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SHAPING PROFESSIONAL SKILLS IN INTERCULTURAL EXCHANGES IN THE "POLISH LANGUAGE ACROSS BORDERS" PROJECT*

Introduction: The contemporary world demands that employees in different work contexts do not only possessthe necessary professional knowledge and skills but also exhibit a necessary level of intercultural communicative competence that enables them to interact successfully with multilingual and multicultural clients, peers and students. While university programmes do have necessary arrangements for practicum, students often perceive this professional practice as insufficient in the development of social and intercultural skills.

Research Aim: The purpose of the present study was to investigate whether students of different study programmes would find participation in the intercultural "Polish language across borders" project as a viable alternative to traditionally serving the practicum. Another aim of the research was to see how voluntary participation in an out-of-study project would contribute to the development of professional, social and communicative competencies.

Method: The study followed the qualitative methodology, with the small-scale interview as a data collection procedure. The data were gathered from student coordinators of project participantsthrough an online interview.

Results: As was evidenced by the data on the viability of alternative forms of serving practicum collected from student coordinators, encouraging students to volunteer in intercultural projects directed at foreign audiences leads to an increase in professional and intercultural competenciesas well as results in a high level of satisfaction and motivation upon the project's completion. The participants stressed the positive effect of participation in the project on their readiness for the job market as well as noticed increased openness to and understanding of representatives of other cultures.

Conclusions: Since traditional practicum often triggers feelings of inadequacy and insufficient authenticity among students, it is worthwhile organising non-formal education projects in the form of intercultural exchanges which would enable the acquisition of intercultural, professional and communicative skills in authenticinteractions with partners from abroad.

Keywords: professional skills, intercultural competence, distance education, Polish language and culture, heritage language learning

INTRODUCTION

Multiculturalism and multiethnicity have become more and more characteristic features of contemporary societies, which engage in constant intercultural interaction. Continuous technological progress, geopolitical changes, migrations and job mobilities change even traditionally monocultural and monolingual societies, opening them to a multitude of ethnic groups (as many as 300 in the entire European Union – Aleksandrowicz-Pędich, 2005).

Processes of modernization of societies and increasing accessibility of new communication technologies, together with at least partial anonymity of their users in new media, lead to a situation in which the rules identifying "ours" and "others" are becoming blurred. As a result, society members are aliens to one another (Riley, 2007). It goes without saying, then, that effective communication in the workplace at the moment requires a sufficient degree of Intercultural Communicative Competence, which would enable language users to be successful at negotiating sociocultural differences.

If one takes into account students as future teachers, translators, editors or specialists in international corporations, developing Intercultural Communicative Competence enables them to avoid communication problems and increase professional effectiveness while building language proficiency at the same time (Shandar, 2005). They become empathetic, sensitized to the perception of otherness and capable of understanding other cultures with their constituent features (Aleksandrowicz-Pędich, 2005). For future teachers, intercultural teaching is intertwined with autonomous instruction, reflective teaching, and focus on applicative knowledge acquisition without predominant emphasis on declarative knowledge (Bandura, 2000). According to the definition of "intercultural competence" by Byram and Planet (1999), this construct is a multifaceted network of interactions between beliefs, viewpoints, values and human practices. Because effective use of this competence requires much more than simply information exchange (Byram, 1997, 2008), acquiring Intercultural Communicative Competence demands work on several levels within different competencies: linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse. These go together with expanding knowledge about target and home cultures, acquiring skills, shaping attitudes and building critical cultural awareness.

All these aspects are indispensable not only for teachers of Polish or other foreign languages, translators and interpreters, but also for employees working in multicultural environments.

The purpose of the article is to report upon a small-scale study aiming at evaluating the possibilities of developing intercultural communicative competence and professional skills via non-formal intercultural exchanges by students at selected study programmes of the Faculty of Languages, Literatures and Cultures of Maria Curie-Skłodowska University (MCSU) in Lublin. The research activities were situated within the larger-scale project "Polish language across borders", which was aimed at promoting the Polish language and culture abroad. In the parts of the project described in the current paper, MCSU students were involved in providing linguistic and cultural support to the members of the Polish language community in southern Brazil (Rio Grande do Sulstate).

