
FACILITATING THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM STUDENTS' INTERCULTURAL LANGUAGE COMPETENCE IN AN ESP COURSE

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Abstract

One of the key issues higher education has to face nowadays is how to educate versatile and knowledgeable specialists able to work in the modern multicultural environment. This formative evaluation research was conducted between 2009 and 2011 in the fourth largest higher education institution in Latvia. The study explores tourism students' and graduates' intercultural language competence in relation to working in a multicultural environment; proposals are also made for facilitating its development in an ESP course. After outlining theories of intercultural competence and theories of English as a world language, the author analyses the results of a survey carried out on 61 tourism students and 144 graduates, applying a Likert scale questionnaire supplemented with open questions. Findings show that most of the students and graduates have a high level of English language competence but their intercultural competence has to be improved. The students' survey indicates that students are prepared to work in a European context, but they are not sufficiently prepared to work with tourists from Asia and the Middle-East. The graduates' survey supports findings from the students' survey. The model offered for facilitating the development of students' intercultural language competence is based on students' active involvement in language activities containing intercultural content and strengthening the already developed intercultural language competence during internship training.

1. Introduction

The 21st century is characterized by mobility, an ever-increasing flow of information and cooperation between countries in the fields of economics, culture and education. This marks an “increased need for communication on a global scale” (Babamova, Grosman, Licari & Pervan 2004: 59), and is clearly demonstrated in the tourism industry which is “a highly international and intercultural-oriented business” (Sangpikul 2009: 13). Therefore it is essential for tourism employees, besides having language competence, to “have a solid background for understanding cultural differences” (*ibid.*) and possess a highly developed intercultural competence: “Students must be prepared to work *in* tourism and *for* tourism” (Lewis 2005: 12). This means that tourism specialists must possess language and intercultural communication skills which allow them to operate in a variety of socio-cultural contexts, including multicultural environments.

Historically Europe has always been multilingual. In the 14th-16th centuries

Latin was the main language of instruction in Europe. However, in everyday situations many people spoke more than one language and/or dialect. With the foundation of independent countries, plurilingualism became a more visible phenomenon (Krumm 2004) and has increasingly attracted the interest of linguists over the years.

Latvia has always been a multicultural and multilingual country. In July 2012 there were 154 nationalities and ethnic groups living in Latvia. The largest nationalities were Latvians (1,319,552 people), Russians (603,125), Byelorussians (77,423), Ukrainians (54,041) and Poles (50,498) (*Latvijas iedzīvotāju sadalījums pēc nacionālā sastāva un valstiskās piederības: 2012*). The 2011 Population Census data show that out of 2.07 million inhabitants, Latvian is the language spoken in a family for 1.16 million people and Russian for 698,757 people. Other popular languages spoken at home are Lithuanian (2,164 speakers), Polish (1,774 speakers) and Ukrainian (1,664 speakers) (*Population Census 2011 Results: 2012*). Unfortunately, the 2011 Population and Housing Census did not include a question on foreign languages spoken in Latvia. The 2000 Population Census data show the most popular foreign languages spoken in Latvia: English (339,949 speakers), German (179,446) and French (9752) (*Results of the 2000 Population and Housing Census in Latvia: 2002*).

An area which highlights foreign language use is tourism. Ever since Latvia joined the European Union (EU), it has become a popular tourist destination: there were 5,496,000 international visitors in 2008, 4,727,000 in 2009 and 5,042,000 in 2010 (*Indicators of Resident and Non-resident Travelers: 2010*). Of the visitors coming to Latvia in 2008 and 2009, 4.74 million were from the EU countries where English is widely spoken while 564,000 came from countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) where Russian dominates. A large proportion of the visitors were from the neighbouring countries: Lithuania (1.96 million) and Estonia (1.38 million). Other languages spoken by the incoming tourists were Swedish (323,000 visitors), German (261,000), Polish (207,000) and Finnish (198,000) (*Statistical Year Book of Latvia 2009, 2010*). Thus, the most popular languages used in Latvia's tourist industry are Latvian, Russian, English and German.

2. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of the study is based on the theories of intercultural competence and its development. For over 25 years intercultural competence has been a fashionable and widely used concept in foreign language teaching/learning (Olk 2009). Many studies stress the importance of the cultural aspect of language learning, suggesting that knowledge of other cultures helps one to learn a language and be aware of cultural values and peculiarities of the language learner's nation (Dirba 2003; Stier 2004, 2006; Ellis 2005; Quappe & Cantatore 2007), thus promoting intercultural dialogue. Intercultural competence is a part of social and communicative competence. The components of intercultural competence include cognition (knowledge, affect), attitudes and emotions, behaviour and skills (Korhonen 2004),

interpretation and relating skills, discovery and interaction skills, and critical awareness of culture or political education (Byram 2000).

