

CHARACTERISTICS AND ADVANTAGES OF USING AN E-LEARNING SYSTEM FOR TRAINING OF PRE-SCHOOL AND PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

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This paper presents a way to use Moodle platform as an additional method in the university course «Games and intercultural competencies in the kindergarten». The results presented are from a test done online by students from the specialties «Preschool Education and Foreign Language Teaching» and «Preschool and Primary School Education», Faculty of Preschool and Primary School Education, St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia.

The test requires the definition of the terms «culture», «interculturality» and «multiculturality» and the derived results serve as a starting point for the organisation of the educational process of these lecture topics.

The electronic course on Moodle has been developed and approved within project BG051P0001-3.3.06 – 0045 «Capacity development of specialists, postdoctoral and young scientists for teaching university disciplines in and on foreign languages using contemporary methodology and ICT». This article is one of the results of the project. The paper is also included in the final report of the project.

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1 Introduction

E-learning as an additional method in the educational process, on the one hand, is a way to direct students in the educational content of the subject, which provides a choice of strategies for the acquisition of the necessary knowledge and skills.

On the other hand, e-learning provides the professor with the opportunity to summarise the results derived from their students' work on separate texts at the beginning of the lecture. On the basis of these results, the lecturer can project the educational process, while taking into account the strong and weak aspects of the students on the topic, and binding the lecture content with the individual experience of each student.

2 Thematic content of the university course «Games and intercultural competencies in the kindergarten»

The university course contains 15 thematic items and each of them includes options for trainings in the group.

1. Identity. Overview of concepts. Personal and social identity. Changes in the formation of identity in contemporary societies. Social roots of identity: symbolic interactionism. Narrative concept of identity. The plural, dialogical «I». Construction of identity and struggle for acceptance (Auernheimer, 2005; Boehm, Boehm & Deiss-Niethammer, 1999; Bolten, 2007; Herbert, 2009; Diepold, 1989; Ziebertz, 2009).
2. Multiculturality. Defining the term «multiculturality». Multicultural society. Types of multiculturality. Synergy, role distance and metacommunication. Bilingual education (Auernheimer, *op. cit.*; Boehm, Boehm & Deiss-Niethammer, *op. cit.*; Bolten, *op. cit.*; Burtscher, 2008).
3. Culture. Definitions. Defining the term «culture»: narrow and broad sense. Surface and deep structures. «Culture shock». Culture as a living world. Culture as a social world. H. Hofstede's model of value orientations. K. Hansen's model of culture (Auernheimer, *op. cit.*; Bolten, *op. cit.*; Hansen, 2000).
4. Interculture. Defining the term «interculture». Theory of perspectives. Pedagogical strategy of diversity. Limits of understanding and communication with differences (Auernheimer, *op. cit.*; Boehm, Boehm & Deiss-Niethammer, *op. cit.*; Bolten, *op. cit.*).
5. Trainings «on the job». Encouraging individual and team work: management, motivation, intercultural consulting, self-criticism, mentoring, supervision, intercultural mediation, observation of the work (Baer, 2011; Fechler, 2010; Knill, 2007).

6. Trainings «off the job»: System of trainings for improving intercultural competence. Cognitive and experience-oriented trainings. Culture-non-specific, culture-specific and intercultural trainings. Methods, aims, specifics of implementation (Bender-Szymanski, 2010; Knill, 2007; Bolten, 2001).
7. Intercultural competence. Intercultural misunderstandings. Hoffman's model. Specifics and field of application. The concept of culture, lying at the basis of intercultural competence. Model of intercultural competence reflection: aspects. Model of intercultural communication (Auernheimer, 2005; Boehm, Boehm & Deiss-Niethammer, 1999; Bolten, 2007; Hoffman, 2010; Lanfranchi, 2010; Rathje, 2006; Goecke, 2002).
8. Games and intercultural competencies. Game concepts. Monodimensional and multidimensional theories. Interactive games. Game situations from a personal, interactive and ecological perspective (Heimlich, 2001; Mogel, 2008; Pausewang, 1997).
9. Relation between game and culture. Influence of media worlds on game worlds (Heimlich, 1993; Mogel, 2008; Pausewang, *op. cit.*).
10. Tolerance towards ambiguity. Stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination. Functions of prejudice. Tolerance towards ambiguity. Tolerance towards frustration (Auernheimer, *op. cit.*; Boehm, Boehm & Deiss-Niethammer, *op. cit.*).
11. Cultivation of self-respect. Experience as a priority category. Principles of implementing situations of experience (Prenzel, 1995).
12. Constructive feedback. Johari window. Implementing feedback in the kindergarten group. Implementing feedback in the university students' group (Baer, 2011; Gudjons, 1995; Schirm, Smejkalova & Roetzmeier, 2010).
13. Cultivating intercultural competence at preschool age. Experimental model «Hand in hand around the world» – ways of implementation in the kindergarten group. Derivation of educational goals and expected results (Kindersley & Kindersley, 1995; Kuhlmann, 2012; Triarchi-Herrmann, 2003, Uslucan, 2003).
14. Assessment of intercultural competence at preschool age. H. Hoffstede's concepts. Model of intercultural competence assessment at preschool age: criteria and indicators (Hoffstede, 1991).
15. Team presentations. Group projects implemented on the basis of combining several topics and deriving their interrelations (Baer, *op. cit.*; Gudjons, *op. cit.*).