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Intercultural competence in educational and professional environments
Teaching and working in intercultural environments confronts teachers and employees with new challenges and puts them into a new role of intercultural mediators (Byram, 1997; Damen, 1987; Aleksandrowicz-Pędich, 2005). This situation requires reflection on components of students' professional competence in its interpersonal, intercultural and linguistic dimensions.

From the interpersonal perspective, some researchers state (e.g. Zawadzka, 2004) that the teacher should be a mediator between students' home culture and the target language's culture. For this to happen, he/she needs to be tolerant of others' behaviours, ready to negotiate and collaborate, be empathetic to understand others' feelings and viewpoints and capable of acting appropriately in new situations.

The components of intercultural competence as enumerated by Edelhoff (after Zawadzka, 2004), Byram (1997, 2008) and Bandura (2007) can be framed in three major categories as follows:
1. Intercultural knowledge encompasses understanding of societies and cultures, both home and target ones; awareness of perception of own culture by others; culturally-oriented learning strategies; interpretations of behaviours and ways of solving conflicts.
2. Intercultural skills comprise negotiating, interpreting texts and media, developing learner autonomy, and managing teaching or professional resources; finally, linguistic competence as required to effectively negotiate meaning.
3. Expected attitudes, finally, are readiness to use the target language to negotiate and reach mutual understanding, willingness to reflect, critical cultural awareness, openness, tolerance and acceptance of otherness.

As is explained by Gautheron-Boutschatsky et al. (2004), intercultural teachers are able to extract and explain to their students symbolic meanings contained in the language used and behaviours displayed by its users. They are also supposed to dispel stereotypes by analysing cultural prejudice. Finally, intercultural teachers demonstrate and put down in detail all those aspects of culture that have a relative nature so that learners understand their hidden and often ambiguous character.

The linguistic dimension of intercultural teaching competence is described by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001) as the mediating ability, or the ability to support users of two different languages while they are striving to solve communication problems. Thus, CEFR lists such competencies of a teacher-mediator as text interpretation, translation, summarising and editing.

An interculturally-skilled teacher or employee plays a highly significant pedagogic and social role in multilingual contexts as a pillar of social cohesion (Zarate et al., 2004). This is achieved by working with students and co-workers not only on specimens of target language and culture, but also by making necessary references to their own one. It becomes more than clear, then, that such a person occupies a central role in teaching and working in intercultural contexts.

Apart from the acquisition of new interpersonal, intercultural and linguistic competencies, the profile of the teacher or worker as an intercultural mediator demands a change in perception of one's own position in the classroom or the workplace, especially in relations with students or co-workers (Zawadzka, 2004; Aleksandrowicz-Pędich, 2005; Bandura, 2007). Due to the fact that intercultural communicative competence is not a fully definable and tangible construct, the teacher cannot be sole source of knowledge inthis respect when passing it on to students.

Moreover, it is not possible to collect complete and perfect intercultural knowledge (Byram, 2008). Instead, the teacher's/worker's task is to participate with students in controlled intercultural mediation. This involves the activation of students/co-workers until they become active agents of the teaching process (Komorowska, 2006).

Finally, an interculturally-skilled teacher and worker needs to be ready for situations in which he/she will not be able to answer questions related to intercultural aspects posed by either students or co-workers. This also includes cases when a teacher needs some assistance from students (most usually, due to communication problems with students at a low level of the target language). Such a situation may be uncomfortable for most instructors, however, the contemporary world sees it as more of a necessity, reflecting the new nature of intercultural teachers as partners rather than supervisors.