Culture as the major determinant of people's thoughts and behaviour (Stier 2006; Van Oord 2008) is the basis of people's socialization and the basis for the development of people and society (Vedins 2008). All the elements of culture (verbal and written language, non-verbal language, symbols, meanings, traditions, habits, customs, norms, rules, ethics) taken together make up a prism through which employees communicate, interpret and experience the world (Stier 2004).

Bodley (2011: 4-22) distinguishes the following approaches to culture: topical, historical, behavioural, normative, functional, mental, structural and symbolic. The applied approach to this study incorporates topical and functional approaches to culture. The topical approach implies that culture includes everything on a list of topics or categories, e.g. social organization, economics, etc., whereas the functional approach regards culture as the way humans try to solve problems of adapting to the environment or living together.

In the course of socialization people acquire society's cultural experience which contributes to raising their cultural awareness: "Language awareness and cultural awareness very often interact with each other in the sense that activities focussing on one of these areas very often involve the other as well" (Penz 2001: 93).

Developing cultural awareness means understanding oneself, knowing one's roots, knowing to what culture one belongs, as well as recognizing the fact that there are "cultural differences in the world of international cooperation" (Merk 2003: 2). Awareness of other cultures enables people to look at phenomena from a wider perspective thus contributing to understanding their own culture and its values (Etus 2008). Raising cultural awareness means that people are able to perceive positive and negative aspects of cultural differences.

In this study, intercultural competence is viewed as an ability to see and understand differences in one's own and other people's cultures and countries, accept them and react accordingly in conversation and behaviour, treating people in a way which is not offensive, scornful or insulting to members of other cultures. At the same time, it includes the knowledge of one's own nation and culture, and awareness of their value, preservation and development in order to form a meaningful interaction and sustain intercultural dialogue between different nationalities, religions and cultures.

Thus by learning the English language and acquiring knowledge in tourism, students also improve their knowledge about other countries and their culture, but it does not mean an automatic transfer of these cultures into students' native language and defaming and ignoring the cultural values of their own country and nationality.

In developing English language competence it is important to take into account the global character of the English language. The literature (Crystal 2003: 1-25; Nunan 2003: 590; Smith 2005: 57; Jenkins 2006: 159; Jenkins 2011; Watterson 2011: 42) adopts several adjectives to denote the new role of English – international, world, global. Watterson (2011: 43-45) points out that the terms 'world English' and 'English as an international language' were first used in the 1920s; however, the

terms 'global English' and 'English as a global language' have existed only since the 1990s. 'World English' denotes English that is "used everywhere, by all its speakers, of whatever national and cultural background" (Watterson 2011: 45). The terms 'international English' and 'English as an international language' are associated with international functionality in business, science, tourism etc. (*ibid.*: 46-47). English as a global language means that English has achieved a genuinely global status – it has developed a special role that is recognized in every country. English has been adopted as the official language of the country or it has achieved the status of the priority foreign language in the given country (Crystal 2003: 3-4; Nunan 2003: 590).

English is the most widely taught foreign language in more than 100 countries in the world (Crystal 2003: 5), including Latvia. This has led to a situation whereby already in 2001 "the global number of non-native speakers was substantially larger than its native speakers (about 4:1)" (House 2001). This means that students have to be prepared to communicate not only with native English speakers but also with non-native English speakers from different countries. They must be aware that they "learn and use English more for interlinguacultural communication than to communicate with speakers who share their first linguaculture" (Jenkins 2006: 164). Students have to be exposed to world Englishes and to their lexical, grammatical, pronunciation peculiarities: "awareness should be created and cross-cultural communication strategies should be studied" (Kilickaya 2009: 37).

Developing intercultural competence is a rather slow learning process which includes learning a foreign language, intercultural training and gaining experience from meeting people of other cultures (Korhonen 2004), self-reflection, appreciating cultural similarities and differences, using cultural resources, respecting all cultures (Singh & Rampersad 2010).

3. Research design and methods

This formative evaluation study (O'Leary 2010; Scriven 2007) implementing mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative) of research (Hunter & Brewer 2003; Kelle & Erzberger 2004) was conducted between 2009 and 2011 in the fourth largest higher education institution of Latvia.

