizenship education that could consolidate one’s awareness of national identity. Once the learners are aware of their national background it could be the signal of their readiness for intercultural encounters.

As language teaching from M. Byram’s perspective is a systematic description of movement from one culture to another (Byram et al., 2004, p. 30) one might embark on a quest for other parts of the knowledge component. In order to be able to discover “otherness”—whether the ‘other’ is another language, another culture, other people” (CEFR, 2001, p. 12) and to learn communicate with people whose cultural heritage makes them very different M. Lustig and J. Koester advocate the necessity of two other kinds of knowledge—culture-general and culture-specific information (Lustig and Koester, 2010, p. 69). **Culture-general knowledge** is related to the concept of culture and its grounding patterns such as shared beliefs, values, norms, and social practices regardless of any culture in particular. Cultural patterns address the manner in which culture orients itself to activities, social relations, the self, the world, and the passage of time (Lustig and Koester, 2010, p. 92). Subsequently, the knowledge about the character type of the culture allows the participants of the communication act to apply the most suitable strategies. This signals the fact that integration of culture into a foreign language lesson breaks traditional boundaries of a language lesson and encompasses the knowledge of other sciences such as communication and intercultural studies, history, geography, anthropology, social psychology, literature, music, etc.

According to M. Lustig and J. Koester, the knowledge component of ICC also depends on **culture-specific information** which is useful for understanding a particular culture. This part of knowledge component might be about uniqueness of that culture, domineering cultural patterns in it or institutions one cannot escape encountering with. The knowledge of the social customs and social system of a country or awareness of how people think and behave in a particular culture can make communication effective (from the outsider’s point of view). Although A. Fantini stresses the fact, that not only the participants’ ability to make themselves understood (either in their own language or the interlocutors’ tongue, or a third language), but also their ability to behave and interact in the style appropriate to the host culture, is of great importance. Here the main focus is given on skills, other structural component of ICC, defined as

complex abilities that are required to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are

linguistically and culturally different from oneself (Fantini, 2009, p. 458).

Stated another way, “effective” indicates an outsider’s (“etic”) point of view of his/her own performance in the target language-culture, while “appropriate” reflects the insider’s (“emic”) point of view, i.e. how native people perceive such performance. The expectations are raised for one’s abilities to build authentic relationships with the host country people “through listening observing and evaluating; analysing, interpreting and relating” (Deardorff, 2009, p. 33). This set of skills is meant for sharing and entering into dialogue with those who are from different backgrounds. The process of creating authentic relationships is highly linked with interactants’ *communication skills* that encompass their verbal and nonverbal behaviours related to *message skills* (the ability to understand and use the language and feedback), *behavioural flexibility* (the ability to select an appropriate behaviour in diverse contexts), *interaction management* and *social skills* (Jandt, 2010, p. 54–55). All of them contribute significantly to handle the feelings of frustration, stress or alienation caused by the exposure to the new environment.

The third major component of ICC, attitudes, has been identified as the most significant component since it coordinates the performance of the rest components of the competence. According to D. Deardorff, attitudes facilitate Intercultural Competence, i.e., its effectiveness and appropriateness. This happens due to the fact that one’s perception of “self” shapes one’s attitudes towards the rest of the world and accordingly affects intercultural communication. The way a person views the self (self-concept), the level of his/her willingness to be open to the others (self-disclosure), the strategies of self-presentation he/she employs (self-monitoring) are the key factors indicating the level of effectiveness and appropriateness of intercultural interaction (Jandt, 2010, p. 54). F. Jandt also points out that effective communicators must know themselves well, and through their self-awareness, initiate positive *attitudes* (ibid., p. 54). Although the list of positive attitudes is long, respect, openness, curiosity and discovery are considered to be of greatest significance (Spitzberg and Changnon, 2009, p. 32). The aspects of motivation have been related to the component of attitudes in many research papers. B. H. Spitzberg and G. Changnon indicate the fact that in early models of human competence (Bloom, 1956; Havighurst, 1957) motivation even used to replace the component of attitudes. Contemporary models of ICC include *motivation* into the list of ICC components which is enhanced by the influence of knowledge (cultural self-awareness, deep cultural knowledge, sociolinguistic awareness) and skills, and define it as the set of emotional associations that people have as they anticipate and actually communicate intercultural (Lustig and Koester, 2010).