Given the complex and multifaceted nature of Intercultural Communicative Competence as described above, it would be unrealistic to expect its full and effective development during university education in chiefly monocultural settings,

where linguistic and cultural diversity is not sufficient to induce the natural activation of all the above-mentioned competences. Occasional activities within externally-funded projects may increase comprehensiveness and versatility of practical training (see, e.g. Krajka and Marczak, 2014; Janicka, 2014), however, they are rarely a systemic solution for the development of Intercultural Communicative Competence during studies. All of these issues open the floor for non-formal education in the form of individual or group activities performed by students with little (or even no) supervision of lecturers (though most probably inspired and at least partially institutionalised by university staff). It is essential to bring together educational systems, multicultural job markets and students' needs and expectations, which is proposed by both national (Statistics Poland – GUS) and international reports (Mourshed et al., 2014). *Education for Employment* (*E2E*) on the one hand, and *Education for Career* (*E4C*) on the other are approaches in which improving communication and deepening understanding between agents of the educational process (lecturers, students and employers) enable negotiation on the shape of practical training and increase students' motivation to serve their practicum (Mourshed et al., 2014). As was evidenced by our study described below, non-formal education complements the formalised system of professional practices (within teaching and text editing) adding the element of interaction in multicultural environments. As advocated by Klimkowski (2015), task-based approach and collaborative learning (also in electronically-mediated intercultural tandems – Warschauer, 1997) can form the foundation for non-formal education, enhancing the potential of interpersonal relations and leading to better development of professional skills.

The "Polish language across borders" project as a tool for the development of intercultural and professional competencies of teachers, translators and editors

The study programmes described above require the accomplishment of professional practice. Even though great efforts are made to organise it in accordance with the predicted learning outcomes, requirements of the job market and ministerial guidelines (for the teaching specialisation), the practicum is not always fully satisfactory for students. As evidenced by the needs analysis conducted in focus groups of students and employers, modern philology students expect their practice to contain topical and useful tasks, which are well focused on particular audiences. Similar expectations were signalled by students of the Polish studies and e-editing and editing techniques, who would be eager to implement the projects related to Polish language teaching, different educational, promotional and multimedia resources in actual interaction. All the interviewed students were interested in establishing contact with their peers from abroad, both of Polish and foreign origin, due to a willingness to develop their intercultural competence.

Taking all these aspects into account, it becomes more than clear that universities should seek additional possibilities for expanding students' practical skills, apart from regular practicum. One such opportunity was the "Polish language across borders" project, which was financed by the National Agency for Academic Exchange (NAWA) within the "Promoting the Polish language" framework and was aimed at supporting the Polish minority in the Ijui area (Brazil) in their preservation of the Polish national identity, Polish language development and maintenance of connection with the Polish culture (from the past and the present). The project was run in cooperation with the Regional University of Northwestern Rio Grande do Sul (UNIJUI) in Brazil between 1 November 2020 and 30 November 2021. It was directed at promoting the Polish language and culture through the presentation of the city and region of Lublin as containing all the "essential elements of Polishness" as well as a multicultural area (similar to the Ijui region in southern Brazil). The outbreak of the pandemic necessitated moving the whole project to the virtual space, which enabled its participants to apply innovative information and communication strategies, acquire additional digital competences, learn how to conduct intercultural negotiations and mediations at a distance, find out the effect of cultural differences on the nature of online interactions and the tools used therein (Morawska and Latoch-Zielińska, 2021).

The project was composed of a few actions accomplished within the framework of non-formal education, which were offered to students of applied linguistics, Polish studies and e-editing and editing techniques: preparing educational films, offering synchronic online tutoring to Brazilian participants in the Online Polish Language Lab, running a Facebook page, teaching Polish folk songs and designing e-books with songs and notes for four folk dance groups from the Ijui region.

One action that brought all of the project activities together was a series of short educational films entitled "Snapshots from Lublin", which were shot with the participation of students and graduates of the Polish studies programme. The first film presented the university and the city of Lublin, while the next six were filmed visits to literary museums from the Lublin region: the Bolesław Prus Museum and the Stefan Żeromski Museum in Nałęczów, the Wincenty Pol Museum and the Józef Czechowicz Museum in Lublin, the Henryk Sienkiewicz Museum in Wola Okrzejska and the Maria Kuncewiczowa Museum in Kazimierz Dolny on the Vistula. The final film was a summary of the whole series as it focused on presenting the places worth seeing in Lublin (among others, the Lublin Castle Museum, the Botanical Garden, the Old City of Lublin). This action was accomplished to a great extentthanks to the involvement of students, who would perform the role of guides touring around the university, the city of Lublin and its literary museums. During these video materials, they would develop their communication skills, striving to build a positive image of themselves and the university. Moreover, the topics raised in the films gave way to shaping a multitude of social competencies enlisted in the

