

## KEY DIMENSIONS OF TRANSVERSAL COMPETENCES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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**Abstract:** In this article, the author will present an innovative way how to develop students' foreign language communicative and intercultural competence alongside with a whole set of transversal competencies via an innovated version of foreign language courses. They may be attended by both university students or secondary school students.

**Keywords:** Innovation, service learning, transversal competencies, foreign language learning.

### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of our paper is to point out one of the possible innovative ways of developing not only foreign language communicative skills, but also several transversal competencies of university students. It is also applicable to high school students.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

Transversal skills and competencies – The word connection transversal skills and competencies is often used as a synonym with the terms generic, key, transferable, global or even 21st century skills or competencies. They all have the same essence but differ slightly in emphasis and purpose, and there are no precise definitions of their use. ‘Generic skills’ are skills that are important for work, education and life in general, applicable in various occupations (e.g., general communication, organizational, interpersonal or analytical skills and abilities). They are sometimes referred to as ‘key competencies’ and operate mainly in the relationship area between education and employment. The term ‘transferable skills and competencies’ emphasizes that these are competencies acquired in one context, e.g., in research, but they can be effectively used and further developed in another context e.g. in employment, or in business.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Global competencies necessary for the next generation of professionals include intercultural competence, which can be defined both as knowledge of culture but also the ability to show intercultural empathy, respect, tolerance, sensitivity, flexibility, the ability to negotiate and argue, try to understand, discuss and achieve consensus with others as well as the ability to communicate in several languages. Foreign language communicative competence - from the point of view of contemporary linguistic didactics - is focused primarily on the ability to communicate in a foreign language. The concept of communicative competence was coined by D. Hymes in his theoretical study. By foreign language communicative competence, we mean the ability of students to use the acquired vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar in the way required by the socio-cultural context and linguistic system, through all four communication skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) [2]. Communicative foreign language competence “contains a static part, ie. complex multilayer knowledge, and a dynamic part, ie. the ability to use this knowledge in various communication contexts” [1]. According to the White Paper on Education and Training by EU Commission, we should have adequate communication skills in at least two foreign languages.

An innovation of foreign language teaching can be achieved in the case of a combination, or better to say, synergy of the goal - which is foreign language communicative and other transversal competencies - with the pedagogical strategy of service-learning. Service learning is based on the

integration of learning processes with meaningful voluntary service to a community, ie it is literally about learning through service. It is a form of experiential learning, where learning occurs in a cycle of activities and critical reflection. It enables students to acquire meaningful learning experiences at the same time as implementing common community solutions to real problems of a particular community. Mitchell and Donahue consider the ideal service-learning experience related to the involvement of students in the community, solving its specific problems, contributing to the real development of communities in particular. According to these authors, “students may see the community as a place of learning equivalent to the classroom or even more valuable than the classroom because knowledge and skills are gained in the context of hands-on use” [3].

It should be emphasized that service-learning includes not only projects for the community, but also their creation in reciprocal relations with the community. The current concept of service-learning includes a critically-reflective practice of better understanding human dignity, oneself, culture, but also socio-economic, political and environmental issues, power relations and social responsibility, in a way emphasizing “the impact of global structures in local contexts. The key dimension of global service-learning is community building, and especially “the development of relational trust and mutual respect” ... It prioritizes the goals of “economic equity, equal partnership, mutual learning, cooperative and positive social change, transparency, and sustainability”. It creates a space for building a “world that recognizes human dignity across nations” (Hartman & Kiely, 2017, 322-324).

As we found out at the first GELS meeting with students, those who were interested in improving their foreign language and intercultural competence, learning about other cultures, as well as in acquiring transversal competencies applied for the course. So far, both domestic and foreign students (studying entire programs at UMB or mobility students) have applied for GELS in each semester.

## **CONCLUSION**

In summary, the main idea of this contribution was to present an innovation consisting of the integration of foreign language teaching with the development of transversal competencies, through a new university course using a service-learning strategy. Within it, internationally mixed groups of university students performed analyzes of the specific needs of a specific community, and subsequently prepared projects to meet them.

The whole innovation has been research-proven. The results showed that such a pedagogical strategy, where students had to cooperate, create and be responsible for the results of group work, contributed to the development of their transversal competencies more than in other, traditionally taught language subjects. Although these were small groups of students, and more massive research would certainly be needed, the results of our validation show that it is extremely successful and, in addition, very popular with students and teachers, as it is a natural, independent and cooperative way of learning.

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