As noticed by B. H. Spitzberg and G. Changnon, the abundance or the existing models of ICC

display both considerable similarity in their brushstrokes (attitudes/motivation, knowledge, skills) and yet extensive

diversity at the level of specific conceptual subcomponents (2009, p. 35).

There is also a discussion about whether or not to include interactants’ *personality strength* into the composition of ICC as effective and appropriate communication and successful adaptation require many personal qualities. However, the opponents of this idea maintain that ICC is contextual and an impression that

a person is intercultural competent is made with respect to both a specific relational context and particular situational context (Lustig and Koester., 2010, p. 67).

Due to a variety of contexts, the same set of behaviours one possesses may be perceived as very competent in one cultural setting and much less competent in another. This inference allowed M. Lusting and J. Koester to deny the importance of personality traits emphasised by F. Jandt, since ICC is contextual and the cultural background of each context identifies its own effective and appropriate intercultural communicators.

To sum up, the paradigm shift in foreign language teaching has expanded the role of language teachers. Further to the development of learners’ linguistic competence, the teachers are expected to educate active and motivated citizens, aware of the relationship between the “world of origin” and the “world of the target community” (CEFR, 2001, p. 103). Having crossed the boundaries of the home country, they should employ effective and appropriate communication strategies based on culture-general and culture-specific knowledge and the skills of discovering, listening, observing, evaluating, analysing, interpreting and relating. As per the competence itself, learners’ high motivation level is expected to generate their knowledge gain, development of positive attitudes and enhancement of skills. The importance of personality strength is still under consideration.

General Information about the Empirical Survey

This part is dedicated to the description of the analysis of the diagnostic survey carried out in the spring of 2010. The methodology of the diagnostic survey encompassed the following methods:

- *Empirical*: the instrument of the diagnostic survey was a semi-structured questionnaire consisting of 6 parts: 1) the respondents’ demographic data; 2) the reasons of giving preference to the UK universities; 3) the respondents’ expectations about studies and life in the UK; 4) the respondents’ self-assessment of their linguistic and intercultural competences before and after coming to the UK; 5) the list of personal qualities that helped them adapt to the new context; 6) the respondents’ future plans. The total number of questions accounted for 32 both closed and open-ended questions. Since the target respondents were Lithuanians studying and residing in the UK an online version of the questionnaire was made accessible for them. The questionnaire was administered via the website www.apklausa.lt.
- *Statistical*: the data obtained via the diagnostic survey were processed by the SPSS software programme

installed in the *www.apklausa.lt* system. A descriptive analysis (percentage rank) was employed to reveal the respondents' attitudes towards their motivation, knowledge of the language and culture of the host country as the main components of the respondents' ICC.

Characteristics of the Sample Group

The respondent group of the diagnostic survey accounted for 73 Lithuanians residing in the UK. The respondents' age ranged from 19 to 27, the majority of them (89%) were undergraduates at some of the UK's top universities, and 30.1% of them combined studies with work experience. 11% of the respondents indicated that they were UK university graduates living and working in the country. The sample distribution by gender was 58.9% female and 41.1% male.

The Lithuanian Respondents' Motivation for Studying in the UK

Since motivation was proven to be an important component of ICC, generating one's positive attitudes towards *otherness* in the context of the host country, it was worth exploring the motivating factors that had contributed

to the Lithuanian students' decisions to study at the institutions of higher education in the UK. Having reviewed them (see Figure 2), it became evident that there are two major factors attracting Lithuanians to study in the UK; i.e. *more attractive study programmes offered by the UK universities* (20%) and *the value of the UK university diploma worldwide* that provides graduates with better job opportunities (20%). 16% of the survey participants were of the *opinion that the teaching quality at Lithuanian universities would not satisfy their demands* and gave preference to the top level teaching quality at UK universities. It has to be noted that just three survey participants had gone through some stages of the study process in Lithuania before enrolling on study programmes at UK universities. Furthermore, the majority of the respondents were among the best school leavers either of the Lithuanian gymnasia or International schools, and the fact that *they wanted to expose themselves to challenges* (14%) presented no surprise. Among the other factors which influenced their choice of studies in the UK, the *willingness for significant changes in life* (10%), the *shorter length of study programmes* (7%), and *cheaper study fees* (4%) were mentioned.

