

II. SOCIALINIO DARBO TEORIJA IR PRAKTIKA

DEVELOPMENT OF MULTICULTURAL COMPETENCE IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

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Abstract

Globalization and modernization of society, cultural differences on the one hand and mixture of cultures on the other hand requires multicultural competence from helping professionals, including social workers. According to scientific literature, multicultural competence, as well as other professional competences, consists of knowledge, attitudes and skills, the education of which should be consistent, continuous and lasting whole lifetime.

In order to assess multicultural competence development in social work education, research was conducted surveying social work fourth-year students and interviewing graduates with international social work practice. Respondents were asked about different aspects of multicultural education during their studies: knowledge and skills necessary for multicultural competence, multicultural experience, multicultural competences and social work education.

Data analysis showed that students' opinion about knowledge and skills related to multicultural competence is positive, but critical. They themselves defined what they need for improvement of their multicultural competence. Survey research revealed that social work student during their studies exercised at least three forms of multicultural social work: activities at the national level, professional exchange of knowledge and international practice.

Social work graduates with multicultural social work practice stated that multicultural competence not only enables social workers for an easier free movement within the European Union labour market, possibility to participate in the creation of European social capital, but also have a positive impact on personal and professional growth.

Keywords: *multicultural social work, multicultural competence, development of multicultural competence.*

Introduction

J. Midgley (2011) emphasises that globalization and modernization of social reality calls for rising importance of multicultural social work. Even if a social worker is not directly involved in multicultural work or even if s/he is not interested, the environment in one way or another is influenced by global changes, s/he has to understand the causes and effects of those changes.

Foreign researchers pay attention largely to the field of multicultural competence: I. Jensen (2003), P. L. Tied and I. M. Tied (2005), J. Cooper et al. (2007), more recently J. W. Neuliep (2009), S. Liu et al. (2011) could be mentioned. Multicultural competence in social work is investigated for example by L. M. Healy (2001), J. Midgley (2001), J. Stier (2004), K. Lyons (2006), T. Tripody et M. P. Tripody (2007), R. Hugman (2010), T. J. Palmu (2010), J. Seden et al (2011) and others. In the Lithuanian context, some works on multicultural competence have been done: V. Pruskus (2004), J. Baršauskienė, B. Janusevičiūtė-Ivaškevičienė (2007), R. Jančaitytė (2009), G. Paurienė (2010), E. Virgalaitė-Mečkauskaitė (2011), however there is lack of research on multicultural competence in social work education. This presupposes the relevance of the research and novelty of this article.

The main object is multicultural competence. The goal of the paper is to discuss development of multicultural competence in social work education from the students' point of view. The research questions are: what is the students' opinion about knowledge and skills related to multicultural competence, how often and where students can exercise their multicultural competence during their studies, what is their opinion

about the necessity of multicultural competence to social workers, how social work studies contributed to their multicultural competence.

The article is based on data of two interconnected researches. The first survey was done at one Lithuanian university of all (N=81) four year bachelors who were graduating, so the studies therefore could reflect on their total studies experience. The questionnaire was composed from several information blocs: knowledge and skills for multicultural competences, multicultural experience, multicultural competencies and social work curriculum. The data of the research was processed using descriptive statistics method. Responses to open ended questions were analysed using the content method.

Another research was done with the bachelor level social work graduates (N=33) who have experienced professional exchange (abroad) and/or international practice (the third and the fourth forms of multicultural social work defined by J. Seden et al, 2011). This was nonprobability purposive sampling, where two sampling criteria were applied: studying at bachelor level and study/practice experience abroad. Data of semi-structured interviews was analysed using content analysis.

Ethical issues were taken into account. Respondents were acknowledged with the aim and process of research, free will of participation. During the survey, anonymity, and during interview, confidentiality, was ensured. Data is presented in generalized manner. There were no sensitive issues during researches.

Multicultural Social Work Education

According to P. C. Gorski (2010) multicultural education acknowledges that educational institutions are essential for laying the foundation for the transformation of society and the elimination of injustice. The underlying goal of multicultural education is to affect social change. The pathway toward this goal incorporates three strands of transformation: the transformation of self, the transformation of educational institutions and learning, the transformation of society. Transformation of educational institutions and learning requires student-centred pedagogy, multicultural curriculum, inclusive educational media and materials, supportive learning climate, continuing evaluation and assessment.

