

## E-LEARNING PLATFORM INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION IN ERA OF DISTANCE – NEW CHALLENGES FOR TEACHERS

The article E-learning platform Intercultural education in era of distance - new challenges for teachers deals with the issues related to the development of intercultural education, new challenges faced by teachers in the era of the Covid-19 pandemic, socio-economic changes and armed conflicts in the world. The author of the article presents new challenges for current and future educators on the example of an international project aimed at creating new tools and methods in the field of teaching intercultural education.

**Key words:** e-learning platform, intercultural education, remote education, teaching

**Introduction.** The phenomenon of international migrations is growing on a global scale, therefore, taking into account the current situation related to the COVID-19 pandemic and states of war, including the war in Ukraine, crisis situations, there is a need to rethink the existing models of integration of groups of newcomers at risk of disadvantage and the role played by the perspective in them professional success. New challenges arise, including challenges for current and future teachers related to intercultural education.

According to Tadeusz Lewowicki, the present day, apart from the obvious possibilities for a better life, carries dangers. "Nationalist tendencies and social conflicts are increasing. Outbreaks of intolerance are not uncommon. (...) The cynicism of the world of politics and business, group interests of the strong and rich communities somehow allow for the sustaining of many local wars and conflicts" (Lewowicki, 2009), therefore we need intercultural education so

much.

In the opinion of the eminent expert in the field of regional, multicultural and intercultural education, Jerzy Nikitorowicz, "Intercultural education can prepare for the life and interaction of multicultural societies, which extends the scope of its influence to indigenous people and majority groups, foreigners and minority groups, including children, adolescents, adults. in the process of school and lifelong learning (Nikitorowicz, 2009, p. 279).

In modern European societies, professional success is undoubtedly closely related to the level and quality of education. Young people who decide to start higher education and choose the field of study in which they will study, follow very different reasons (Walancik-Ryba, 2021). Activities related to studying are undertaken for internal motivations, achievements, self-image motivations, self-actualization and self-development (Franken, 2005). At the same time, it should be emphasized that education is of particular importance for the process of migrants' integration, which is a long-term process. This is because migrants face a multitude of additional barriers that make it difficult to obtain education. It is closely related to the socio-economic, legal and psychological determinants of adaptation to a new way of life in the host society. It follows from the above that children migrating with their parents have specific needs in the field of education.

International educational platform – interculturalism in a modern edition.

At WSB University, a project was created whose overall goal is to equip future and current teachers and students of pedagogy with tools and knowledge to work with migrant children. Activities under the project will contribute to developing the

competences of teachers who, using new methods, will counteract early leaving for students from disadvantaged groups such as refugee families and economic migrants.

The reality is no longer monolithic and unambiguous, but heterogeneous and fragmented, full of thousands of "small", contradictory narratives. It is difficult to find oneself in it (Melosik, 2002, p. 15), and the more difficult it is to function in a multicultural world without getting to know the culture of the "Others". Therefore, it is worth using various forms of intercultural education, including remote education (Dacko-Pikiewicz, W?dz, Walancik-Fish, Pikiewicz, 2021).

The ED-ON project: Intercultural Education in the Age of Distance Learning, led by WSB University and its partners: Poland, Lithuania, Finland and the Czech Republic (WSB University, Mykolo Romerio Universitetas, Fin Edu Consult Oy, Ostravska Univerzita) is implemented under the Erasmus + program, was set for two years, followed by the first year. The detailed effect of the project is, what has already been done, the development of materials describing innovative methods of work of teachers with children from migrant families, which are available in English as a module of an online educational platform addressed mainly to people dealing with or studying faculties related to working with migrant children. Currently, the module is available to students, eventually it is to be generally available. The e-learning platform includes a module for students of Preschool and Early Childhood Education in Intercultural Education, developed on the basis of ethnographic research among migrants, consisting of methodological and didactic solutions ready for use in school practice, based on courses

developed by all project partners. Courses from 3 partner countries with English translations (Czech, Lithuanian, Polish) were placed on the platform with the substantive support of a partner from Finland. The content is presented in the form of lectures, films, presentations, tests, quizzes and presentations prepared by the student or a group of students (2–3 people) and forms of completing the course by the student: participation in the course and presentation.