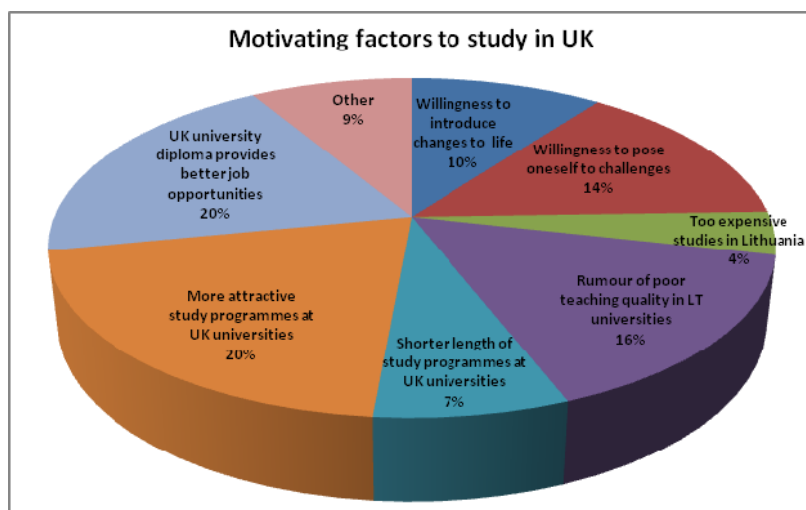


Figure 2. Motivating factors to study in the UK

Getting deeper into the reasons for the participants' decision to study in the UK, some other factors were identified, such as *the attractiveness of the UK HE system* based on the long standing tradition and research-and-studies nexus, *a more favourable student finance funding system*, and *a friendly student-professor relationship* grounded on constructive dialogue and mutual respect.

Having explored the demographic data of the respondents and their motivation level, the following section will focus on the analysis of the data obtained.

Analysis of the Survey Results

Bearing in mind that a person's successful adaptation to the socio-cultural environment of the host country is highly dependant on the manifestation of his/her ICC through linguistic-communicative and intercultural abilities, the analysis of the results has been divided into three sections.

Section One covers the revision of the respondents' self-assessment of their linguistic-communicative competence related to its use in social contexts. Section Two focuses on the survey participants' self-assessment of their English for academic and specific purposes. Section Three deals with the respondents' identification of culture-specific knowledge components that were the potential clues to socio-cultural understanding of the new environment and investigates the factors that had contributed to the development of Lithuanians' intercultural awareness.

The Lithuanian Respondents' Self-assessment of their English Language Proficiency in Social Situations

Needless to say, that there are many advantages associated with knowing a foreign language, especially for the people getting ready to reside and study abroad. This fact was

fully grasped by the Lithuanian school-leavers associating their future with the studies in the UK.

Given the fact that sometimes it is quite difficult to assess one's foreign language knowledge and skills without their

prior practical application in the target context, we aimed to juxtapose the respondents' self-assessment results by asking them to assess their English proficiency before leaving for the UK and after settling in the country (see Table 1).

Table 1. The respondents' self-assessment of their English language proficiency before and after entering the UK

BEFORE		AFTER	
Language aspects	Highly positive self-evaluation (good/excellent)	Language aspects	Highly positive self-evaluation (good/excellent)
Language accuracy	57.6%	Language accuracy	53.5%
Vocabulary	53.5%	Vocabulary	41%
Grammar	57.6%	Grammar	61.6%
Understanding Spoken English	68.5%	Understanding Spoken English	67.1%
Listening	70%	Listening	64.4%
Speaking	63%	Speaking	52.1%
Reading	78%	Reading	72.6%
Writing	64.4%	Writing	64.4%

