

Role of intercultural communication in foreign languages studying in higher educational institutions

O papel da comunicação intercultural no estudo de línguas estrangeiras em instituições de ensino superior

Papel de la comunicació intercultural en el estudio de lenguas extranjeras en centros de enseñanza superior

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Abstract: *Intercultural communication competence plays a decisive role in the development of values, relations, skills, knowledge and critical thinking, necessary for life and professional activity in the globalised world. This study aims at the analysis of intercultural communication in enhancing the effectiveness of English language studying by students of higher educational institutions. In this study, different empirical methods such as experiment, questionnaire, and qualitative and quantitative analysis were used. The educational online course “International communication” was conducted with the engagement of students at the age of 19-23 from the member-states of the European Union. The effectiveness of students’ education in international and mononational study groups was evaluated. The results showed that students, who studied in international groups, achieved higher indicators compared to students of mononational groups. Testing confirmed that education in international groups significantly accelerated the development of key linguistic skills in the English language. The creation of an educational environment, oriented on intercultural interaction, knowledge and experience exchange, contributed to the achievement of high results in studying. Results of self-evaluation of the personal level of the development of intercultural English-language communication competence by students showed that students of the international group became more confident in their ability to participate in quality intercultural English-language communication than students of the mononational group. Further study perspectives include the development of an integral self-regulating mechanism for the development of intercultural English-language communication competence under conditions of international educational cooperation as well as the creation of the methodology of evaluation of education with the use of quantitative and qualitative indicators.*

Keywords: *Intercultural awareness. Linguistic competence. Pragmatic competence. Sociolinguistic competence.*

Resumo: A competência de comunicação intercultural desempenha um papel decisivo no desenvolvimento de valores,

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relações, capacidades, conhecimentos e pensamento crítico, necessários à vida e à atividade profissional no mundo globalizado. Este estudo tem como objetivo a análise da comunicação intercultural no reforço da eficácia do estudo da língua inglesa por parte de alunos de instituições de ensino superior. Na pesquisa foram utilizados diferentes métodos empíricos, como a experiência, o questionário e a análise qualitativa e quantitativa. O curso educativo em linha “Comunicação internacional” foi realizado com a participação de estudantes com idades compreendidas entre os 19 e os 23 anos, provenientes dos Estados-Membros da União Europeia. Foi avaliada a eficácia da formação dos estudantes em grupos de estudo internacionais e mononacionais. Os resultados mostraram que os estudantes que estudaram em grupos internacionais obtiveram indicadores mais elevados do que os estudantes de grupos mononacionais. Os testes confirmaram que a educação em grupos internacionais acelerou significativamente o desenvolvimento de competências linguísticas fundamentais na língua inglesa. A criação de um ambiente educativo, orientado para a interação intercultural e para a troca de conhecimentos e experiências, contribuiu para a obtenção de resultados elevados nos estudos. Os resultados da autoavaliação do nível pessoal do desenvolvimento da competência de comunicação intercultural em língua inglesa pelos estudantes mostraram que os estudantes do grupo internacional se tornaram mais confiantes na sua capacidade de participar numa comunicação intercultural de qualidade em língua inglesa do que os estudantes do grupo mononacional. Outras perspectivas de estudo incluem o desenvolvimento de um mecanismo integral de autorregulação para o desenvolvimento da competência de comunicação intercultural em língua inglesa em condições de cooperação educativa internacional, bem como a criação de uma metodologia de avaliação da educação com a utilização de indicadores quantitativos e qualitativos.

Palavras-chave: Consciência intercultural. Competência competência linguística. Competência pragmática. Competência sociolinguística.