learning outcomes, such as responsible accomplishment of a variety of professional and social roles, cultivation of knowledge about regional and national cultural heritage, promotion of the Polish culture in different milieus, cooperation and collaboration for the joint accomplishment of assigned tasks, or cultivation and conscious formation of one's cultural interests.

Other students were involved in making an audiovisual translation of the "Snapshots from Lublin" films. Subtitling these video materials proved necessary as the project's participants were at highly diversified levels of the Polish language competence. Moreover, it was a mixed-age group, comprising both children, adolescents and adults. This is where the students of the Polish studies could implement practical skills of preparing clear and correct messages. Ready-made subtitled films were published on YouTube and on the website of the project, with premieres announced on the project's Facebook page (www1).

Running a Facebook page was another important assignment for students of Polish studies, applied linguistics and Portuguese studies. They were responsible for preparing posts and translating them into Portuguese. Altogether 68 posts were published in Polish and Portuguese, which concerned not only current information on the project activities or announcements of upcoming video and educational resources, but also interesting cultural events, which was greatly appreciated by the Brazilian audience. While performing this task, the students were able to improve their skills of searching for knowledge, using both traditional and cutting-edge techniques of locating and retrieving information. They would edit various texts based on Internet resources, putting the regulations of copyright law and intellectual property protection into action.

Yet another important area of student activity was providing support to Polish language instructors in the Online Polish Language Lab within the "Polish at Work" action. Apart from that, students also translated educational resources prepared by the MCSU specialists from Polish into Portuguese and the resources provided by the UNIJUI staff from Portuguese into Polish.

> The presence of Portuguese-speaking students proved indispensable since the language level of participants was highly diversified, many did not speak Polish, and had problems with understanding instructions, while others made attempts at communicating in their forefathers' language with great effort. (Morawska and Latoch-Zielińska, 2021, p. 7)

These language problems necessitated also assistance of the remote partner (UNIJUI University) in the project activities.

Yet another project activity, "Time for Change", comprising a preparation of four e-books with folk songs for four Polonia ensembles from Brazil, would not be possible without students' involvement. The content and graphics of the Polish language version were prepared by the students of e-editing and editing techniques,

while the students of applied linguistics and Portuguese studies were in charge of the Portuguese version. The former found this as an opportunity to learn how to edit and process texts, design their graphical aspect, use professional technical editing software to do their typesetting and prepare the final shape of e-books. The students worked in two-person teams, chose songs to include in the e-books, prepared short notes on them, and then added necessary elements such as the editorial page and the table of contents as well as other graphics to come up with the final e-book. When commenting on the work done, they emphasised that "the opportunity to create an e-book that would be widely available for the real audience and would not be only a university project was awesome […] we learned how to create something out of nothing, but also how to work in a team. This e-book is actually our first professional achievement […] this was a pleasure to make, which we are more than grateful for".

This action comprised also online singing lessons of selected songs from the Polish regions, run by the qualified singing instructor from the Folk Dance Ensemble of MCSU, who was assisted by a student of Portuguese studies. The language support was necessary since apart from the very singing, the Brazilian participants would also use those classes as an opportunity to improve their communication in Polish and Polish pronunciation, and get information about the history of the songs, their connections with the region, folk traditions and customs.

The final project action was participation in the FENADI/EXPOIJUI 2021 Festival of Multiculturality, which was attended by MCSU project participants (instructors and students) at a distance. The Brazilian participants performed newly learned Polish songs during a festival concert, which was recorded as a film highlighting the project outcomes in Polish with Portuguese subtitles. At the same time, UNIJUI students prepared a film summing up the whole project and making a report on the festival. This was also subtitled by MCSU students of applied linguistics and Portuguese studies. The whole activity was reported in a post published on the project's Facebook page, websites of the project, UNIJUI University and the Polish Club of Ijui. An additional task was editing and proofreading a bilingual booklet about the Polish community in Ijui, which was published by the Editora da Unijuí publishing house.