Table 1 juxtaposes the self-assessment results of the respondents' English proficiency focusing on two periods of their lives, i.e., while living in Lithuania and while adapting to the environment of the UK. When asked to assess their *English language accuracy*¹ before entering the UK more than half (57.6%) of the respondents evaluated it either as good or excellent on the 5 point scale. However, encounters with the language use in its native environment reduced the percentage of those thinking of their English in highly positive terms by 53.5%. Some evident discrepancy was noticed in the aspect of *Vocabulary*, as 12.5% of the respondents overestimated their knowledge of it as adequate before coming to the country. On the other hand, while residing in UK, 4% of the respondents found that they had underestimated their *grammar proficiency*, which demonstrates the fact that the focus on grammar in the Lithuanian schools is still very effective. Reviewing the self-assessment results of the linguistic skills three cases of overestimation were noticed. First, nearly 11% of the Lithuanians studying in the UK acknowledged the facts of overestimated their *Speaking skills*, nearly 6% indicated having overestimated their *Listening* and 5% *Reading skills* respectively.

When asked to identify the most problematic language areas 65.7% of the respondents stated that *to understand the dialects of the local people* was either very difficult or difficult for them. While living in a multicultural society one cannot escape *the exposure to the varieties of English* which was acknowledged as the second major difficulty in communication by 54.8% of the survey participants. 51.7% of the Lithuanians studying in UK revealed the fact that their command of English was not good enough *to grasp the meanings of idioms* so frequently used by the local residents in every day conversations. Finally, *the pronunciation and intonation subtleties* of the English speaking people happened to be obstacles in effective and

appropriate communication for 46.9% of the Lithuanians surveyed.

Among the minor difficulties in English language use, the drawbacks in interaction skills or, to be more precise, the lack of experience in keeping up two-sided conversations was stressed: *“at school the teacher used to take time until you constructed a grammatically correct sentence, while in reality nobody waits; you have to produce an answer immediately”*. The complexity of the UK measurement system when the respondents had to convert the meaning of a 'mile' into 'kilometres', or a 'pint' into a 'litre' under time pressure was also mentioned. The third most common difficulty for the respondents was the specificity of British humour, *“when you are panic-stricken with no idea how to react”*. Since the latter two difficulties are related more to the cultural aspects than to the linguistic ones, it becomes evident that integration of the socio-cultural aspects into the lessons of a foreign language is of great importance.

The Lithuanian Respondents' Self-assessment of their English Language Skills in Academic Contexts

The academic setting refers to the use of English for academic and specific purposes. It is not just the understanding of vocabulary related to the specific subject area; it also includes such skills as comparing and contrasting, classifying and synthesising, evaluating, and drawing conclusions. These mentioned skills need to be accomplished in English. While exploring whether the Lithuanian school-leavers' sufficient command of English enabled them to interact effectively and appropriately in academic contexts, some problematic language skill areas were pointed out. Table 2 presents the list of skill areas in which our respondents were encountering problems at the beginning of their studies at UK universities.

The most difficult activity area for the respondents (as indicated by 60.6% of them) was *participation in discussions*, when they had to provide in-depth groundings for their arguments. It might have been due to their *insufficient ability to express their thoughts fluently*

¹ Language accuracy refers to the correct students' use of the language system, including their use of Grammar, Pronunciation, and Vocabulary.

(55.6%) which was the second problematic skill area pointed out. The third skill area that needed to be improved was *reading complex academic texts*. In their reflections, the respondents stressed that the attitudes of British professors and students towards *reading* differ totally from the Lithuanian teachers' and students' points of view, as *"reading in Great Britain is part of the philosophy of life and an inseparable part of living. In Lithuania, in contrast to the UK, it is a dull academic chore with no proper attention given to it from either participant of the teaching-*

learning process". Therefore, the respondents addressed their encouragement to start reading academic texts as early as possible to those who relate their future studies to the UK. Among the least complicated tasks for the students from Lithuania were *to feel differences in register*, although there were remarks that *"nobody taught us about them at school"* which were mentioned by two respondents; and *to take notes of the lectures* which might correlate with the respondents' good proficiency of Listening (see Table 1).