At this point should be noted, that next to the most popular “international” (older one) and “multicultural” (more recent one) terms, there are more different concepts which are used in scientific papers: cross-national social work, cross-cultural social work, intercultural social work, global social work, etc., but as L. M. Healy (2001), M. D. Bryan (2010) explained, all these words have similar conceptual meaning. In this paper the term multicultural will be used as it encompasses emphasis not only on the activities out of origin but also in the origin countries (based on M. D. Bryan, 2010).

The notion of multicultural competence is not clearly described. One of the models defines that multicultural competence is composed of knowledge, attitudes, skills of interpretation and connection/relation, skills of interaction and discovery, cultural consciousness and sensitivity (Virgailaitė-Mečkauskaitė, 2008; Healy, 2001). J. Stier

(2004) describes multicultural competence as interactional and cognitive and relates them with generalist social work competences. Authors disagree about using the singular or plural form of the concept “competence,” in this paper preference is given to the singular form.

Multicultural competence is relevant in many professions, especially when professional-client relation is involved. Social work is one of such example. J. Seden et al. (2011) defines four forms of multicultural social work:

- Activities at the national level, usually social work with migrants, refugees, international adoption, etc. This is social work practice in the country of origin but in relation with at least one other culture;
- Professional exchange of knowledge, skills, experience and/or practice. It could or could not be connected with physical movement, for example it could be done in the country of origin (reading articles in international journals or participating in training seminars with foreigners);
- International practice usually understood as social work abroad or in international organizations;
- International social development occurs as the outcome of participation in the one or more activities mentioned above

Multicultural competence is acquired during the course of one’s life, usually learning doesn’t happen incidentally. Several models of multicultural competence training (education) are developed, for example, EEE – Esteem, Empathy, Equity (Tied and Tied, 2005), the model by *Gesellschaft für interkulturelles Zusammenleben* – GIZ (Abrams, Moio, 2009). It should be noted that no one model could “teach” multicultural competence at once, acquiring it is a consistent, permanent, never ending process, well associated with lifelong learning principles. Universities play important role in promoting multicultural education, they could become one of the key factors in the development of multicultural competence for students. Therefore during the research it was chosen to question students about their experience during studies at university.

Knowledge and skills of multicultural competences

The first set of questions was designed to get a general opinion about knowledge and skills related to multicultural competence. There were included questions about understanding of the culture of origin and foreign culture, foreign language skills and communication skills. Open ended question asked about any possible knowledge and/or skills students would like to have for their multicultural competence.

According to E. Virgalaitė-Mečkauskaitė (2011) knowledge about culture of origin is a fundamental component of multicultural competence. It allows comparing of one’s own and other cultures, to notice differences and discover similarities. The second component of multicultural competence is knowledge about other cultures. It helps to communicate with representatives of other nationalities, predict, understand and explain their behaviour (Paurienė, 2010). Normally, knowledge about culture of

origin is better than about foreign culture, and both are essential for multicultural competence development.