Students' effective functioning and accomplishment of the project's activities would not be possible without the appropriate motivational scheme, which was closely connected to the accomplishment of learning outcomes assigned for their study programmes. Other issues which added to their great involvement were treating them as equal partners, preparing diplomas of gratitude for work in the project, promoting accomplished tasks on the project's Facebook page and the university website as well as registering the participation in the diploma supplement.

RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTION

The current study had an exploratory nature, it aimed at seeking answers to the questions whether and to what extent participation in the project would lead to the accomplishment of students' needs and expectations. It also strived to determine whether and to what degree students' professional and intercultural competencies would be developed through practice-oriented intercultural exchanges. The final purpose of the present study was to investigate whether students of different study programmes would find participation in the intercultural "Polish language across borders" project as a viable alternative to serving the practicum in a traditional way.

RESEARCH METHOD AND SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

Each educational activity should take assessment and evaluation of undertaken actions as its top priority. Reflective assessment and planning of further actions require also *ex-post* evaluation, which aims at collecting data to show how durable the effects obtained in the project are, what successes or pitfalls were encountered, what limitations and drawbacks had to be overcome. One of the purposes of this kind of evaluation is also supporting the learning processes by confronting initial assumptions with the achieved effects.

The current study aimed to examine the extent to which the implementation of the "Polish language across borders" project was in line with the needs and expectations of student participants and the degree to which it contributed to the development of their intercultural and professional competencies.

The micro-study conducted 1.5 years after the project's completion involved a small number of participants (four), however, the most meaningful and significant ones – group coordinators, whose task was to manage other student participants involved in film-making, editing, language tutoring and translation/subtitling activities. The small sample size was adopted on purpose – it was more important to achieve full coverage of meaningful figures (all four group coordinators) as data sources as they would be more reliable and authoritative as informants. It was the researchers' deliberate decision to take micro-research as the research method, as it sports a "small scale and scope with little time necessary for its implementation, together with a clear focus on obtaining particular pieces of information" (Kasprzak, 2013, p. 3). One drawback of micro-research is the lack of representativeness, however, in the present study targeting virtually all student coordinators (rather than student participants playing other roles) was supposed to reach representativeness and minimise this biggest obstacle to generalisability of findings. We aimed to gain insight into the perception of the increase of intercultural and professional skills of student participants, together with their awareness of benefits drawn from it as well as usefulness on the job market from a longer time perspec-

tive. Such a qualitative approach opens the ground for planning additional activities for students, which would be beyond the regular curriculum but which could enable accomplishment of learning outcomes in a real-life context. Thus, using student coordinators as informants gave the current research a meta perspective, which, especially with certain distance (in terms of time and position on the job market), increased objectivity of perception of the project as a context for non-formal education.

The study was conducted as an online interview, with the following topics raised in discussion:

1. Motivations to participate in the "Polish language across borders" programme
2. Tasks accomplished and their characteristics.
3. The effect of participation in the project on skills and knowledge from the study programme followed.
4. The effect of the study programme followed on readiness to undertake actions in the project.
5. Skills and social competencies shaped or acquired during the accomplishment of the project actions.
6. Participation in the project as a way of satisfying the practicum requirement.
7. The effect of the knowledge and skills acquired in the project on the accomplishment of the learning outcomes adopted for the study programme.
8. Accomplishment of the project actions as an alternative mode of serving the practicum.

STATISTICAL DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

Interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed for recurring topics. Then they were subjected to qualitative analysis, striving to address the key concepts underlying the interview questions. On this basis conclusions were made.