Table 2. The respondents' self-assessment of their English language skill areas at the beginning of their studies in UK

Skill areas	Very difficult/ Difficult	Rather difficult	Probably not difficult/ Not difficult
To express thoughts fluently	26.4%	29.2%	44.4%
To get engaged in various topics	22.6%	25.4%	52.1%
To participate in discussions	28.2%	32.4%	39.4%
To interact flexibly	18.4%	25.4%	56.3%
To read complex academic texts	26.4%	23.6%	50%
To read specialty literature	26.4%	20.8%	52.8%
To take notes of the lectures	16.9%	12.7%	70.4%
To complete tasks in writing (e.g., essay)	19.8%	29.6%	50.7%
To feel register differences and apply them correctly	18.3%	11.3%	70.4%
Other	30%	24%	40%

The answers to the question, "What could have been done in order to prevent the existing gaps in the English language knowledge and skills?" divided the respondents into two opposite groups: the ones who were grateful to their English language teachers as *"they, Lithuanians, did their best to train our linguistic and communicative skills; naturally, they could neither convey the cultural peculiarities of the English speaking countries nor teach us perfect English"*. However, the majority of the respondents criticised the existing foreign language teaching policy at schools in Lithuania since *"the basics of the language are taught by anybody who knows a bit of English"*, while in the last two years of schooling *"they administer the most demanding teachers and expect us to cover everything that was meant to be learnt for the language subject over all the previous school years"*. Among the critical remarks there were also some complaints about *"poor and boring teaching methods"*: as in the classes they had to create *"artificial situations based on the topics studied, rather than impromptu situations or in-depth discussions"*; *"the Lithuanian language prevailed in English lessons"*; *"too little attention was given to practicing writing skills"*: *"nobody taught us how to write an essay"*; poor organisation of the language teaching-learning process: *"there is no streaming of students according to their English proficiency"*, and finally that *"teachers focus on mediocre students"*.

Despite some negative points of view towards teaching the English language at schools of secondary education in Lithuania, the context of the UK disclosed the survey participants' command of General English as 'good' and 'excellent' with some minor drawbacks in speaking, reading, listening and the use of subject area lexis. The

respondents' dissatisfaction with their level of interaction skills for effective and appropriate communication, especially in the academic environment, raises some doubts about the appropriate application of communicative approach teaching methods to develop language learners' communication strategies in Lithuanian schools.

The Lithuanian Respondents' Self-assessment of their Culture-Specific Knowledge

The English language proficiency provided the Lithuanians with the first-hand insights into the culture and people of the UK. However, it was assumed that culture-specific information, as a major knowledge component of one's ICC, would be of great importance to those who relate their future to adapting to the environment of the UK. Therefore, it was targeted to investigate what particular culture-specific information was focused on by the survey respondents before their arrival in the UK, as well as which factors contributed to their knowledge about the target country and its culture.

Real encounters with the socio-cultural phenomena of the UK allowed the respondents to reflect objectively upon their culture-specific knowledge gained prior to the arrival in the target country. When asked to list the components of culture-specific information about the UK, the respondents indicated that it was mainly the awareness of *UK symbols, heroes or rituals* which was assessed as *fair* by 32.9%, *good* or *excellent* by 45.2% of the respondents. The participants of the survey highlighted their knowledge of *Geography*, which was fairly familiar to 32.9% and known well by 50.6% of the respondents. The respondents' knowledge of the *History of the country* was assessed either as *poor/rather poor* (34.3%) or *fair* (43.8%), the

same or even worse was said about *Literature*: the works by the British writers and poets were fairly familiar to 38.4% and known well just by 22% of the Lithuanians participating in the survey. The primary values of the country citizens were vaguely familiar to approximately half (50.7%) of the respondents; however, 54.8% of them stated that they were aware of *the cultural diversity* and knew about the country's *cultural heritage* either fairly (42.5%) or well (27.4%). 37% of the respondents knew nothing about *the political system of the country*, 64.4% were not familiar with *the health care system of the country*. *The legal system of Great Britain* was totally unfamiliar to 69.9 % of the respondents. On the contrary, *the system of education* was fairly known to 34.2% and well-known to 41.1% of the respondents.