The preparation of the materials was preceded by an empirical analysis of the needs, expectations, cultural and cultural regulations in the field of intercultural education in primary schools in Poland, the Czech Republic, Lithuania and Finland. The partner from Finland - Fin Edu Consult Oy is a leader in the field of knowledge and experience transfer, which he gained during many years of cooperation with Finnish schools. Currently, a strategy for the development of the competences of teachers and students in pedagogy related to the education of migrant children is being developed. This cross-cultural education modeling strategy developed by project teams is universal. The participants of the consortium responsible for the implementation of the project are institutions that have undoubtedly significant achievements in educating teaching staff, and the organization from Finland has extensive experience in the implementation of Finnish educational solutions.

The aim of the research, as Erall Babbie (*Babbie, 2001*) writes, is to explore, describe and explain the issues, therefore the aim of the article is to present the experiences resulting from the implementation of the intercultural education module among students of pedagogy.

The aim of the project is to provide migrant children with the appropriate quality of education by equipping and training educational staff with innovative tools. This will contribute to increasing the chances of long-term social integration of migrant children in the host country.

As part of the project, which began on March 1, 2021, organizational and

methodological meetings of the project partners at WSB University on-line due to the closure of the borders in connection with the Covid-19 pandemic, were held, where the project implementation schedule, communication rules, meeting schedule, education conditions were discussed. intercultural relations in the partner countries, research and evaluation methodology, functioning of the e-learning platform.

There were also meetings in Ostrava and a meeting at Edu Consult Oy in Helsinki on the evaluation of the content of the implemented module, online intercultural education strategy and the implementation of the e-learning platform assumptions. The meeting in Finland was also attended by teachers of intercultural education, students of pedagogy from each of the Member States. This meeting was aimed at getting to know good practices from representatives of Finnish education, teachers of primary school principals, people responsible for the organization of intercultural education, as well as the exchange of knowledge and experiences, taken into account in improving the content of the module, the prepared strategy, and the functioning of the e-learning platform. At the hybrid meeting of partners at Mykolo Romerio Universitetas, the evaluation of the developed products of the project among students from Poland, Lithuania and the Czech Republic, the course of the education process, and reports on the tasks performed by the partners so far were presented in the form of multi-media presentations. The scope of tasks for the next year was discussed, including the shape and stages of progress in creating the strategy. The most interesting materials prepared by students from Poland and Lithuania were presented. A meeting of partners in Ostrava and the date of the conference crowning the project disseminating the results in February 2023 at WSB University are also planned.

During the project, regular meetings with partners are held in a direct, hybrid, remote form via the Zoom platform, contact by e-mail, telephone, including

the Viber and Whatsapp mobile applications, in order to develop and agree with partners the scope of tasks and progress in their implementation. During the webinars so far, issues concerning the concept of e-course projects were consulted, the skills of implementing the course idea were improved using the tools available on the platform.

At the moment, according to the author of the article, who is the manager of the described project, the achieved results in project management are in line with the assumed goals. So far, the project partners have conducted research, prepared the content of a module for students of Pre-school and early childhood education in intercultural education based on ethnographic research among migrants, and the course was completed by students of all partner countries, excluding Finland, whose task is to advise and give opinions on activities in the project. Currently, the use of platform resources is not a problem. The division of tasks related to the development and preparation of e-learning courses adopted in the project has been successfully completed. So far, representatives of partner countries have shown great activity and commitment. This made it possible to undertake further project activities consisting in undertaking the implementation of courses constituting the results of the project.

The activities carried out so far under the project, including, in particular, the creation of an e-learning platform containing a module for students developed by international experts consisting of methodological and didactic solutions ready for use in school practice, contributed to increasing the competences of students in the field of preschool and early school education in the perspective of primary school teachers in the field of intercultural education in relation to immigrant children coming to Polish schools. Intercultural educators from partner countries are more willing to successfully include children from immigrant families in the schools of the society.

Meanwhile, project partners

exchanged their experiences and acquired new good practices in intercultural education. At the local and regional level, the project increased the awareness of students, teachers, scientists and residents of partner countries' regions about the problems faced by immigrants, encouraged to actions to improve the social integration of immigrants and their children. At the national level, the project has already had a positive impact on the quality of remote education by creating an e-learning platform at the present stage. At European level, the project contributed to increasing the willingness to effectively include children from migrant families.

It should be emphasized that some of the project results brought a real change resulting from the exchange of information about the diverse needs of local communities in the partner countries in relation to the level of English language proficiency and the level of IT skills. The awareness of multiculturalism has increased and the need to implement this aspect in the program of e-learning courses has increased. Project team members expanded their knowledge and skills in the field of intercultural education, learned at international project meetings and during distance consultations, and also improved their English language skills.