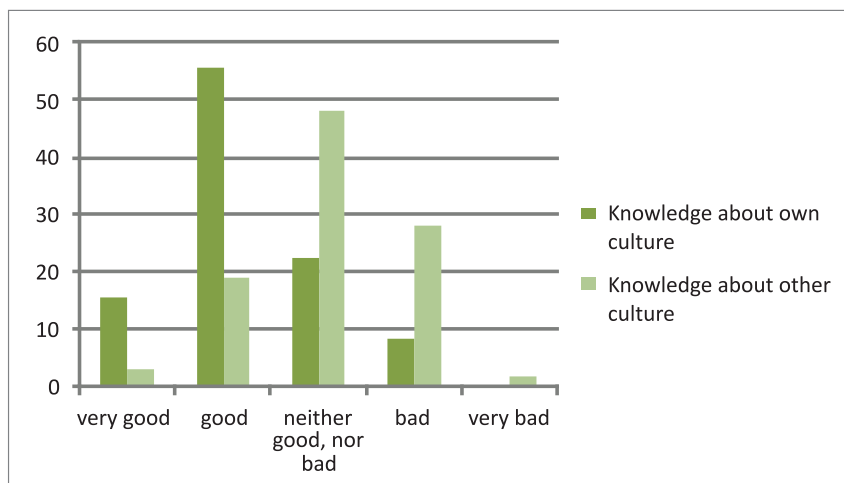


Fig. 1. Knowledge about culture of origin and other cultures, per cent

Survey data shows that knowledge about culture of origin as very good was assessed by 15.4 per cent of respondents, 55.6 per cent of students assessed their knowledge as good, 22.2 per cent said that knowledge is neither good nor bad, 8.4 per cent responded as bad. Response option as very bad was not selected in question about knowledge of the culture of origin. 3.0 per cent of respondents assessed their knowledge of foreign cultures as very good, 19.0 per cent of respondents have good knowledge, 48.0 per cent said their knowledge is neither good nor bad, 28.0 per cent of respondents assessed as bad, 2.0 per cent responded as very bad. Knowledge of culture of origin and other cultures is important in order to better understanding and finding a common language, better communication and collaboration, and it couldn't happen without skills of a foreign language. According to V. Baršauskienė, B. Janusevičiūtė-Ivaškevičienė (2007) foreign language helps not only to build up verbal contact, but also to develop deeper meanings and understanding in a multicultural sense. Language skills are important for understanding and oral and written communication. Improper use and interpretation of language can do a lot of damage and cause confusion. According to T. Tripody et M. P. Tripody (2007) it is important to manage professionally written and spoken language, because many languages have more than one expression, which can be wrongly interpreted in a completely different context of meaning. It is especially relevant to professional language which is used in working with vulnerable clients. Therefore, successful communication requires better than everyday use of foreign language skills, both spoken and written.

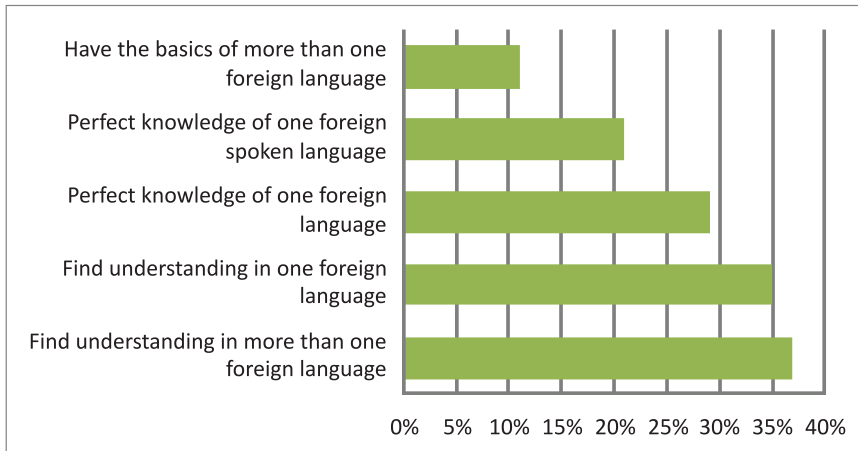


Fig. 2. Competence in foreign language

Survey data shows that 29.0 per cent of social work students reported perfectly managing one foreign language. 37.0 per cent could communicate in one of foreign language. Overall, 72.0 per cent of respondents could communicate in one of foreign language. 63.0 per cent of students strongly agree with the statement that the lack of foreign language skills is the reason why communication with other nationalities could not be completely successful.

Students also were asked what they think about their communication skills with other cultures. Prevailing answer was neither good nor bad—43.2 per cent of respondents choose this statement. 23.3 per cent of students assessed as good, 20.2 per cent as bad, 7.1 per cent said very good, 6.2 per cent—very bad. Data shows that social work students quite critically evaluate their ability to communicate with other cultures. 63.4 per cent of students said, that they faced verbal or non-verbal miscommunication cases.