Despite great care taken to design and conduct the study according to all methodological rigours, it has certain limitations. First is the use of a single data collection tool, online interview. The second is a small research sample, which, however, is close to representativeness due to the fact that virtually all student coordinators (but not the very student participants) were targeted and interrogated in the study. The obtained results, due to their small scale and nature of the micro-study, do not allow greater generalisation of conclusions, and the problems identified need further research and analyses. Thus, the current study can be a starting point and inspiration for further explorations of the topic of implementation of intercultural exchanges into practical training of students and non-formal international educational projects.

RESULTS

The presentation of findings is exemplified by the original responses from the interviews, translated into English. The data obtained in the interviews show that the chief motivation for participation in the project was willingness to gather experience in coordinating intercultural and international exchanges together with improving language and translation skills. The interviewees also emphasized the possibility to verify one's capacity for group work and cooperation in international contexts. Another crucial reason was the possibility to apply the knowledge and skills acquired during studies in practice, as evidenced by the following quote: "The proposed tasks were almost ideally in line with the scope of my study programme, so I decided that it was a great opportunity to put my acquired knowledge into work". (R1) Such an opinion confirms the trend of profiling study curricula towards functional application of acquired competencies and verifying the effectiveness of the educational process in authentic conditions.

Participation in the project was also a chance to "become familiar with the specificity of teaching Polish as a foreign language to non-Slavic students and to interact with the inhabitants of Brazil to get to know the culture of this country better" (R2). This kind of experience is indispensable for formation of teaching competence for any language instructor, not only that of Polish as a foreign language. Becoming familiarised with customs and traditions of the students' home country is, after all, a key to effective language education, which is so strongly rooted in the cultural heritage of the target language country.

The student participants were involved in almost all actions of the project. Those studying modern languages were chiefly responsible for translating, subtitling and editing texts as well as providing support to instructors in the Online Polish Language Lab and during song lessons. They highly appreciated the bilingual Facebook page as a channel of communication and interaction with the Brazilian participants, inspired by posts about Poland and Brazil in Polish and Portuguese to achieve greater cultural understanding and integration. The process of preparing resources for the Facebook page, subtitles for the "Snapshots from Lublin" films or translations of lyrics for song lessons was complex and demanded high organisational skills, which is evidenced by the quote below:

> The contact with project participants consisted of mediating communication between instructors and students, sharing class materials and homework tasks with students, informing them about changes in organisation and schedule of class, maintaining their interest in the Polish language and motivation to participate in the project. It was necessary to divide tasks among translators and editors, monitor deadlines for submission of translated texts and their verified versions, conduct a record of tasks conducted within the project, all alongside conducting regular translations and verifications. (R3)

The chance to prove oneself in action, when decisions need to be made independently under the pressure of time, while taking responsibility for the outcome of own and group's work, were estimated by students as priceless. No simulation, project work or discussion during university classes can provide such a real-life experience.

As opposed to modern philology students, project participants studying e-editing became involved in editing and typesetting of a booklet "Santana – history and Polish culture in Ijui", designing covers, preparing and editing e-books with folk songs. All of these activities enabled verification of the skills acquired during studies in practice. Finally, the students of Polish studies were responsible for preparing texts for the project page and for acting their roles in educational films, which were the opportunities for implementation of acquired knowledge and skills.

Observation of the project's participants and confrontation of the opinions gathered from a survey with the findings from evaluation of study curricula justify the conclusion that practical training delivered in real-life conditions proves to be highly efficient and relevant to students' needs and expectations about the ways of accomplishing learning objectives. For sure, expanding the range of activities in which students were involved and confronting them with additional challenges as a part of the described project enabled students to achieve a higher level of professional competence and learning outcomes.

DISCUSSION

The interviewees emphasised positive impact of the participation in the project on their professional (linguistic, editing, typesetting) and social competences. As one student coordinator reported, "participation in the project broadened my horizons, taught me how to organise my work as a translator, how to organise the work of others and how to shape my own presence in social media. Moreover, I improved my Portuguese language skills, the ability to translate and interpret texts from Polish into Portuguese" (R2).