The purpose of the study was to explore tourism students' and graduates' intercultural language competence in relation to working in a multicultural environment, and proposals are made for facilitating the development of students' intercultural language competence in an ESP course.

The research questions are as follows:

1. Does tourism students' and graduates' intercultural language competence correspond to the requirements of working in a multicultural environment?
2. How can students' intercultural competence be facilitated in an ESP course?

The following research methods were applied: an analysis of theoretical literature and sources, empirical methods – data collection (surveys containing structured and open questions), data processing and analysis methods (primary and secondary

quantitative data analysis by applying SPSS 16.0 software – frequencies, means, Kruskal Wallis Test, Pearson Correlation Test, Cronbach's Alpha Reliability and Validity test (Raščevska & Kristapone 2000) and discourse analysis (Lynch 2007) and qualitative data processing and analysis software AQUAD (Mayring 2002) for the analysis of qualitative data.

The study consisted of the following stages:

1. the context analysis (analysis of theoretical literature and sources on intercultural competence and English as a global, international and world language);
2. the survey of 61 fourth-year tourism students applying a Likert scale questionnaire ("1" the lowest and "6" the highest score) for three questions in which the students had to make a self-assessment of knowledge and skills acquired during their studies and their usefulness for intercultural communication during the internship training supplemented with open questions in order to study in detail students' experience and intercultural competence gained during internship. In the open questions the students had to describe intercultural communication with their colleagues, express their opinion on other cultures based on their observations, point to communication problems with colleagues and provide solutions, analyse their communication with clients, describe some misunderstandings at work caused by cultural differences and say how these situations were resolved;
3. the survey of 144 graduates applying a Likert scale questionnaire ("1" the lowest and "6" the highest score) for 10 questions dealing with the graduates' work experience, self-assessment of their skills and knowledge gained during their studies and their application at work, as well as containing two open questions in order to study the compliance of graduates' intercultural competence with working in a multicultural environment. In the open questions the graduates were asked to point to the knowledge and skills they were lacking and explain how this lack of certain knowledge and skills has influenced their work;
4. drawing conclusions and elaborating proposals for facilitating the development of students' intercultural language competence in an ESP course.

Considering the six competence levels – the lowest and highest level of *basic, independent* and *proficient user* (Tišļa 2005), a six-point scale was used for evaluation of students' and graduates' competence which has been defined here as "a combination of knowledge, skills and attitude appropriate to the context" (Recommendation 2006/962/EC 2006: 13).

4. Study sample

The study sample was composed based on the approach of Raščevska & Kristapone (2000) and Geske & Grīnfelds (2006).

An intentional sample of 61 fourth year (final year) tourism students who had undergone all the internship training envisaged by the curriculum was composed. 33 respondents (54.1%) had undergone internship only in Latvia, whereas eight respondents had not done internship in Latvia at all. 13 respondents (21.3%) had practised abroad once, seven respondents (11.5%) twice and eight respondents (13.1%) three

times. From the total number of internship periods (183 times) the respondents had visited Greece 17 times (9.3%), the USA 14 times (7.7%), Cyprus nine times, Italy and the UK twice, Switzerland and Ireland once. Respondents were questioned during the final internship meeting in which they reported on their internship results.

A random sample of 144 respondents was formed for the graduates' survey. The majority of respondents work in a tourism enterprise (76 respondents or 52.8%). 21 respondents (27.6%) represented medium-size tourism establishments and 22 respondents (28.9%) large tourism establishments. The respondents represented all regions of the country: 89 respondents (61.8%) were from the largest region – Riga and Riga region – while 14 respondents (9.7%) worked in another European country. Respondents were questioned by e-mail sending a link to the online questionnaire.

5. Findings of the study

The findings of the students' survey show that language competence is closely connected with intercultural competence. Most students consider understanding cultures and customs of other countries to be significant for work and studies. The findings are as follows: 47 students (77.0%) find the knowledge of the culture and traditions of the target country significant for successful intercultural communication, 54 students (88.5%) consider that the knowledge of the behaviour and communication styles of the target country make intercultural communication easier, and 49 students (80.0%) assert that the knowledge of the target nationality's temperament is significant in order to understand the people from other countries.

