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INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER: STRAIGTFORWARD OR CONTRAVERSIAL?

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Abstract. *The concept of intercultural competence for every denizen of a global world, and especially, a professional, such as a pedagogue, a law enforcement officer is important, it has been discussed and has gained support for the last two decades at least. However, in the light of recent events and changing geopolitical context, the deliberations should be renewed. The aim of this paper is discussing aspects that are straightforward and aspects that may comprise controversy, regarding the intercultural competence of law enforcement officers (or any other person for that matter). The attention to revisit the concept and its contents was prompted due to the recent discussions motivated by joining the project, funded by the EC: Cooperation for developing joint curriculum on tackling hybrid threats (HYBRIDC). Participation in the project allowed collecting the part of the data for empiric study and deciding on potential benefits to proceed with the deliberations. The paper presents findings of a pilot study, which revealed the differences between interpretations among students in two countries. The limitation of the study should be taken into consideration, yet, the findings provide observations worth further examinations, especially in the light of recent geopolitical context.*

Keywords*: intercultural competence, hybrid threats, controversy.*

Introduction

While the very concept of the importance of intercultural competence for every denizen of a global world, and especially, a professional, such as a pedagogue, a law enforcement officer is discussed and gained support for the last two decades at least, however, in the light of recent events and changing geopolitical context, the deliberations should be renewed, at least from the point of view of the authors of this paper.

The **aim** of this paper is discuss aspects that are straightforward and the aspects that may comprise controversy, regarding the intercultural competence of law enforcement officers (or any other person for that matter).

The **objectives** are organized around the two RQs: What are the aspects of intercultural competence, which make discussion straightforward? What are the aspects of intercultural competence, which make discussion straightforward?

Methods of critical analyses of references, theoretical considerations, reflection on personal experience and a pilot empiric study, involving respondents – future law enforcement officers in Lithuania and Estonia were employed for the development of the paper.

Intercultural competence: straightforward of controversial

For the authors of this paper, especially, one of them, the attention and analysis, contextualization of intercultural competence and the development of intercultural competence was one of the main research interests for more than two decades (see, e.g., Zuzeviciute, 2010; Ross, Zuzeviciute, 2011; Zuzeviciute et al, 2013, etc.).

While we still believe in the importance of intercultural competence for every denizen of a global world, and especially, a professional, such as a pedagogue, a law enforcement officer, however, in the light of recent events and changing geopolitical context, we think that the deliberations should be renewed.

Our thinking and the logics of the paper are organized along the arguments about what is straightforward, and what may pose certain controversy, when intercultural competence of law –enforcement officers is analysed.

Firstly, we posit that intercultural competence is very important for every denizen of this global world, including people in professional settings, such as law enforcement. The fact that professional law-enforcement officers must be aware of cultural differences, must be ready to address them in a professional yet culturally sensitive manner seems straightforward.

Secondly, we posit that due certain innate characteristics of intercultural competence, which the very essence of the said competence, intercultural competence may be contextualized as controversial in the light of geopolitical situation.

While the former claim is based on a number of theories and studies completed during at least the last twenty years, the attention on the latter was prompted due to the recent discussions motivated by joining the project, funded by the EC: *Cooperation for developing joint curriculum on tackling hybrid threats* (HYBRIDC).

War against the Ukraine, which started on 24th February, 2022, motivated us, citizens of the countries with the external EU border to re-think certain concepts, re-visit certain understandings and re-examine certain beliefs. Intercultural competence falls into this category.

Several influential models of intercultural competence were offered, with the one offered by Deardorff almost twenty years ago having gained the place among the most frequently used (Deardorff, 2008, though the model was first introduced for academic community few years earlier).

In the model three dimensions: Knowledge and comprehension, Skills and Attitudes are identified. Knowledge and Comprehension include cultural self-awareness, deep cultural knowledge sociolinguistic awareness; Skills encompass ability to listen, observe, and evaluate, analyze, interpret, and relate; Attitudes encompass respect (valuing other cultures), openness (withholding judgment), curiosity and discovery (tolerating ambiguity).

Another influential model was offered by Bennet (2008). The model also identifies three aspects: Cognitive Dimension (here cultural self-awareness, culture-general knowledge, culture-specific knowledge and cultural adaptation process are enumerated), Behavioral Dimensions encompass ability to empathize, to listen and gather appropriate information, ability to manage relationships and to manage social interactions and anxiety, Affective Dimensions encompass curiosity, initiative, risk-taking, suspension of judgment, cognitive flexibility, tolerance of ambiguity, cultural humility.