The impact of the project on development of personal and professional competences was visible in the following quote:

> For me, it was the first opportunity to have a real book editing assignment, which cannot be compared to what we did in class, as this is where I did not feel such responsibility for my actions. What surely helped me broaden my knowledge and skills was the bilingual nature of the book, which means that all my editing and typesetting tricks acquired in the Polish language surrounding had to be transferred to the context of the Portuguese text. Also working with the InDesign software, which I had not done much work with prior to the project, was a highly developing experience. During my involvement in the project I learnt this software inside out, which means there is no task that I cannot do with it. (R1)

Another interviewee strongly emphasised the significance of teamwork with students of different specialties, working under the pressure of time, undertaking independent decisions and taking full responsibility for the undertaken actions.

According to all interviewees, the studies made them well-prepared for the tasks undertaken in the project: "The curriculum of my study programme made me ready to participate in the project, as I had acquired practical intercultural, social and language skills (fluency in English and Portuguese) as well as translation, interpretation and audiovisual translation skills" (R3). This assessment was confirmed in relations to e-editing and Polish studies as follows: "The study programme constituted excellent background for accomplishment of tasks assigned to me in the project. Text proofreading classes were more than useful, as were those covering graphics design and typesetting" (R1). "Yes, especially classes covering broadly speaking language development and oral communication, as well as teaching specialization courses – while serving my practicum at school, I had to take decisions, adapting my foreign language to the comprehension capacity of my audience" (R4).

The data obtained during the interviews prove that students clearly noticed ongoing development of their intercultural skills and social competencies while taking part in the project activities. They particularly valued improving their ability to manage and coordinate a team of student translators, translate texts, films and lyrics, operate new software in the target language (Portuguese) and cooperate with project participants from a different culture at a distance.

A very interesting opinion on her experiences in the project was expressed by one interviewee studying e-editing:

> For me, it was most important to learn how to communicate effectively with others because in the project we had interactions on many different planes. This is interconnected with learning how to work in a team, since, after all, each book is the outcome of many people's work and many compromises need to be found, which demands arguing your view in such a way so as to be convincing for others. (R1)

When answering the question about skills acquired during the project, the interviewees mentioned also the abilities to produce clear and linguistically correct messages, apply the copyright law regulations in practice, find and select information and show respect for one's national heritage.

The participation in the project activities was perceived by most student coordinators as a way of satisfying the practicum requirement. However, they all agreed that rather than simply performing the tasks and getting credits, they perceived this as an opportunity for internal development: "I felt I was doing something also for myself. It was a very fruitful time, I felt I was not only an apprentice, but I was doing something important for others" (R1).

As was indicated by the respondents, the tasks assigned to them in the project had a positive impact on their accomplishment of the learning outcomes assumed

for the study programme. What is more, the involvement in the project even gave greater momentum to this process: "All the tasks that were assigned to me involved practical implementation of knowledge and additional applications of skills, which speeded up accomplishment of the learning outcomes for the studies and helped consolidate the knowledge acquired at university" (R4).

For researchers it was important to verify the extent to which the participation in the project could be regarded as an alternative form of serving the practicum as non-formal education. All the interviewees were of the opinion that this would be a highly beneficial and convenient solution, both for organisational reasons (difficulties with finding proper places to serve the practicum) and subject matter ones, as evidenced in the following quotes:

> Such a project brings together a number of different areas of knowledge and skills, moves beyond the traditional translation assignments, gives a real value to the work done due to visible effect of the translations on the audience. As a result, we can achieve higher quality of translations and become more motivated to work. Cooperation with students of other study programmes (Polish studies) adds a new dimension to the work of a translator by adding increased language sensitivity, introducing new patterns of work and increasing communication skills. Besides, making acquaintances with participants from abroad are also an important form of reward. (R2)

> I believe such projects should be an alternative form of serving the practicum since they are equally (or even more) beneficial than the practicum served in a traditional way. I do not feel I missed anything by not serving my practicum in a publishing house. On the contrary, serving my practicum during the project taught me new experiences and equipped with the same skills that publishing houses would. (R1)