In order to find out what social work students lack for successful multicultural communication, respondents were asked to answer an open ended question. Students defined that they need general knowledge about other cultures, information about specific situations which are mostly associated with etiquette and religion, foreign language and communication skills. Even the responses to closed questions about foreign language showed that majority of students can freely communicate in at least one foreign language, answering to open ended question students still defined shortage in using foreign languages, as it was mentioned most often as well as communication skills. Students wrote that they need to improve communication skills with certain culture representatives; usually it was mentioned Muslim culture.

In general, fourth year social work students' opinion about knowledge and skills related to multicultural competence is positive (knowledge about culture of origin, foreign language, communication skills) but critical (not enough knowledge about foreign cultures, need for better communication in foreign language). They them-

selves define what they need for improvement of their multicultural competence. All these issues are related to students' multicultural experience during their studies.

Multicultural Experience During Studies

The second set of questions was designed to find out how often and where students can exercise their multicultural competence during their studies.

25.3 per cent of respondents said that they communicate with foreigners more often than once a month, 20.1 per cent—once a week, 19.3 per cent more often than once a week, and 19.3 per cent—everyday. Less than once a month with representatives of other cultures communicate 16.0 per cent of respondents. Respondents also had the opportunity to choose the answer that they have never communicated with other cultures, but it was not chosen.

Respondents have many possibilities to meet foreigners at the university as there are many degree and Erasmus exchange students, moreover, 72.4 per cent of respondents stated that during field placement they met representatives of other nationalities as well.

Research data shows, that social work students often interact with representatives of other cultures, it can be assumed that they notice differences between the various nationalities' behaviour, communication, habits and manners. Respondents were asked to answer the open question of what differences they noticed facing other cultures.

Differences between representatives of different cultures divided into sub-categories: external and emotional differences. Respondents usually noticed external differences. As V. Pruskus (2004) noted external visible physical differences is easy to notice, this doesn't require multicultural competence. Responses about emotional differences suggest that some of the respondents have higher multicultural competence.

Social work final year students reported that they often communicate with other cultures, noticed and identified various differences, and they strongly disagree with the statement that communication with other nationalities create for them discomfort. In general, research data shows that students not only have multicultural competence but that their environment requires from them exercise multicultural competence, it is needed during their studies, therefore social work curriculum could benefit to these students' needs.

Multicultural competencies in social work curriculum

The last set of questions investigated students' opinion about the necessity of multicultural competences to social workers and how social work studies contributed to their multicultural competence.