Resumen: La competencia comunicativa intercultural desempeña un papel decisivo en el desarrollo de valores, relaciones, habilidades, conocimientos y pensamiento crítico, necesarios para la vida y la actividad profesional en el mundo globalizado. Este estudio tiene como objetivo el análisis de la comunicación intercultural en la mejora de la eficacia del estudio de la lengua inglesa por parte de los estudiantes de centros de enseñanza superior. En este estudio se utilizaron diferentes métodos empíricos como el experimento, el cuestionario y el análisis cualitativo y cuantitativo. El curso educativo en línea «Comunicación internacional» se llevó a cabo con la participación de estudiantes de entre 19 y 23 años procedentes de los estados miembros de la Unión Europea. Se evaluó la eficacia de la educación de los estudiantes en grupos de estudio internacionales y mononacionales. Los resultados mostraron que los estudiantes que estudiaron en grupos internacionales obtuvieron indicadores más altos en comparación con los estudiantes de grupos mononacionales. Las pruebas confirmaron que la educación en grupos internacionales aceleraba significativamente el desarrollo de las competencias lingüísticas clave en lengua inglesa. La creación de un entorno educativo, orientado a la interacción intercultural y al intercambio de conocimientos y experiencias, contribuyó al logro de altos resultados en el estudio. Los resultados de la autoevaluación del nivel personal de desarrollo de la competencia comunicativa intercultural en lengua inglesa por parte de los estudiantes mostraron que los estudiantes del grupo internacional tenían más confianza en su capacidad para participar en una comunicación intercultural de calidad en lengua inglesa que los estudiantes del grupo mononacional. Otras perspectivas de estudio incluyen el desarrollo de un mecanismo integral de autorregulación para el desarrollo de la competencia comunicativa intercultural en lengua inglesa en condiciones de cooperación educativa internacional, así como la creación de la metodología de evaluación de la educación con el uso de indicadores cuantitativos y cualitativos.

Palabras clave: Conciencia intercultural. Competencia lingüística. Competencia pragmática. Competencia sociolingüística.

1 INTRODUCTION

Foreign language studying is directly related to immersion in the language environment. A language adapts to new communication needs, creating a variety of forms, demanding the user to possess wider and deeper knowledge of cultures and contexts, where the language is used (Santos-Sopena, Pichel, 2022). Immersion in the culture of people, whose language is studied, is the immersion into the system of its perception of the world. The cul-

ture of people, social conditions of their life and language are inextricably intertwined, therefore these factors should be considered both while studying a foreign language and communicating with representatives of other countries and people (Sarnovska, Rybinska, Antonivska, 2023). In this regard, integration of cultural elements into language studies is essential to develop intercultural awareness of students (Ivenz, Klimova, 2022). Intercultural communication plays a decisive role in teaching foreign languages, developing awareness of cultural differences between students and

contributing to effective communication skills in real-life situations. Intercultural communication provides students with instruments, enabling them to overcome language differences and develop significant relations with people, belonging to different cultures (Kabdulnova, 2024).

Intercultural communication literacy and intercultural understanding are especially relevant under conditions of rapid development of foreign economic and social relations of the world countries under the influence of globalisation processes. Therefore, the importance of training highly-qualified linguistic intercultural specialists, able to skilfully apply the acquired knowledge in professional fields and demonstrate their cultural knowledge for successful participation in intercultural communication increases within the programs of higher education (Korolova, Popova, 2021). Targeted strategies for the development of intercultural competence of students as the ability to effectively function in different cultures, think and act appropriately, as well as communicate and work with people of different cultural backgrounds are more and more often implemented and widely realised. The importance of intercultural competence during foreign language teaching is its ability to provide students with the necessary skills for successful navigation in a diverse cultural environment. Development of these competencies enables them not only to effectively interact with people of different cultural origins but also to better understand their own culture and cultural nuances, characteristic of language studying (Achieng, 2023).

Intercultural communication skills play a key role in effective intercultural communication, strengthening global mutual understanding and making cooperation in the modern, interrelated world easier. The development of profound understanding and respect for all cultures has a significant meaning for the development of cohesive communities, enabling the co-existence of mutual exchange of ideas, as well as cultural norms and values (Joseph, Nethsinghe, Cabedo-Mas, Mellizo,

2024). Modern digital technologies significantly extend possibilities of intercultural education, eliminating present barriers, and providing an exciting and personalised educational experience, as well as contributing to the development of global relations. Using technology, students can immerse themselves deeper into studying and understanding various cultures. Immersive technologies such as virtual and augmented reality enable students to study different cultures, visit historical places, participate in virtual exchanges and master various cultural practices. Online forums, video conferences and platforms for joint work create conditions for unobstructed interaction and idea exchange between students from different cultures. Overcoming geographical borders, these platforms contribute to interaction in real-time, intercultural understanding and successful teamwork. Thus, modern technologies open new opportunities for intercultural education and cooperation on a global scale.