3 Thematic items «Multiculturality», «Culture», «Interculture»

The lectures on the second, third and fourth topic are in the form of e-learning system with seven stages.

1. Formulation of the joint topic «Multiculturality, culture and interculture» [student's concepts].
2. Doing the online test on Moodle platform, which is a short version of J. Bolten's test (Bolten, 2006). Summarising the results derived from the test and presenting them in the group.
3. Posing questions related to gaining additional information, clarification and specification.
4. Theoretical study of the problem consecutively for each of the three topics: «Culture», «Interculture» and «Muticulturality» [presentations, cognitive and experience-oriented trainings].
5. Individual reflection [individual projects].
6. Transfer of individual ideas into groups [team projects].
7. Control of the achieved success by all participants.

These seven stages improve the university students' skills of team work, leadership and discussion, of communication and self-presentation, solution of conflicts, cognitive, emotional and behavioural empathy.

3.1 Stage 1

Implementation of the training «associative cloud», in which the university students' associations related to each of the three concepts [«culture», «interculture» and «multiculturalit»] are recorded and their definitions are derived on the basis of these associations. The definitions around which the university students' group is united, are also written on the board, so that they can be seen by everyone until the end of the work on the thematic field. Then the university students do the online test on Moodle platform.

The first stage ensures the possibility to compare the student's interpretations, which reflect their daily experience, with the meaning of these basic concepts presented in the scientific literature. At this stage, we can establish the essential difference between the student's concepts on culture, interculturality and multiculturalit» and the modern scientific concepts and their development.

3.2 Stage 2

The second stage concerns the replenishment of the online test, offering the option of definitions, which limits the free associations. It is expedient to implement the second one in order to be guaranteed without restraint the

expressing of ideas at the first stage.

The test was taken in 2014 -2015 by 75 students studying «Pre-school pedagogy and foreign language» and «Pre-school and primary school pedagogy» in the Faculty of Pre-school and Primary School Pedagogy in Sofia University St Kliment Ohridski.

The results from the test can be summarized in the following way:

Question 1: To the question «Which definitions of the concept «culture» are most precise?: 1. Every living environment, 2. Nature, 3. Special refined way of life, 4. A combination of spiritual and aesthetic life events, 5. Agriculture.»

- 32% of the students have given the correct answer «Every living environment»;
- 65,3% of the students have chosen the wrong answer «A combination of spiritual and aesthetic life events»;
- 7% of the students have provided no answer.

Question 2: To the question «Which statement is closer to the truth?: 1. Every country has its culture, 2. Every country is a culture.»:

- 56% of the students have given the correct answer «Every country is a culture»;
- 41,3 % of the students have given the wrong answer;
- 2,7% of the students have provided no answer.

To Question 3: «How would you define «interculturality»? 1. Intercultural = international, 2. Synthesis between two culturally different groups, 3. Comparison between two cultures, 4. A «third thing» that is a result of the contact between representatives of different source cultures and is not identical to any of those cultures, 5. An event that occurs as a result of the interaction between representatives of different cultures»:

- 50% of the students have given the correct answer «A «third thing» that is a result of the contact between representatives of different source cultures and is not identical to any of those cultures»;
- 45,3 % of the students have given wrong answers;
- 4 % of the students have provided no answer.