It should be noted that international project meetings undoubtedly contributed to acceptance and openness to other cultures, allowed them to learn about the traditions and history of the host country, break stereotypes, and foreign meetings influenced the development of personal competences of the project participants: strengthening self-esteem and coping skills stressful

In addition, the current results of the project are disseminated through the publication of popular science press materials about the solutions developed and information about the project results, as well as the previous meetings of partners. The results are also presented during educational events (e.g. the inauguration of the academic year at the WSB Academy by the rector) and posted on social media.

It is important that the e-learning platform is currently being disseminated in Poland among organizations and institutions supporting refugees from Ukraine in the form of information campaigns in social media. The project also has an impact on the local community – students participating in courses on the e-learning platform, project partners and research and administrative staff involved in the project, as well as students of universities and institutions of partner countries. In addition, the authorities of partner organizations and teaching staff help to promote the project in Polish communities in their countries by emphasizing the possibility of distance learning during educational meetings and events, present the effects and course of the project implementation as part of international meetings and visits, sharing conclusions about activities in the project elements e-learning courses also include, inter alia, information about the local community, including the scientific community.

**End.** Intercultural education is a specific model of social, cultural and educational activity, focused on getting to know each other, understanding and enriching cultures and individual people who create these cultures. Its essential feature was the openness to Other Strangers and their problems "(Tadeusz Lewowicki, 2000). It is one of the possible approaches to cultural diversity. In intercultural education, the internal ethnic, racial, cultural and social differences of a given society are taken into account and respected. They are associated with different visions of the world and cultural concepts of their respective carriers (Grzybowski, 2008).

Summing up, it should be pointed out that multicultural education is a process related to the general reform of education and basic education of all students. It rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society, and accepts and supports the pluralism represented by students, their communities and teachers. He points out that science does not divide into races, that they are the result of their cultural embedding in human minds (...)

(Nikitorowicz, 2007, p. 38).

In the acculturation process, a number of people, groups and institutions interact, triggering many ideologies, based on different interactions and different socio-political contexts, therefore the basic challenges of education include making constant attempts to search for and implement programs based on the coexistence paradigm, with simultaneous care for a sense of identity local, regional, national, continental and planetary, which may – in my opinion – eliminate the irrational feeling of superiority (...). In this context, intercultural education should be understood as the total of mutual influences and interactions of individuals and groups, institutions, organizations, associations and human development, during which he becomes a fully conscious and creative member of a family, local, regional, religious, national, continental, cultural and global or planetary community and his identity (Nikitorowicz, 2007, p. 45).

It should be emphasized that in the opinion of the author of the article that the innovation of the project, which undoubtedly remains a challenge for the current and future authors, consists in developing new, empirically grounded ways of working with a student from an immigrant family. These methods take into account the previously diagnosed educational needs of the student and his family. It should be pointed out that the current support system for students in a migration situation does not provide a path for the educational development of a student adjusted to his cultural conditions. This leads to ineffective functioning in educational institutions, and often to complete abandonment of education. In addition, the current situation related to the COVID-19 pandemic has further deepened these disparities by limiting the access of immigrant children to proper education for cultural integration. The creation of an e-learning platform containing innovative strategies and a module on the education of migrant children focused on online education is therefore, in the opinion of the author of the article, an ideal tool that teachers

and students of pedagogy will be able to use to adapt their working methods to the new reality in which most of the education takes place. online. Intercultural education with the use of modern technologies has a great future (Walancik-Ryba, 2021).

It is important that the project focuses on the issue of broadly understood educational support for children from migrant families, not only by developing new, innovative and empirically grounded teaching strategies, but also by increasing the competences of teachers and students of pedagogy as well as their knowledge and skills. The e-learning platform created as part of the project, currently available to students, and in the future for all interested parties, is a place to share knowledge about working with migrant children, a place that will constantly develop and evolve.

Therefore, it is worth undertaking various educational and educational activities in intercultural pedagogy aimed at preventing the cultural exclusion of the local community and creating good relations (Walancik, 2011). It should be emphasized that although the introduction of new teaching methods and tools is a challenge for future teachers, the appropriate quality of education of migrant children will contribute to increasing the chances of long-term social integration in the host country.

It should be remembered that competition for influence in the souls and minds of inhabitants of different cultures, if not supported by means of pressure, usually brings positive effects for the sphere of life of the inhabitants (Drabina, 1999).

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*Стаття надійшла 21.05.2022 р.*