This study aims at the analysis of intercultural communication in enhancing the effectiveness of English language studying by students of higher educational institutions. To achieve the set aim, the following tasks were formed:

to conduct an educational online course "International communication" with the engagement of students at the age of 19-23 from the member-states of the European Union;

to evaluate the effectiveness of students' studying in international and mononational study groups within the educational course;

to determine differences in the progress of students, who studied in international and mononational groups, related to linguistic competence development;

to evaluate the level of development of intercultural English-language communication competence of students and determine differences in the acquired skills;

to analyse the results of self-evaluation of the personal level of the development of intercultural English-language communication competence by students.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The intercultural theory of foreign education originates from several independent directions of studies, which are based on the theory of intercultural education and the theory of intercultural communication. According to researchers Chui and Mohammed (2024) cultural awareness has a significant meaning in studying foreign languages, especially when its aim is the development of interlingual and intercultural skills. Researchers Saparbaeva, Norboyeva and Azatova (2021) consider that appropriate development of students' treatment of values of national and foreign cultures creates the basis for the rational use of knowledge, skills, internal (understanding, communication, word choice) and external (translation, expression, and presentation) of the potential of the studied communication material. Thus, integration of the intercultural theory in foreign education is a necessary condition for the formation of cultural awareness and interlingual skills of students, which in turn contributes to successful socialisation and effective interaction in the globalised world.

Chinese researchers Yang, Huang and Li (2024) believe that the development of intercultural communication skills should consider the tendency of cultural essentialism, which provides that there is one universal essence and integrity within a specific culture. Relations, concepts, and behaviour of people and manifestations of the culture, to which they belong, where culture stereotypes are its integral feature. Essentialism leads to the specification of cultural aspects, where cultural differences are the most important and influential aspect of intercultural communication. Researchers Yanping and Burhanudeen (2023) believe that interculturality is related to the mutual understanding of differences when people of different origins establish communication relations. Thus, considering the importance of cultural essentialism in the development of intercultural communication, it is necessary to realise that understanding cultural stereotypes and differences is the key to effective interaction between representatives of different cultures,

which, in turn, contributes to better mastering of the foreign language and strengthening intercultural relations.

In their study, Chen (2022) presented the instrument of intercultural competence (IC) for Chinese students studying Spanish as a foreign language (SFL). The researchers defined seven personal qualities for the development of intercultural competence: attentiveness and readiness to interact, respect for cultural differences, confidence in interaction, satisfaction from communication, non-verbal communication and behaviour, cultural elements and non-verbal aspects of verbal communication. Researcher Sharma (2020) pays attention to the importance of the development of intercultural research abilities of students, using the notion of transcultural communication competence. Receiving strong knowledge of intercultural and transcultural aspects, students can develop transactional cultural competence, which enables them to effectively interact and conduct negotiations with professionals from different cultures, having different cultural beliefs. According to researchers Mena-cho-Vargas, Garcia, Rojas, Wong-Fajardo and Saavedra-López (2021) studying the targeted culture may help students achieve their communication goals due to the developed ability to correctly and effectively use language in different cultural situations. Thus, the development of intercultural competence of students who study foreign languages, is an integral part of the educational process, enabling them not only to effectively interact with representatives of various cultures but achieve communication goals through a profound understanding of cultural aspects and transcultural skills.

According to researchers Khataee and Dowlatabadi (2023) previous knowledge and experience of students including their cultural origin affect their understanding and interpretation of the new information. Language teachers can activate and develop available information perception of students, related to the cultural context of the language by the inclusion of cultural materials, means and experience, reflecting cultural variety.

Foreign language teaching plays a dominant role in the development of intercultural competence, due to which students receive the ability to orient in cultural nuances and establish significant relations in different contexts along with language skills. Therefore, it is important to emphasise the significant role of teachers in the creation of a meaningful intercultural education experience and realisation of effective teaching strategies with an accent on the development of the various aspects of intercultural competence, including cultural knowledge, skills of intercultural communication, cultural awareness, sensitivity, and adaptivity (Oberste-Berghaus, 2024). According to Indonesian scientists Fitriani and Pratiwi (2024) integration of cultural awareness into language studying can significantly improve the general communicative abilities of students. Therefore, teachers should pay special attention to the development of intercultural competence along with linguistic skills for better preparation of students for interaction in the real world. The main purpose of intercultural education should be directed at the extension of the global world-view of students and providing them with the possibility to participate in more effective intercultural communication with people of different cultural origins (Fan, 2024). Moreover, to achieve a high motivation level, educational intercultural events shall be carefully planned with consideration of the most appropriate motivating factors, the main of which are: i) development of goals and setting tasks, which, according to students, are related to the real life; ii) realisation of teamwork as the basis of cooperation; iii) use of modern digital technologies to make intercultural educational communication more enjoying, timely and effective (Colomar, Menn, 2024). Thus, for successful foreign language teaching and the development of intercultural competence of students, it is necessary to integrate cultural awareness and modern pedagogical approaches, which will enable students not only to improve their language skills, but also become more sensitive and adaptive in the diverse global community, ready to effective interaction with people of different cultures.

