

# SUPPORTING MULTICULTURAL COMPETENCE IN LITHUANIA: MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS AND EXPECTATIONS FOR LEARNING ABOUT TURKIC CULTURES

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## Background

- The current sociopolitical environment in Europe is characterized by a strong emphasis on the recognition of diversity and on the sustainability of heritage languages and cultures in a globalizing society.
- This focus has led to an increasing awareness of multilingualism and multiculturalism, in turn stimulating efforts to promote multilingual and multicultural development as an important aspect of education (CoE, 2001; Çelik, 2013).
- As part of this process, European higher education institutions frequently offer elective courses that are designed to promote positive attitudes toward diversity, as well as improved understanding and appreciation for foreign cultures.
- In order to ensure that these aims are achieved, it is important to understand what motivates students to enroll in such courses; whether their expectations are being met; and whether they believe that their level of intercultural competence has been enhanced by the course content.
- Furthermore, it is important to understand the difficulties involved in raising students' awareness of a foreign culture in a university environment (Ismailov, 2010).

## Purpose of the Study

- The researchers designed this study as a means to investigate the development of multicultural skills in the context of an undergraduate course in Turkic cultures offered at a prominent Lithuanian university.
- The results may be used to aid educators in determining the types of content that should be taught in cultural education courses, as well as effective approaches to teaching about foreign cultures and to encouraging enrollment in diversity-oriented classes.

## The Course

- The aim of the course is to present the historical, political and economic structure of Turkic states in Asia Minor, Caucasus and Central Asia and to raise students' awareness of the origin and culture of the Turkic people.
- The course also offers a curriculum to undergraduates involving study of the classification of relevant languages, with special emphasis on the Ural-Altai language family, to which the Turkic languages belong.
- Visual materials and extracts from several books on history of Turkic countries and Turkish Turks in particular were utilized in the course.

## Research Design

- **Participants**
  - The participants in the study were 50 undergraduate students aged 19 to 24 years old.
  - All of the participants spoke Lithuanian as their native language, with varying levels of proficiency in other foreign languages, mainly English and Russian.
  - Most of the participants had travelled outside of Lithuania at least once; most of their foreign travel was for sightseeing/touristic purposes, with some traveling for educational purposes, work or participation in international sporting events.
  - The students generally expressed an interest in future international travel and in getting to know people from other cultures.
- **Data collection and analysis**
  - The data were collected via a 5 –pt. scalar survey that was designed by the researchers to elicit the views of students who participated in the course in terms of:
    - their motivation for taking the course;
    - whether the course affected their views of Turkic cultures, and in what way;
    - whether they found the material covered in the course to be useful;
    - and how they perceived the impact of the course on their level of intercultural competence.
  - The students were asked to rate the importance of each survey item (e.g., not important, of little importance, neutral, important, very important).
  - The surveys were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun 2008). Descriptive statistics were determined for each of the survey items.

## MOTIVATION FOR TAKING A COURSE IN TURKIC CULTURES

- The most important motivation for taking a course in Turkic cultures was reported by the participants as wanting to understand what is going on in the world (M=4.5510).
- "Broadening my horizons" was also cited as an important motivating factor (M=4.4286).
- "Developing an understanding of people from Turkic cultures" was given some degree of importance (M=3.6200).
- The least important motivating factor was noted as "pleasing a family member or friend (M=1.8163).
- Overall, it can be seen that the participants' motivation for enrolling in the course involved a desire to learn more about the world in general, rather than a specific focus on learning about Turkic culture.

## Results

### IMPACT OF THE COURSE ON PARTICIPANTS' KNOWLEDGE AND VIEWS OF TURKIC CULTURES

- Most of the participants felt that the course had increased their awareness of Turkic cultures (M=4.1800).
- Many of the participants expressed that the course had deepened their appreciation for Turkic culture (M=3.6600).
- The participants overall did not feel that their new level of awareness of Turkic culture had resulted in a more negative view of Turks (M=1.6600).

### OVERALL USEFULNESS AND QUALITY OF THE COURSE

- In terms of the quality of the course, the participants agreed strongly that the instructor was knowledgeable about Turks and Turkic culture (M=4.5714) and that the course had increased their awareness of Turkic cultures (M=4.1200).
- The students also felt that the knowledge they had developed in the course would benefit them in the future (M=3.6600) and that, as a result of the course, they wanted to learn more about Turkic culture (M=3.6327).

### IMPACT OF THE COURSE ON STUDENTS' LEVEL OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

- According to the survey results, the participants believed overall that their level of intercultural awareness had increased (M=3.900) and that they had a greater understanding of what is going on in the world (M=3.8600).
- Furthermore, they felt that the course had increased their desire to learn more about other cultures in addition to Turkic culture (M=3.8200).
- In addition, they often felt that the course had helped

## Discussion

- The results of the study indicate that the greatest motivation for students to enroll in the course was developing a better understanding of the world and to broaden their horizons.
- Furthermore, the participants reported for the most part that they felt they had increased their multicultural awareness and had a deeper appreciation for diversity, in line with the educational goals of the CEFR (CoE, 2001; 2011).
- Overall, the participants enjoyed the course and believed it would benefit them in their future lives, and that it had helped them to develop as multicultural citizens.

## Conclusion

- Although the study was conducted on a small scale with a limited number of participants, the majority of the students who enroll in the course come from similar backgrounds and experiences; thus, it is not unlikely that they would express similar views.
- In light of the findings, it can be concluded that, overall, the course is achieving the CEFR-grounded goal of increasing students' understanding of international cultures.
- Furthermore, the course served as a motivating influence for students to seek further opportunities to expand their knowledge of other cultures.
- With this in mind, it can be asserted that similar courses in this university, as well as other learning contexts, may be effective for developing multicultural awareness and appreciation for diversity.

## References

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