The respondents have evaluated language competence, namely English (59 students), Russian (57 students) and German (28 students), as being among the most important skills for intercultural communication. 16 students out of 61 (26.3%) pointed to the communication problems caused by the lack of English language skills. Many students worked abroad and several of them pointed to the fact that the lack of the local state language skills created communication problems. Communication problems with colleagues also arose due to differences in temperament, mentality and global outlook (12 respondents or 19.7%). The respondents noted the biggest discrepancy while working with Greek colleagues; one respondent (Student 43) affirmed that "Greeks perceive everything very emotionally". Some respondents indicated that Arabs, Romanians, Albanians and Bulgarians had entirely different cultures and understanding and ways of thinking, while two respondents (Student 57, Student 55) thought that Scots, English and Swiss differed and were "more conservative in comparison to Latvians".

Regarding work with clients the results are not so different and respondents mentioned their low level of English language skills or poor pronunciation (35 respondents) as the main problem, as well as the unwillingness of clients to communicate in English. For one respondent (Student 10) the solution was found by using gestures or by adopting phrases from another language, e.g. French.

The students have remarked that they would have been able to work more successfully if they had possessed the competence of the following languages: Greek,

Italian, Estonian, Lithuanian, Polish, Dutch, Swedish, Finnish, Spanish, and Chinese. Greek was naturally mentioned by the students who had been practising in Greece and Cyprus (e.g. Student 1, Student 8, Student 43, Student 45, Student 47), whereas Swedish, Lithuanian, Estonian, Finnish and Polish were mentioned by the students undergoing internship training in Latvia (e.g. Student 5, Student 6, Student 9, Student 18, Student 23, Student 27, Student 31, Student 38). The following examples are taken from the students' survey to illustrate this:

Student 8: "It was quite difficult to communicate with Greek customers as they do not speak English or Russian – the languages which I speak. Besides, the Greek clients considered that as they were attending a restaurant in Greece, they would naturally be addressed in Greek. Greek language skills would have helped me to understand their wishes and work better."

Student 27: "Sometimes it was difficult to communicate with people who do not speak English, Russian or Latvian. I would have felt more comfortable with those tourists if I had been able to communicate in a Scandinavian language or Lithuanian and Estonian. We had very many clients from these countries."

The Faculty management has responded to the students' wishes and has introduced Spanish and Russian as the third foreign language alongside German and French.

The qualitative analysis revealed the relations between language problems and using gestures (Student 10, Student 43, Student 56), language problems and negative experience (Student 11), language problems and different traditions (Student 44, Student 45). The respondents acknowledged the importance of knowing the basic habits and traditions of all nationalities that tourism employees would meet. This would prevent any misunderstandings and problems in communication and would help the students to choose the culturally appropriate behaviour when serving the customers. The students mostly coped with European guests; however, they pointed to the lack of knowledge regarding different styles of greeting with different nationalities and the awkward situations they sometimes found themselves in because of the lack of corresponding knowledge. The study showed that more attention should be paid to introducing students not only to other European cultures but also to Arab and Asian cultures, given the emerging tourism markets. This could be also done in language courses by selecting appropriate texts, case studies and promoting discussions in the group.

Considering the students' internship (Latvia or some other country), the Kruskal Wallis Test revealed that the students' answers differed in the following evaluation categories: knowledge of the culture and traditions of the target country ($p=0.039$), knowledge of the behaviour and communication styles of the target country ($p=0.000$), knowledge of the target nationality's temperament ($p=0.010$). This might be explained by the fact that the students who had undergone internship training abroad had gained experience working in a multicultural environment. They had obtained experience also by communicating with the locals, observing their lifestyle, traditions, culture, etc. The students' answers were also influenced by their visits abroad for other reasons apart from training. The influence was demonstrated regarding the students' opinion on the necessity of English language competence in intercultural communica-

tion both depending on the times the students had been abroad ($p=0.001$) and the region/country visited ($p=0.039$). The more times the students had been abroad, the more they had the opportunity to apply their language skills in practice. The applied Cronbach's Alpha Test verified a high data reliability ($\alpha=0.756$).

The graduates' survey revealed their relatively high self-evaluation of intercultural language competence, the means ranging from 3.15 to 5.24 ($\max=6.0$). The highest evaluation is given to abilities to communicate with clients (5.24), an ability to work in a multicultural team (5.16), and abilities to communicate with colleagues (5.19). English (4.85) and Russian (4.47) language competences are highly evaluated whereas graduates' German/French language competence received a comparatively low evaluation (3.15). Only 56 graduates (38.39%) consider that they have sufficient German/French language capacity. The situation in language learning might be explained by the socio-cultural, historical and educational situation in the country and its geographical location, which substantiates the spread and popularity of English, German and Russian in Latvia. Considering the incoming tourism tendencies in Latvia, it is necessary to pay more attention to developing German language competence.