To Question 4: «The perception functions ...»? 1... as construction of reality, 2. ... objectively, 3. ... as an arrangement of new experience in an already existing scheme, 4. ... like photography»:

- 58,7 % of the students have given the correct answer «. ... as an arrangement of new experience in an already existing scheme»;
- 37,3 % of the students have given a wrong answer;
- 4 % of the students have provided no answer.

On Question 5, the students can choose between two correct answers: « Multicultural society means ...: 1. that people give up their own identity and start to behave entirely in the way, characteristic of the country they moved in, 2. ... that representatives of different cultures follow one common leading culture, 3... that people preserve and respect the identity characteristics of their own culture but despite this, there is collaboration and cooperation with the others, 4. ... that representatives of different cultures live close to one another, 5. ... that representatives of different cultures live opposite one another, 6. ... that representatives of different cultures live with one another»:

- 80 % of the students have given the correct answer «that people preserve and respect the identity characteristics of their own culture but despite this, there is collaboration and cooperation with the others»;
- 6,7 % of the students have chosen the other correct answer: »... that representatives of different cultures live close to one another»;
- 9,3 % of the students have given wrong answers;
- 4 % of the students have provided no answer.

On Question 6 in the test the students can choose between more than one correct answer: «When managing the intercultural processes, it is recommended to follow this leading principle: 1. It is important to become aware of the cultural differences of your partner and reach consensus on this basis, 2. It is advisable to strive for the complete fusion of the cultural differences, 3. It is necessary to stimulate the improvement of the interaction and provide the biggest possible free space for the deployment of the participant, 4. It is necessary to try to synthesize all the good qualities, 5. The economically stronger company has to dominate in all aspects.»:

- 21,3 % of the students have chosen both correct answers «It is important to become aware of the cultural differences of your partner and reach consensus on this basis» and «It is necessary to stimulate the improvement of the interaction and provide the biggest possible free space for the deployment of the participant»;
- 14,7 % of the students have chosen the correct answer: «It is important to become aware of the cultural differences of your partner and to reach consensus on this basis»;
- 17,3 % of the students have chosen the correct answer: «It is necessary to stimulate the improvement of the interaction and provide the biggest possible free space for the deployment of the participant»;
- 32 % of the students have provided more than one answer, among which there are wrong answers;
- 10,7 % of the students have given wrong answers;
- 4 % of the students have provided no answer.

3.3 Stage 3

The results from the test serve as a starting point of the discussion on the topic – students get to the correct answer by providing arguments and discussing within the group. After presenting the results, the lecturer would assume the role of a helper - the lecturer leads the discussion but does not provide a ready-made solution so that the group itself can reach one.

At the third stage, we discuss the concrete points of view for taking notices of discrepancies and contradictions among the student's interpretations [first stage] and the scientific conceptions [second stage]. This way, we ensure the dialogue form and conditions for the university course to be developed. We stimulate the students to reflection, and to look for additional literature on the topic.

3.4 Stage 4

This stage covers the theoretical survey of literature, connected with clarifying the concept of «culture», «interculture» and «multiculturality». The methods used are mostly distributive – interpreting and discussing theoretical models and concepts which are presented.

Generally, they can be systemized in the following way.

Culture. On the 31st UNESCO General Conference in November 2001 in Paris, a definition of the concept is formulated and the basic principle of cultural diversity is derived.

Culture is a combination of stable and irreplaceable spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional qualities, which are characteristic of a society or a social group. They refer not only to art and literature but to life forms, forms of living together, of value systems, traditions and beliefs.

The principle of cultural diversity is defined as a free exchange of ideas through words and pictures; upbringing in the principles of justice, freedom and peace for supporting the dignity of every human being; implementation of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights as basic components of human rights; respect to cultural diversity, tolerance, communication and collaboration under the conditions of mutual understanding and trust as a guarantee for international peace and security; solidarity on the basis of accepting the cultural diversity, awareness for the unity of mankind and intercultural exchange; globalization through the development of information and communication technologies is a challenge for cultural diversity and a prerequisite for a new dialogue between cultures and civilizations.

In 1996 the German minister of culture defined the intercultural competency as «a key qualification for all children and youths from the minorities, as well

as from the majorities», and its forming as «an integrative process which cannot be isolated in separate topics, subjects or projects» (KMK-Empfehlung «Interkulturelle Bildung und Erziehung in der Schule», 25.10.1996).