There are evident differences, such as an emphasis on linguistic competence in Deardorff's model, while in Bennett's model emphases is on relations. However, the two models have many similarities: the knowledge about and the competence to do may clearly be identified as similar, also, for both authors withholding judgements, tolerating ambiguity are important.

It is important to note that the subsequent analysis of the models, and their translation into the professional's life in Lithuanian context (on the case of teacher's professional) revealed that the most demanding and the least automatic is the behavioural aspect of intercultural competence. That is, even if we learn about other people and their cultures, and even if we consciously understand certain characteristics of their culture that we make us wonder, but to behave in an adequate and contextual way may be most demanding (Norvilienė, Zuzevičiūtė, 2011).

While importance of linguistic competence is extensively discussed by other authors, emphasizing the crucial role of linguistic (whether it is contemporary lingua franca: English, or other language(s) used in communities) competencies for effective police work (Pielmus, 2019; Shalfrooshan et al, 2019), other authors note the importance of other factors for building authentic, genuine intercultural competence.

Longer interactions (Guillén-Yparrea, Soledad Ramírez-Montoya, 2023), also immersion into another culture (Chédru, Delhoume, 2023), attention and analyses of personal attitudes (Barrow, 2023) are identified among those factors.

The very idea of analyzing the concept, the attempts to construct and deconstruct intercultural competence is a huge social innovation. These attempts denote humanity's efforts to distance itself from colonialist ambitions and to re-orientate itself towards global denizinship and universality of human rights (Bea, 2022).

Intercultural competence, or at least admitting its place and importance among the professional's competencies (including professional law-enforcement officer) – we will argue - may serve as a strong marker regarding society's genuine maturity. While these aspects seem to illustrate straightforwardly positive and desirable role intercultural competence plays in professional law-enforcement officer's (or any other citizen's) activities, however, recent events prompt further analysis.

Hybrid threats, including propaganda, deliberately misleading or specifically designed informational attacks (Arcos et al, 2022), including breach or straightforward cyberattacks (Magonara, Malatras, 2023), mass migration (Lubinski, 2022) may be enumerated next to full fledged bloody war; these are the realities of the recent years in the world which a decade ago we thought had been taking a direction towards rules, reason based cohabitation.

The list of hybrid threats is long, and due to the limitations for the scope of this paper we will not analyse all of them. Among the most evidently linked to our theme is mass migration.

As Bachmann, Paphiti (2021) suggest:

> *'Mass migration within the context of hybrid warfare is a strategic mechanism effected where the state deploying the threat will place pressure upon the targeted government to take some course of action – or not – which is to the advantage of the state making the threat and to the disadvantage of the targeted state. The targeted state will recognize that the threat to cause a migration flow across its borders will place tensions upon the welfare, social, medical, and educational sectors of its society which, in turn, raises the specter of unrest and dissatisfaction with the government. Changing demographics, and increasing unemployment <...> In an extreme case, this could conceivably lead to the collapse of the government, especially in a country that had a volatile economy.'* (Bachmann, Paphiti, 2021, 120).

The very characteristics, which make up the essence of intercultural competence: empathy, suspension of judgment, cognitive flexibility, tolerance of ambiguity, cultural

humility may be (and was, as it was the experienced along Polish, Lithuanian, Latvian borders in 2021) corrupted for the nefarious purposes of agents acting in bad faith.

The disinformation machine, targeted hybrid aggressions under the guise of humanitarian crisis appeal to the best intentions we hold towards a brother or sister, a human being with whom we share this small planet of ours; but the machine does not have the best intentions of its own, thus a defence mechanism has to be enacted in such situation.

The problem is, we barely started learning to exercise intercultural competence as a countermeasure for the egocentric cultural instincts, which are inherent for any person; and yet, after not more than two decades we have to re-evaluate its role and potential hazards for relying on it.

Thus, while discussing the contents of professionalism with future law enforcement officers, including attention to intercultural competence as the competence that underlines the contemporary, human rights orientated cohesive society, probably, also it must be emphasised that the same society is founded on the ideas of supremacy of law.

The ideas of contemporary state as the state based on democracy, thus equality, thus universal human rights, thus supremacy of law are quite young. They were formulated appr.300 years ago and it took some time for them to be recognised and implemented; moreover, still not all countries globally implemented this social-legal innovation, which makes it so much harder to preserve the fragile progress achieved (Zuzeviciute, 2022).