In most cases the graduates' survey shows a moderate correlation between the issues under investigation which points to the mutual relatedness of the phenomena. An ability to work in a multicultural team lies at the core of developing tourism specialists' professional competence as in nearly all cases it demonstrates a moderate correlation ($r=0.310-0.693$; $p=0.000$). Surprisingly, the only exceptions are German/French language competence ($r=0.277$, $p=0.001$) where a small correlation is observed and Russian language competence ($r=0.146$; $p=0.080$) where no correlation is revealed. Communication abilities with clients ($r=0.314-0.650$; $p=0.000$) and colleagues ($r=0.300-0.632$) have a moderate correlation with other phenomena under investigation which means they influence the development of tourism specialists' professional competence and vice versa. English language competence has a moderate correlation with an ability to work in a multicultural team ($r=0.395$; $p=0.000$), an ability to motivate employees ($r=0.316$; $p=0.000$), responsibility for one's decisions ($r=0.326$; $p=0.000$), a strategic approach to entrepreneurship ($r=0.322$; $p=0.000$), an ability to clearly explain their opinion ($r=0.363$; $p=0.000$) and presentation skills ($r=0.381$; $p=0.000$). Contrary to the previously mentioned competences, German/French language competence and Russian language competence have low correlations or no correlations at all. This also explains why graduates expressed the need to improve their Russian language competence and third language (German/French) competence. The applied Cronbach's Alpha Test verifies high data reliability ($\alpha=0.897$).

Graduates' answers to open questions support the findings of the quantitative survey. They stress the need to pay more attention to language learning, especially German and Russian, to succeed in working in a multicultural environment. For example, Graduate 36 suggested that "it would be helpful if the second and third foreign language skills could be strengthened in the internship abroad". It has to be added that the majority of graduates considered their English language competence to be highly developed.

Graduates also stressed the need to pay more attention to the study courses on

culture: "There was a lot of theory in the studies, which is good, but it would be wise to inform students about the real situation in tourism. It would be necessary to study world geography and culture in a more detailed way" (Graduate 28); "It is necessary to compare Latvian tourism with other countries of the world" (Graduate 136).

Thus, students' and graduates' surveys point to the significance of intercultural competence in developing tourism specialists' professional competence. As language and culture are related, intercultural competence can be facilitated in an ESP course.

6. Discussion

Students of tourism study the course *English for Tourism Purposes* for a duration of four semesters and a second foreign language (German, French, Spanish or Russian) for four semesters as well. The ESP curriculum covers a wide range of topics (career in tourism, food, accommodation, transport, tour operators and travel agents, tour guiding, promotional activities, business travel, economic aspects etc.) providing students with the professional terminology necessary for active interaction with people of different nationalities with varied cultural and educational backgrounds.

The objective of the ESP course is to develop professional English language competence that would allow students to creatively use the target language both at receptive and productive levels in communication and professional tourism activities taking into consideration the peculiarities of different cultural traditions, to demonstrate comprehensive general knowledge and generic and professional competences and use the language as a means for studying the content of other courses.

The ESP course provides an opportunity:

1. to acquire the knowledge of professional lexis relating to the tourist trade;
2. to develop the skills to implement the knowledge acquired in further professional work, as well as in solving complicated problems in a specialized working environment;
3. to develop language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and an ability to implement them for everyday and business communication and studies;
4. to enhance the development of generic competences necessary for effective work in the industry;
5. to enhance the development of critical and creative thinking.

Learning outcomes: Level C1 of English language competence is to be achieved according to the EU system of validation of students' language competence (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, 2001). Students have to acquire the appropriate professional lexis in the English language, professional knowledge in the tourism industry, and an ability to creatively implement them in professional activities in a multicultural environment. They have to be responsible for decision-making, management of their own work and/or teamwork and accept challenges, creatively use new opportunities, and independently work in a versatile socio-cultural environment.

The following teaching-learning methods and approaches are applied to master the course content: the communicative approach, the task-based approach, the lexical approach, the creative approach, problem-based discussions, case studies, role plays, simulations, presentations, individual work, group work, pair work, project work, etc.

Students' intercultural competence is promoted in the ESP course by applying specially designed teaching/learning aids and tasks, and selecting the above-mentioned methods and approaches that foster intercultural communication. The selected teaching/learning aids must correspond to four criteria: providing information about the country, its inhabitants, and values and attitudes, and promoting the student's wish to learn and accept other cultures (Kalnina & Petre 2006).