According to Chinese researchers Su and

Pan (2022), the creation and realisation of the effective intercultural method of English language studying in class is an important measure, contributing to the development of intercultural foreign language communication skills. It is important to be flexible in the use of discussion methods of communicative education, enabling students to interact with a particular cultural situation and immerse themselves into the cultural atmosphere to deepen understanding of the cultural meaning of the vocabulary, and the cultural background of communication. It is worth noting that rapid technological development has a significant influence on intercultural education. The Internet has become a powerful platform for uniting cultures and facilitating intercultural communication. Israeli scientist Shonfeld (2024) believes that teachers can use the potential of digital technologies to overcome cultural gaps, promote inclusiveness and improve intercultural mutual understanding. Due to innovative pedagogical approaches, technologies can be a transformative tool in the development of intercultural competencies and the creation of a more inclusive and globally connected educational environment (Shonfeld, 2024). Thus, effective intercultural English language teaching, which is based on the flexible use of discussion methods and digital technologies, is a key factor in the development of intercultural communication skills of students, enabling them to effectively interact in the globalised world.

3 METHODS AND MATERIALS

3.1 METHODS

In this study, empirical methods such as experiment, questionnaire, qualitative and quantitative analyses were used. To determine the influence of intercultural communication on the effectiveness of English language learning, a six-month educational experiment (from January to July 2024) was conducted. The questionnaire method was used to determine the academic progress of students of the focus group, who studied the online course “Intercultural communication”. The qualitative and

quantitative analytical method was used in the process of detecting the influence of the international communication academic environment on the level of development of linguistic competencies of students.

3.2 STUDY SAMPLING FORMATION

Course moderators conducted an advertising campaign on social networks, in particular on Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, and WhatsApp during September- December 2023. The campaign offered free six-month training on the course "Intercultural communication" and was oriented toward students from the member-states of the European Union at the age of 19-23, having an intermediate level of English (B1).

As a result of testing and participant selection, 38 applications for training from students from the following countries were confirmed: Belgium (3 persons), Bulgaria (5 persons), Croatia (5 persons), Finland (5 persons), France (4 persons), Lithuania (5 persons), Latvia (3 persons), Poland (2 persons), Romania (4 persons) and Italy (3 persons).

For educational process organisation, 8 subgroups were formed. Each of them consisted of 19 participants, 5 of which were international (Annex A, Table A.1). The focus group of the study consisted of 113 students of Kharkiv State Academy of Design and Fine Arts. The experimental group consisted of 56 students from the international group (Inter 1-5), while the control group consisted of 57 students from mononational groups (Local 6-8).

3.3 STUDY PROCEDURE

Moderation functions were performed by three lecturers of the Department of Pedagogics, Ukrainian and Foreign Philology of the Faculty "Environment Design" of Kharkiv State Academy of Design and Fine Arts. Educational video lessons, oriented at the development of the key components of intercultural English-language communication competence, in particular, linguistic, sociolinguistic, pragmatic competencies, intercultural awareness, sensi-

tivity, tolerance and open-mindedness, as well as coordination and cooperation in intercultural communication of students were presented on SkillShare platform.

Interactive individual tasks, developed on SkillzRun platform, and enabling students to learn while using a mobile application were prepared for each class. Furthermore, participants of the educational experiment could daily practice their communication skills, working on joint tasks in the online environment of the Zoom platform. They also created interactive content on the studied themes with the use of online service Genially and joint work platform Microsoft Teams.

Course moderators created a study group on the social network Telegram, where each group made a report on its academic achievements in the form of a microblog. Participants selected discussion themes and provided jointly developed interactive materials on the given themes for discussions.

3.4 EVALUATION OF THE ACADEMIC PROGRESS

At the beginning and end of the educational experiment course moderators conducted testing of the level of development of linguistic competence of students, which involved evaluation of the level of grammar, lexical, phonetic, phonological, stylistic and discursive competencies. The students were given situational video tasks with test questions.