Law enforcement officers (though, probably, all the professionals and citizens) must balance their activities carefully with the sensitivity to intercultural aspects of contemporary living, and upholding the supremacy of law, which comprises the core of our democracies.

Controversies, in relation to intercultural competencies are linked to situations where this balance must be maintained in order to secure the general cohesiveness of co-habitation and the implementation of law enforcement for the general state of security within a given society.

Findings from a pilot study

In order to examine whether the role of intercultural competence resonates with future law-enforcement officers, a pilot study was designed and implemented during the last quarter of 2022 and the first quarter of 2023. Totally 99 students/future law enforcement officers from Lithuania (65) and Estonia (34) shared their opinion in an anonymous questionnaire, where they were asked to choose the statement that they agreed with most.

Limitations of the study.

The limited number of respondents (less than 100), a convenience sampling comprise two major limitations in this pilot study, also, the fact that the number of respondents in each group is different should be taken into consideration; thus, we are not formulating generalisation, but merely present findings and possible interpretations. The findings also enable formulation guidelines for further, more in-depth studies in the theme.

The first observation is interesting and asks for further, probably, qualitative research methodology based study in the future; namely: the answers by respondents in Lithuania and Estonia differed significantly. Even if the number of respondents was unequal, the findings indicate situation worth further exploration, Fig.1, Fig 2.

If the majority of Estonian respondents chose '*It is moral to have and exercise it, but rule of law comes first'*, among Lithuanian respondents '*It is very important in global world*' received the most voices.

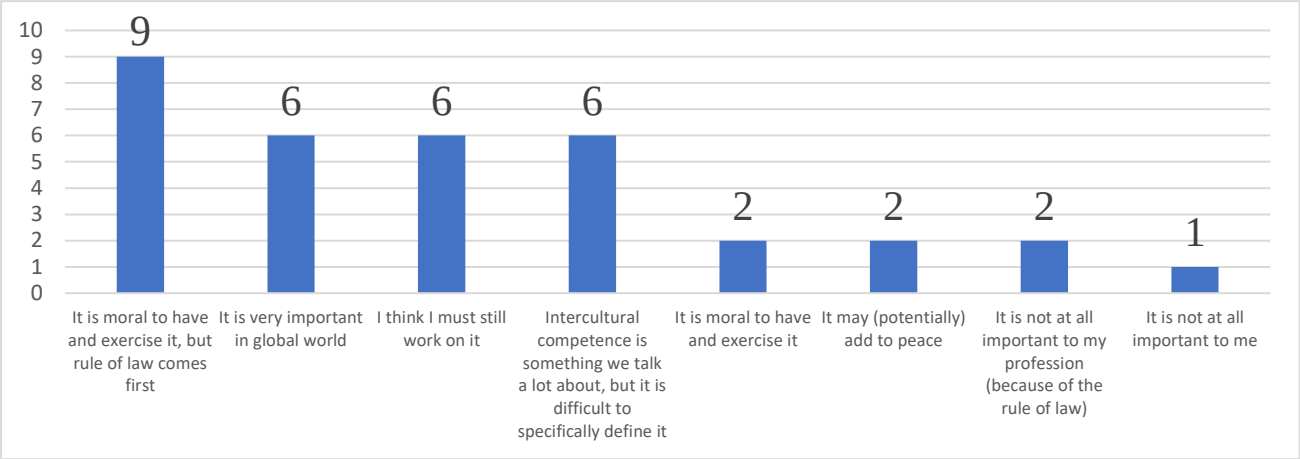


Figure1. Estonian respondents (future law-enforcement officers) on intercultural competence

Interestingly, Estonian colleagues had a much more diversified opinions, e.g., Estonian respondents 26.4% chose their first rank, while 36,9% of Lithuanian respondents chose their first rank.