Hansen's cultural model (Hansen, 2000) examines the difference in culture. In all more complex groups there is not only diversity but also remoteness, heterogeneity, divergence, differentiations, distance and contradictions. The difference becomes a basis for creating individuality. In this sense, culture can be understood as a stock of divergent proposals, which, when in contact with the inner world of the individuals, get their imprint. The stock of divergent proposals is not the same in the different cultures, so the original individual imprint refers to the cultural identity of the individual. Belonging to a particular group creates automatic separation from other groups which is allayed through the repeated reorientation of the individuals in numerous collectives and in this way stability is created in a net-like way. The stability of culture appears not so much on the basis of the obligatory value and norms but much more because of the creation of normality. Every culture defines normality, which is its most important criteria and its most influential and highest achievement. The obvious integrity of the culture is determined not by its coherence but by the familiarity and the normality of its differences.

Interculturality stands out with unknownness, otherness of differences.

Intercultural competence can be interpreted as a system of skills, which settles the initially missing normality and thus creates cohesion. According to this idea, the intercultural competence leads to the conversion of the unfamiliar differences into familiar ones. In the sense of the concept of culture, suggested by Hansen, this corresponds to the emergence of culture. Hence, intercultural competence transforms the characterized by otherness «volatile» interculture into a culture, in which cohesion is created through normality (Rathje, 2006).

What distinguishes Intercultural competence is that it transforms interculturality into culture and along with that it creates, according to the behavioural goal of the interactive partner, a basis for communication, further interactions, collaborations or life through the formation of normality. The success or failure of the interaction depends on numerous frame conditions, e.g. specialized or strategic competence, situational factors, power relations. This definition of the intercultural competence releases the concept from the need to be overestimated as the guarantor of success or be condemned as an instrument of manipulation (*Ibidem*).

Multiculturality. The term refers to the social structure of the Organization in the society and interculturality – to the dynamics of the joint living. It can be summed up that interculturality determines the quality of multiculturality.

3.5 Stage 5

Reflection, regarded individually, includes tasks for work done on one's own. A part of them are formulated at the end of each presentation [cognitive training], and another part are connected with analyses of authentic situations in the form of video materials [experience-oriented training]. Students are required to share their personal opinion and experience, as well as to adduce arguments in support of their ideas.

3.6 Stage 6

The transfer of individual ideas from previous stage in the group plan is achieved through the development of collaborative projects under the reconciliation of perspectives. Each team is required to prepare a joint opinion for each of the tasks in the fifth stage.

3.7 Stage 7

In the last stage the students have the opportunity to assess their work in the direction of each of these objectives, both individually and as a group (Schirm, Smejkalova & Roetzmeier, 2010):

Cognitive skills: understanding one's own goals and emotions; adoption of a foreign perspective; understanding of others intentions; proper assessment of one's own participation; consideration of ethical issues; discovering strategic opportunities and new information; distinguishing between positions and interests; cognitive empathy.

Strategic skills: deployment of support alternatives; creativity concerning available options; purposeful organization of the activity and flexibility of behavior; effective time management; discovery of information; persistence; representation of one's own goals and feelings.

Communication skills: placing open and clear questions; paraphrasing with the purpose of better understanding; avoidance of ambivalence; sharing and justifying observations; effective structuring of statements; maintaining composure in emotional situations; sincerity to others and to oneself; a sense of underlying problems and interests; consistency between thoughts and actions.

Interpersonal relationships: expression of recognition; giving and receiving feedback; restoration and renewal of relationships; achieving consent and harmonious relationship; consultation with others; behavioral and emotional empathy; building trust; distinguish the communicative situation from personal relationships.

Conclusion

E-learning allows for variety, flexibility, creativity, orderliness, publicity, accessibility, interactivity and communication of the educational content while ensuring novelty, timeliness and significance of information, and the ways of its presentation.

E-learning ensures individuality, activity, creativity and generating ideas on the part of the student, the focus and the projectivity of his/her activity in the conditions of teamwork and cooperation.

In addition, e-learning can be used for designing the educational process on the part of the teacher taking into account the specific features in different courses.

The results from the online test, set out in the report, require the implementation of all stages of the e-learning system. In groups with higher incoming results there is a possibility for their reduction, taking into account the strengths and weaknesses of the students.

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