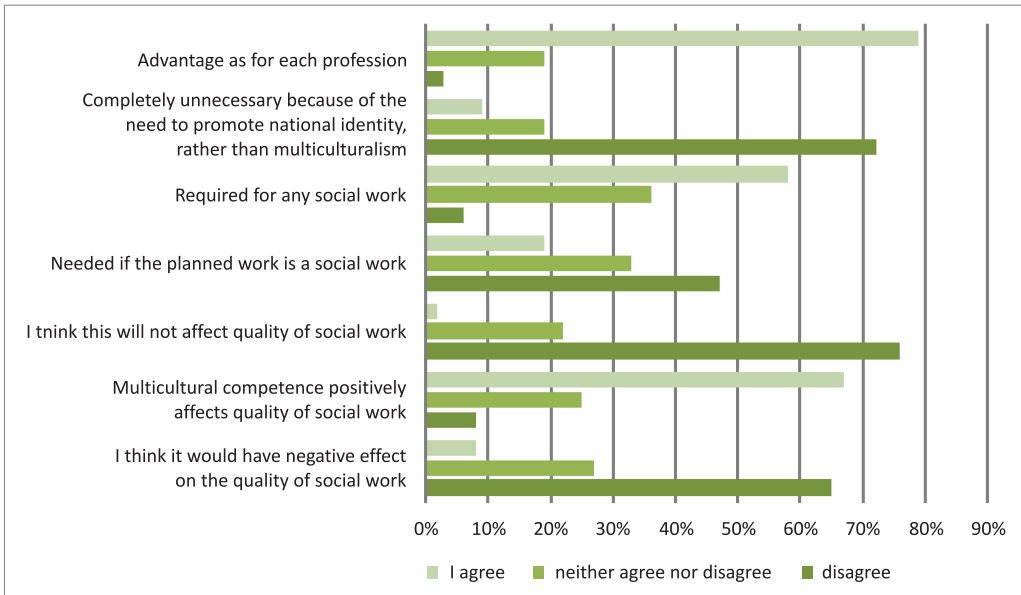


Fig. 3. *Importance of multicultural competence in social work profession*

Answering the question with multiple possibilities for answers, 79.0 per cent of the respondents agreed to the statement that multicultural competence is an advantage in social work as in every other profession. 58.0 per cent of social work students agreed that multicultural competences are necessary in any social work field, 67.0 per cent agreed that multicultural competence would positively affect the results of social work. 72.0 per cent disagreed with the idea to promote national identity rather than multiculturalism. Also 47.0 per cent of respondents disagreed, that multicultural competence is necessary only when planning to work in social work area internationally.

Survey data shows that social work students are positive about multicultural competence and believe that it is necessary for any practical activity in social work; it could make a positive impact on the results of social workers. Generally, social work students positively evaluate the multicultural competence in social work.

Next set of questions was designed to investigate students' opinion about multicultural competence development during their studies.

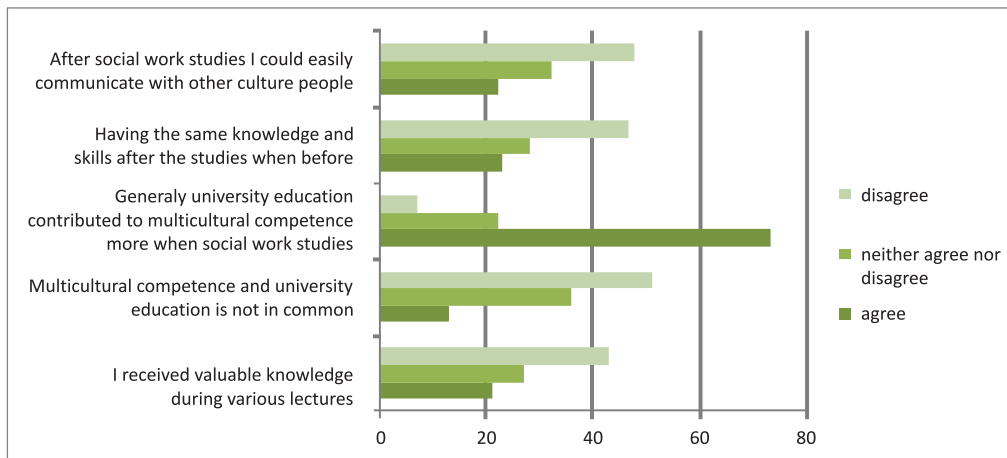


Fig. 4. Development of multicultural competence during social work studies, per cent

46.8 per cent of respondents disagree about having the same knowledge and skills after their studies as before them, however, 73.4 per cent of the students stated that general university education contributed to their ability to communicate with members of other cultures more than social work study programme. Fourth year social work students, who are finishing social work programme, said that they would like to get more knowledge about multiculturalism in social work. 89.0 per cent of respondents said they believe that social work studies should focus more on multiculturalism and development of multicultural competence.

Students were asked to answer to an open ended question and to express their opinion on what has to be changed in social work study programme. Content analysis showed that students suggested including separate subject about multiculturalism or multicultural communication, to intensify foreign language learning in social work programme. Another aspect, which was reflected in the students' proposals, was related to practical activities, e.g. to provide more possibilities to do field placement abroad.

Survey research showed that social work students during their studies exercise at least three forms of multicultural social work: activities at the national level, professional exchange of knowledge and international practice (Seden et al, 2011). It is assumed that international practice could benefit most the development of multicultural competence; therefore students who for a shorter or longer time studied or had field placement abroad were interviewed about their experience.

Data of students who have experienced multicultural social work shows that these experiences provide opportunities for students to gain comparative interdisciplinary intercultural approach toward topic under study; to gain knowledge about other cultures and to become more tolerant to them; to participate in student-centred international learning environment and all this had an influence on personal and professional growth (Pivoriene, 2010). The data reveals that experience of multicultural social work

is connected not only with transformation of learning, but also with transformation of self and even with transformation of society (according to P. C. Gorski classification, 2010). Respondents emphasised that the main benefit is that acquired multicultural competence was recognized and included in their curriculum (mainly as a substitute of elective courses). This makes it a higher possibility to move in the European labour market and work more efficiently with vulnerable groups all across Europe, thus building the social capital of the European community. As P. C. Gorski (2010) says, multicultural education uses the transformation of self and education as a metaphor and point of departure for the transformation of society.