Considering the fact that English has become a global language, it is essential to prepare students for international communication "by teaching them strategic competence when interacting with speakers who speak other varieties of English" (Farell & Martin 2009: 4). This has to be done taking into account the teaching/learning context and students' educational and cultural needs (*ibid.*: 4). Students have to be exposed to other non-native accents of English so that it will be easier for them to understand the message (Jenkins 2011). The following skills might be useful: asking the interlocutor to slow down, to repeat the message, to excuse oneself for making the interlocutor wait while finding the appropriate word (Farell & Martin 2009: 5). Intercultural competence helps interlocutors overcome socio-linguistic differences thus decreasing misunderstandings between the speakers (*ibid.*: 5-6). Jenkins & Seidlhofer (2001) consider that it is necessary to offer European students such teaching/learning materials that focus on the European context and are important to European speakers of English. Since students of tourism are in contact with people of different nationalities, not only European, it is recommended that they have exposure to Standard English, European English and other world Englishes.

Intercultural language competence is facilitated first of all by the exposure of students to authentic and specially designed teaching materials including text, listening and video materials throughout the teaching/learning process. Students hear and get accustomed to the accents of different language speakers and are able to understand the English spoken by people of different nationalities in real-life situations while undergoing internship in the tourism industry. They are exposed to culturally diverse viewpoints and opinions.

One of the ways to develop students' intercultural competence is through culture assimilation exercises. Students are informed about different incidents that characterize a typical and critical interaction between two representatives from different cultures. For each incident several explanations are offered (one is right and the others are wrong) for the activity of the interaction partners. Students have to find the solution which is the most typical for the interaction partners. Other methods include the analysis of critical incidents or case studies, which may be stories, fairy tales, newspaper articles, video or audio recordings. It is advisable to think of some challenging themes – for example, differentiating between a business gift and a bribe. Other tasks may include problem-solving situations that reveal mistakes in communication or conflicts between members of different cultures. Students may also apply decision-making strategies. Another option is to use role play and case studies which are close to

real-life contexts, and students can demonstrate their attitudes, emotions and values while performing their role (Morgensternova & Gillernova 2005).

During the English language course, there is a lot of group work and pair work in order to involve all students in the activities. The pairs or groups are formed by taking into account students' experiences so that they can exchange their experience gained while travelling or working in Latvia and/or abroad and form meaningful intercultural communication learning from each other. The students have to create an itinerary for a tour and sell it to their clients. Students can choose between two options – to sell foreign clients a tour around Latvia or to sell a tour abroad to Latvian tourists – thus demonstrating understanding of the needs of different cultures. The students also give presentations on holidays, festivals and celebrations in another country; present the national cuisine of another country; plan a business trip abroad, taking into consideration the cultural and business traditions of the target nation; inform group mates about the most popular tourist attractions and museums in another country.

In such a way students become aware that each culture is unique. The previously-mentioned applied tasks help in developing students' imagination and creativity and enhance the students' intercultural language competence.

7. Conclusions

The findings of the study regarding English language competence and intercultural competence are similar to those of the study conducted in Lithuania (Pukelis & Pileikiene 2009) which show that students have developed an ability to work with people from other cultural environments, they possess knowledge of intercultural differences, professional knowledge of other countries and have highly developed foreign language competence. These abilities coincide with the generic competences of the Tuning project – knowledge of a second language, appreciation of diversity and multiculturalism, ability to work in an international context, understanding of cultures and customs of other countries (González & Wagenar 2003, 2005, 2007).

Both students and graduates acknowledged the significance of English language competence, intercultural competence, the knowledge of different cultures and an ability to work in multicultural teams for work in the tourist industry. The students' survey indicated that students are prepared to work in a European context, but they are not ready to work with the tourists from Asia and the Middle-East as they have not acquired enough knowledge of those cultures. The findings show that most of the students and graduates have a high level of English language competence but their intercultural competence has to be improved.

Intercultural competence is an important component of tourism specialists' professional competence as tourism specialists have to meet representatives of different cultures, nationalities and ethnic groups and have to act accordingly, taking into consideration their habits and traditions. Developing students' intercultural competence is a slow process and it is more likely to succeed if the students have the possibility of working in a multicultural context.

The development of students' intercultural language competence may be enhanced during an ESP course in involving students in language activities containing an intercultural content, and the developed intercultural language competence may be further strengthened during internship training working in a multicultural environment.

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