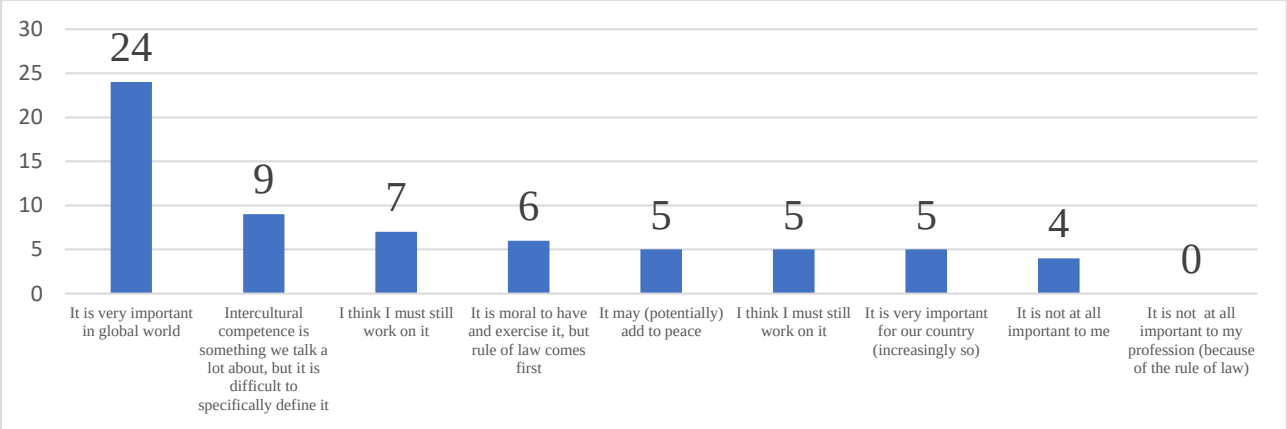


Figure 2. Lithuanian respondents (future law-enforcement officers) on intercultural competence

Even if the rank itself was different (Estonians: 'intercultural competence is important, but rule of law come first' (for Lithuanian this one was in the 4th place); Lithuanians: 'it is very important in contemporary world' (for Estonians this one was in the 2nd place)), but the general distribution of ideas was more diverse among the Estonian colleagues.

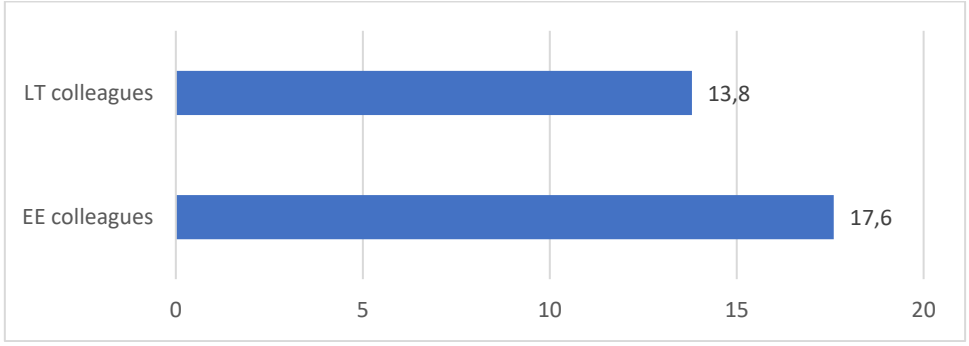


Figure 3. 'Intercultural competence is something we talk a lot about, but it is difficult to specifically define it' – choices (% of respondents)

Lithuanians were quite categorical regarding whether' intercultural competence is important for their profession' (0 respondents chose this statement), while there were 2 Estonians who chose it.

For more Estonian colleagues intercultural competence remains to be further and more precisely defined than for Lithuanian colleagues, Fig.3.

While the data is preliminary, but it shows the differences between interpretations among students in two countries. Surely, we are aware about the limitation of the study and provide these observations merely as a stepping stone for further examinations.

Conclusions

Straightforward aspects of role of intercultural competence, or at least admitting its place among the professional's competencies (including professional law-enforcement officer) may serve as a strong marker regarding society's genuine maturity, level respect for human rights. These aspects illustrate positive and desirable role intercultural competence plays in professional law-enforcement officer's (or any other citizen's) activities.

Controversies, related to intercultural competencies are linked to situations where the balance between sensitivity to intercultural aspects of contemporary living, and upholding the supremacy of law must be maintained in order to secure the general cohesiveness of co-habitation and the implementation of law enforcement for the general state of security within a given society.

Pilot empiric study findings, though preliminary, show that respondents in Estonia and Lithuania attributed different ranks for intercultural competence. For Estonian students intercultural competence is important, but rule of law comes first, for Lithuanian students intercultural competence is important in global world.

Findings show the differences between interpretations among students in two countries, while the limitation of the study should be taken into consideration, yet, the findings provide observations worth further examinations, especially in the light of recent context and also in the light of the curriculum that the professionals (future law enforcement officers) are covering, facing the recent changed geopolitical situation.

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