Despite the fact that culture-specific information about the country of residence was rather limited, and the cultural background comprising the core values and cultural heritage of the host country was totally unfamiliar, the majority (87.7%) of the respondents were satisfied with

life and studies in their chosen country. 82.2% of the survey participants felt that they were respected, and 80.8% of them felt tolerated by the people of the host country. In addition, 79.4% of the respondents felt secure in the host environment, which is a crucial factor for successful adaptation. When asked to indicate any other factors that contribute to helping them to feel good in the host country, the following factors were specified by the students (ranked according to the responses):

- a variety of leisure activities (58.9%);
- promising career opportunities (58.9%);
- opportunities for self-realisation (54.8%);
- good relationship with professors (52.1%);
- interesting cultural life (52.1%);
- interesting studies (50.7%);
- sustainable relationship with relatives (47.9%).

Table 3. The Lithuanian respondents' self-assessment of their culture-specific knowledge

Knowledge of:	Poor/Rather poor	Fair	Good/Excellent
Symbols, heroes & rituals of the UK	21.9%	32.9%	45.2%
Geography of the country	16.4%	32.9%	50.6%
Primary values of UK	50.7%	38.4%	10.9%
History of the country	34.3%	43.8%	21.9%
Cultural diversity in the country	19.1%	26%	54.8%
Cultural heritage	30.2%	42.5%	27.4%
Literature	39.8%	38.4%	21.9%
Prevailing norms of socialising	41.3%	37.0%	21.9%
Political system	37%	31.5%	31.5%
Health care system	60.3%	28.8%	11%
Legal system	69.9%	23.3%	6.8%
Education system	24.6%	34.2%	41.2%

The latter factor happened to be the only piece of evidence indicating the respondents' links with the native country and its cultural identity. In direct contrast to the doubts expressed about the importance of character traits in the successful adaptation to the cultural and academic environments of the hosting country, and effective and appropriate interaction with the culturally different people, priority was given to such personal qualities as *self-sufficiency* (84.9%), *responsibility* (83.6%) and *persistence* (80.8%). Only then did *flexibility* (79.4%) follow, with *self-confidence* (75.3%) and the *ability to communicate* (75.3%). The order the personal traits were ranked indicates the fact that the respondents had to deal with the hardships of survival in the competitive society of the United Kingdom; however, none of them elaborated on this in detail.

When asked to indicate to which attitudes more attention could have been paid to while developing at school, the respondents mentioned *openness*, *tolerance*, *respect towards otherness*, and *personal freedom* as the key human personality domains that widen the *horizons of one's*

worldview and help while adapting to multicultural societies.

Finally, the factors that had contributed to the development of the Lithuanian respondents' intercultural awareness were aimed to be identified. *Travels abroad* or mobility (76.7%) were ranked as the most effective means. *Websites* (75.3%) were the second factor to enhance their intercultural intelligence, while *the mass media* (69.9%) and snippets of information provided by them were of the third importance for their intercultural development. *Watching films in the original language* was added to the list of helpful factors "to educate yourself how to survive in an environment which is culturally different from your own".

The respondents also indicated that they had foreseen the possibility of cultural misunderstandings in a new country; therefore, they spent much time *self-studying* how to adapt to the academic environment of the hosting country (63.0%). Furthermore, *the way their parents had brought them up* (60.3%) facilitated the development of their intercultural awareness nearly as much as *participation in*

international projects (58.9%) or *studies at International Schools*. The idea was mentioned that the best education for one's cultural adjustment while entering a new culture could be "*your personal experience when passing through the stages of culture shock*"; however, the respondents were not willing to share the hardships they came up with while interacting in a new culture.

Unfortunately, *the contribution of the English language teachers* to raising the students' intercultural awareness was recognised by less than half of the respondents (48%); moreover, 37% of the respondents disagreed about the input of language teachers into their intercultural development. This leads to the conclusion that despite the fact that the intercultural approach to foreign language teaching has been advocated for nearly thirty years, in Lithuania it has been still neglected by nearly half of the foreign language teachers who attribute this part of student development to the responsibility of the parents, or even students themselves through the processes of self-education or personal discoveries.