Conclusions

Students critically assessed their ability to communicate with representatives of other cultures, mainly because of a lack of knowledge about other cultures and skills in a foreign language. More than half of respondents can freely communicate in one of the foreign language, but they don't think that one foreign language is enough.

Students have multicultural experience during their studies: they often communicate with representatives of other cultures mainly at university and during field placement, thus experiencing the first and the second form of multicultural social work.

Students acquired their multicultural competences at university more often during general education courses than in social work disciplines; and all of them agree that social work curriculum has to be updated in one or another way adding multicultural education.

Research data shows that multicultural competence is developed during social work education, but it happens more in an unplanned than in a structured way, therefore there are many things to do in order to enhance multicultural education in social work at the university level.

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MULTIKULTŪRINIŲ KOMPETENCIJŲ UGDYMAS SOCIALINIŲ DARBUOTOJŲ RENGIME

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Globalėjantis pasaulis ir modernėjanti visuomenė, kurioje skirtingų tautų ir kultūrų tarpusavio komunikacija tampa kasdieniu reiškiniu, reikalauja socialinių darbuotojų išankstinio pasirengimo veikti besikeičiančioje visuomenėje.

Viena svarbiausių šio pasirengimo dalių yra multikultūrinės kompetencijos įgijimas socialinio darbo studijų metu. Kaip teigia autoriai, multikultūrinė kompetencija, kaip ir kitos profesinės kompetencijos, susideda iš žinių, nuostatų ir įgūdžių, kurių ugdymas turėtų būti nuoseklus, nenutrūkstamas ir trunkantis visą gyvenimą.

Siekiant įvertinti multikultūrinių kompetencijų ugdymą socialinio darbo studijų metu buvo atlikti tyrimai apklausiant visus vieno universiteto socialinio darbo ketvirto kurso studentus bei atliekant interviu su studentais, kurie turėjo multikultūrinio socialinio darbo patirties studijų metu. Tyrimo metu respondentai buvo klausiami apie jų multikultūrinio ugdymo patirtį universitete, darant prielaidą, kad ši švietimo institucija galėtų ir turėtų tapti svarbia multikultūrinių kompetencijų ugdymo vieta.

Tyrimo instrumentai sudaryti remiantis multikultūrinės kompetencijos sudedamosiomis dalimis, respondentai buvo prašomi atsakyti į klausimus apie žinias ir įgūdžius, reikalingus multikultūrinei kompetencijai, multikultūrinę patirtį studijų metu, multikultūrinės kompetencijos ugdymą socialinio darbo studijų metu.

Išanalizavus socialinio darbo ketvirto kurso studentų atsakymus paaiškėjo, kad respondentai kritiškai vertina savo gebėjimus bendrauti su kitų kultūrų atstovais dėl žinių apie kitas kultūras trūkumo ir nepakankamų užsienio kalbos įgūdžių. Studijų metu studentai turėjo galimybių įgyti multikultūrinės patirties Lietuvoje ir užsienyje. Respondentai teigia, kad multikultūrinė kompetencija yra svarbi socialinio darbuotojo profesijos dalis, tačiau studijuodami universitete daugiau multikultūrinės kompetencijos galėjo įgyti bendrauniversitetiniuose nei socialinio darbo studijų dalykuose.

Socialinio darbo studentai, turintys multikultūrinio socialinio darbo patirties, teigia, jog multikultūrinis kompetentingumas ne tik sudaro sąlygas socialiniams darbuotojams laisvai judėti Europos Sąjungos darbo rinkoje, užsiimti savanoriška veikla, dalyvauti kuriant Europos socialinį kapitalą, bet ir ugdo toleranciją kitoms kultūroms bei daro teigiamą įtaką kitų kultūrų supratimui, kuris skatina asmenybės ir profesinį augimą.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: multikultūrinė kompetencija, multikultūrinis socialinis darbas, multikultūrinės kompetencijos ugdymas.