CONCLUSIONS

The contemporary job market requires each of its participants to be fully professional. For such a requirement to be met, it is not enough to acquire the knowledge during one's studies. It is through professional practice that reflectivity of thinking is developed and the knowledge necessary for professional competence is gained (Włoch, 2005). A prerequisite for reaching professionalism is conscious participation in one's development (Dróżka, 2011). All forms of practical activities accomplished outside the study programme as non-formal education enable students to build up additional competencies and develop their interpersonal qualities, leading to a head start on the job market. The accomplished project "Polish language across borders" was perceived by student participants as an occasion to gain all of these skills. Surely, functioning in the multicultural environment as well as verification of implementation of the knowledge and skills acquired during one's

studies in non-formal contexts were important motivators leading to success of the project. As was evidenced by the project's evaluation, there is much space for development of students' practical skills in non-formal education as a complement to practical in-class training and organised practicum.

STUDY LIMINATIONS

Due to the small scale of the study, very few participants (however, selected purposefully as "experts" in the boosted sample purposive sampling process – Cohen et al., 2007) and a single perspective of Polish student participants not confronted with that of Brazilian participants,1 we clearly avoid any generalisability of conclusions reached. It is more than certain that the qualitative data gathered and processed for the purpose of this article can only serve to draw conclusions about the very interviewees, not any other contexts.

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1 Evaluation data were gathered from Brazilian participants via an online questionnaire at the project's completion as a requirement of the NAWA project closure. We do not refer to them in the current paper due to limitations of space. However, such a perspective with ample data analysis can be found in the project's evaluation report submitted to NAWA as well as our other publications (e.g. Morawska and Latoch-Zielińska, 2021).

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ROZWIJANIE KOMPETENCJI PROFESJONALNEJ STUDENTÓW W WYMIANACH INTERKULTUROWYCH W PROJEKCIE „JĘZYK POLSKI PONAD GRANICAMI"

Wprowadzenie: Współczesny świat wymaga od pracowników na różnych stanowiskach nie tylko wystarczającego poziomu kompetencji zawodowej, ale również odpowiednio rozwiniętej interkulturowej kompetencji komunikacyjnej umożliwiającej skuteczną interakcję z wielojęzycznymi i wielokulturowymi klientami, współpracownikami czy uczniami. O ile programy kształcenia na uniwersytetach zawierają wymagane komponenty praktyk, studenci często postrzegają je jako niewystarczające dla rozwijania kompetencji interkulturowej.

Cel badań: Celem niniejszego badania było stwierdzenie, na ile uczestnictwo w międzykulturowym projekcie „Język polski ponad granicami" będzie przez studentów postrzegane jako wartościowa i skuteczna alternatywa dla praktyk studenckich odbywanych w tradycyjny sposób oraz w jakim stopniu przyczynia się do nabywania kompetencji zawodowych, społecznych i komunikacyjnych.

Metoda badań: W badaniu zastosowano podejście jakościowe typu *wywiady otwarte*. Badanie przeprowadzono za pomocą kwestionariusza wywiadu *online* z koordynatorami grup studentów-uczestników projektu.

Wyniki: Jak pokazują opinie studentów na temat roli alternatywnych form realizacji praktyk studenckich w nabywaniu kompetencji zawodowych oraz rozwijaniu interkulturowej kompetencji komunikacyjnej, nastąpił wzrost kompetencji zawodowej i interkulturowej oraz zauważono wysoki poziom zadowolenia i motywacji z ukończenia projektu. Respondenci podkreślali pozytywny wpływ projektu na ich kompetencje, zarówno te zawodowe (językowe, redakcyjne, edytorskie), jak i społeczne, równie ważne na rynku pracy.

Wnioski: Wraz z częstym poczuciem braku adekwatności i niewystarczającej autentyczności zadań wykonywanych podczas tradycyjnych praktyk studenckich, włączanie studentów w projekty wymian interkulturowych, gdzie pełnią różne role zawodowe, pomaga na realizację komponentu praktycznego w bardziej autentyczny i motywujący sposób.

Słowa kluczowe: kompetencje zawodowe, kompetencja interkulturowa, kształcenie na odległość, nauczanie języka i kultury polskiej, nabywanie języka mniejszościowego