Conclusions

The undergoing reform of the education system of Lithuania has introduced many changes in favour of developing its young citizens' competences for living together and understanding people representing different cultures. The goals raised in the national documents put emphasis on foreign language teaching-learning socio-cultural content and methods to develop the learners' linguistic, communicative and intercultural competences. Much attention is paid to the learners' abilities to envisage linking points between the native and the target language cultures and mediate, recognise the type of culture and use the most suitable strategies in communication, overcome stereotyping in relationship. This guarantees theoretically educating learners to become fully-fledged world citizens aware of their own cultural background and open and respectful to other cultures and their people.

The review of the scientific literature presented an expanded role of language teachers whose responsibility covers not only the development of learners' linguistic competence but their intercultural communicative competence as well. Having revised the ICC structural components (knowledge, skills, attitudes) it became evident that many scholars stress the role of *attitudes* in generating the rest of the ICC. Positive attitudes shape one's tolerance, respect and openness towards the host country people as well as willingness to communicate effectively and appropriately. The component of *motivation* has also been attributed to the domain of attitudes or even considered to be a substitute for it. The analysis of the *knowledge* component of ICC refers to at least three sub-components, such as the *knowledge of one's own culture*, i.e. one's cultural identity and experiences. The second sub-component was identified to be *culture-general knowledge* which deals with the concept of culture and its grounding patterns such as shared beliefs, values, norms, and social practices that allows to identify the type of culture. The knowledge about the character type of the culture allows the participants of the communication act to apply the most suitable strategies. Finally, *culture-specific*

knowledge is useful for understanding a particular culture. This part of knowledge sub-component indicates the uniqueness of that culture, domineering cultural patterns in it or institutions. The knowledge of the social customs and social system of a country or awareness of how people think and behave in a particular culture can make communication effective and appropriate. Building authentic relationships with the host country people is highly dependent on such skills as *listening observing and evaluating; analysing, interpreting and relating*. Also, interactants' *communication skills*, that encompass their verbal and nonverbal behaviours related to *message skills, behavioural flexibility, interaction management and social skills* were stressed of utmost importance. The importance and role of personal qualities is still under consideration by many scholars of intercultural communication.

The list of ICC components pointed out by the Lithuanians studying at UK universities starts with its driving force—*motivation* that supported Lithuanians' extreme willingness to become competitive, first, in the academic environment, and later in the worldwide labour market. Second, the participants of the survey give priority to the *linguistic knowledge and skills* both in social and academic contexts. Although more than half of the respondents were satisfied with their language proficiency, the use of English in its native social environment indicated some Lithuanians' limitations on their English *vocabulary, speaking and reading skills*, which leads to the statement about the necessity to improve these language areas. There is still much to be done with *understanding the dialects of the local people and varieties of English* which was acknowledged as the second major difficulty in communication. Ability to *grasp the meanings of idioms and pronunciation/intonation subtleties* of the English speaking people happens to be the third obstacle in effective and appropriate communication for nearly half of the survey participants.

In the academic contexts the survey participants were quite successful in many language areas, such as understanding spoken English, taking notes, getting engaged in various topics and being flexible, feeling register differences. Among the skills that still need to be improved there were mentioned *participation in discussions*, as the most difficult skill area for more than half of the respondents, *insufficient ability to express their thoughts fluently*, the second problematic skill area pointed out by the survey participants and *reading complex academic texts*, the third difficulty.

The component of culture-specific knowledge of Lithuanians studying and residing in the UK was mainly based on the knowledge of geography, UK symbols, heroes and rituals, and understanding the education system of the country. The primary values of the country citizens were vaguely familiar to half of the respondents; nearly nothing was known about the *political, health care and legal systems of the country*. The collected data allows us to infer that general psychological atmosphere in the host country, the feeling of security, respect, and tolerance demonstrated towards them by the people of their host country made them feel comfortable and provided

conditions for their personal success. Lithuanians acknowledged the importance of their personal qualities such as self-sufficiency, responsibility, persistence, flexibility, self-confidence, and open-mindedness for their successful adaptation to the UK country socio-cultural environment.

There is a great difference between the theoretical framework of ICC and the one provided by the respondents from Lithuania. The Lithuanians' adaptation is based more on the affective background: motivation, personal qualities, good linguistic knowledge and skills, and some snippets of culture-specific information. The results of the survey helped us reveal the fact that the intercultural approach to foreign language teaching has still been neglected by the English language teachers in Lithuania. ICC development has become the responsibility of the students themselves through the processes of self-education and personal discoveries.

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Loreta Chodzkienė

Studentų iš Lietuvos pritaipimas Jungtinės Karalystės sociokultūriniame kontekste

Santrauka

Lietuvai tapus ES nare (2004) Lietuvos jaunimui atsivėrė galimybės studijuoti kitų šalių aukštosiose mokyklose. Tyrimo duomenimis, Jungtinės Karalystės universitetai Lietuvos abiturientams yra patraukliausi dėl išlikusių tradicijų, aukštos studijų kokybės, mokslo ir studijų dermės. Sėkmingam asmens pritaipimui prie kitos šalies konteksto reikia iš(si)ugdyti daug kompetencijų, taip pat ir tarpkultūrinę komunikacinę kompetenciją. Straipsnyje apžvelgiami teisiniai Lietuvos Respublikos dokumentai, nubrėžiantys gaires ir detalius planus nagrinėjamai kompetencijai ugdyti(s). Ši kompetencija straipsnyje apibrėžiama kaip žinių, gebėjimų, nuostatų ir vertybių visuma, leidžianti asmeniui efektyviai ir tinkamai bendrauti tiek socialinėse, tiek akademinėse situacijose. Taip pat pateikiama atskirų kompetencijos struktūrinių dalių išsklotinė, kai žinios išskaidomos į lingvistines žinias, savo kultūrinio tapatumo

suvokimą, bendras žinias apie kultūrą ir žinias apie tikslinės šalies kultūrą. Tokios nuostatos (jeigu jos pozityvios), kaip tolerancija, pagarba, atvirumas ir smalsumas skatina žinių įsisavinimą ir gebėjimų klausytis ir stebėti, vertinti ir analizuoti, interpretuoti ir sieti tobulinimą. Diskutuojama apie motyvacijos, kaip svarbaus nuostatų komponento, ir asmeninių savybių būtinumo įtraukti į tarpkultūrinės kompetencijos komponentų sąrašą, kai pasaulio mokslininkų nuomonės šiuo klausimu išsiskiria.

Antroje straipsnio dalyje pristatomas diagnostinis tyrimas, kuriame dalyvavo 73 lietuviai, gyvenantys ir studijuojantys (arba studijavę) JK universitetuose. Tyrimo metodologija grindžiama empiriniu ir statistiniu metodais: tyrimo instrumentas – anketa, kurią sudaro 32 atviro ir uždaro tipo klausimai, skelbiama www.apklausa.lt portale. Gauti duomenys apdoroti portalo www.apklausa.lt programine įranga. Taikyta aprašomoji analizė (procentiniai dažniai) apibūdinant, kurie lingvistinės komunikacinės ir tarpkultūrinės kompetencijų komponentai buvo svarbiausi studentams iš Lietuvos adaptuojantis Jungtinės Karalystės sociokultūrinuose, įskaitant ir akademinį, kontekstuose. Gauti duomenys, deja, nepatvirtino fakto, kad pačių lietuvių, gyvenančių ir studijuojančių JK, apibūdinta tarpkultūrinė komunikacinė kompetencija atitinka moksliniuose darbuose pateikiamus modelius. Lietuvių pritaipimas JK sociokultūriniame kontekste daugiausia grindžiamas emociniu pagrindu – motyvacija, tvirto charakterio bruožais ir lingvistinėmis žiniomis.

Straipsnis įteiktas 2013 10
Parengtas spaudai 2013 12

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