After the end of the experiment, the level of the development of intercultural English-language communication competence of the students of the focus group was evaluated in the form of interactive testing, which was conducted using the mobile application SkillzRun. 100-score grading ECTS scale was used for testing.

Herewith, at the end of the experiment, students were offered to determine their personal level of the development of intercultural English-language communication competence by self-evaluation. The questionnaire contained statements, with which students should agree or disagree. For the evaluation, Likert scale with 5 gradations was used: 1- completely disagree, 2

- somewhat agree, 3- largely agree, 4- completely agree, 5- definitely agree (Annex A, Table A.2).

3.5 INSTRUMENTS

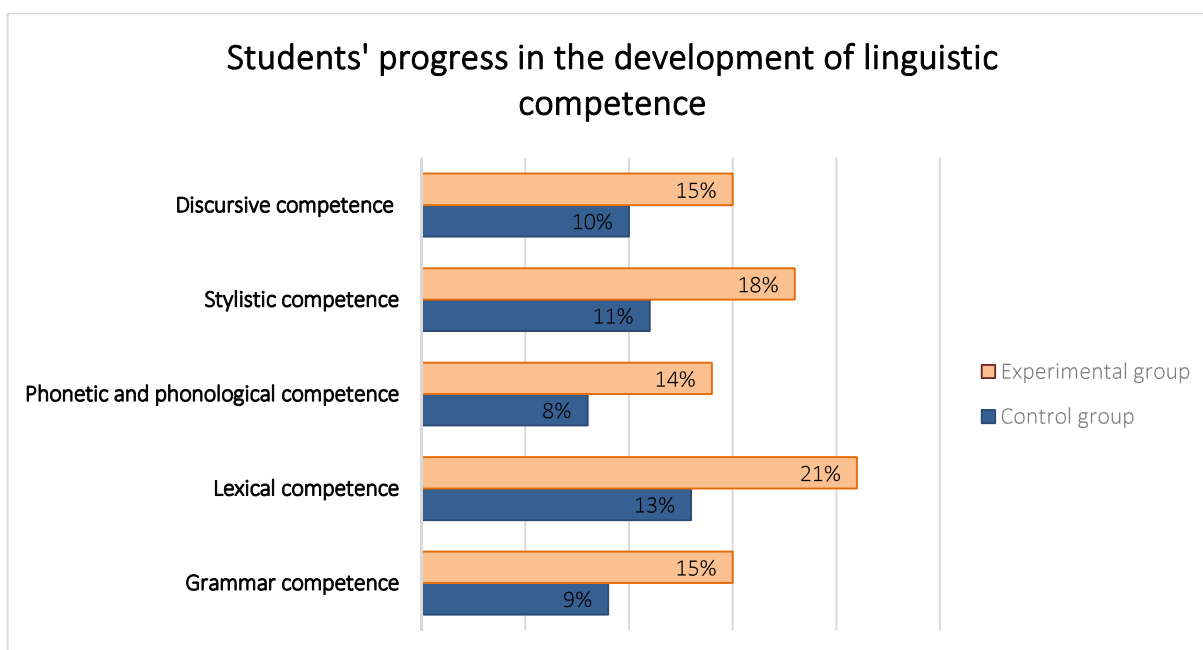
The received data were analysed and processed using statistical methods and Microsoft Excel software. Questionnaires of the respondents were sorted based on the relevance, T-test of independent sampling method results did not show a significant difference ($>0,037$). For a check of the systematic error of the general method, Harman's one-factor test was used. The first-factor dispersion was 37,23% (less than 50%), which confirms the absence of serious systematic error in the general method of this study.

4 RESULTS

Intercultural communication grounds on linguistic competence, which is a decisive fac-

tor in successful communication. The ability to build consistent and logical statements is especially important during intercultural interaction and communication in a foreign language. The results of testing of the level of development of linguistic competence of students, which involved evaluation of the level of grammar, lexical, phonetic, phonological, stylistic and discursive competencies conducted at the beginning and end of the educational experiment by course moderators indicate significant progress of students in the improvement of their linguistic skills. All students of the focus group demonstrated better results in the final testing compared to the initial one. However, the achievements of students of the experimental group, who studied in international study groups, were better than those of students of the control group, who studied in mononational groups (Figure 1).

Figure 1- Students' progress in the development of linguistic competence



Source: Prepared by the authors (2024).

In the process of studying the course "Intercultural communication" students of the experimental group achieved significant progress in the development of lexical competencies (+21%), which is 8% more compared to the

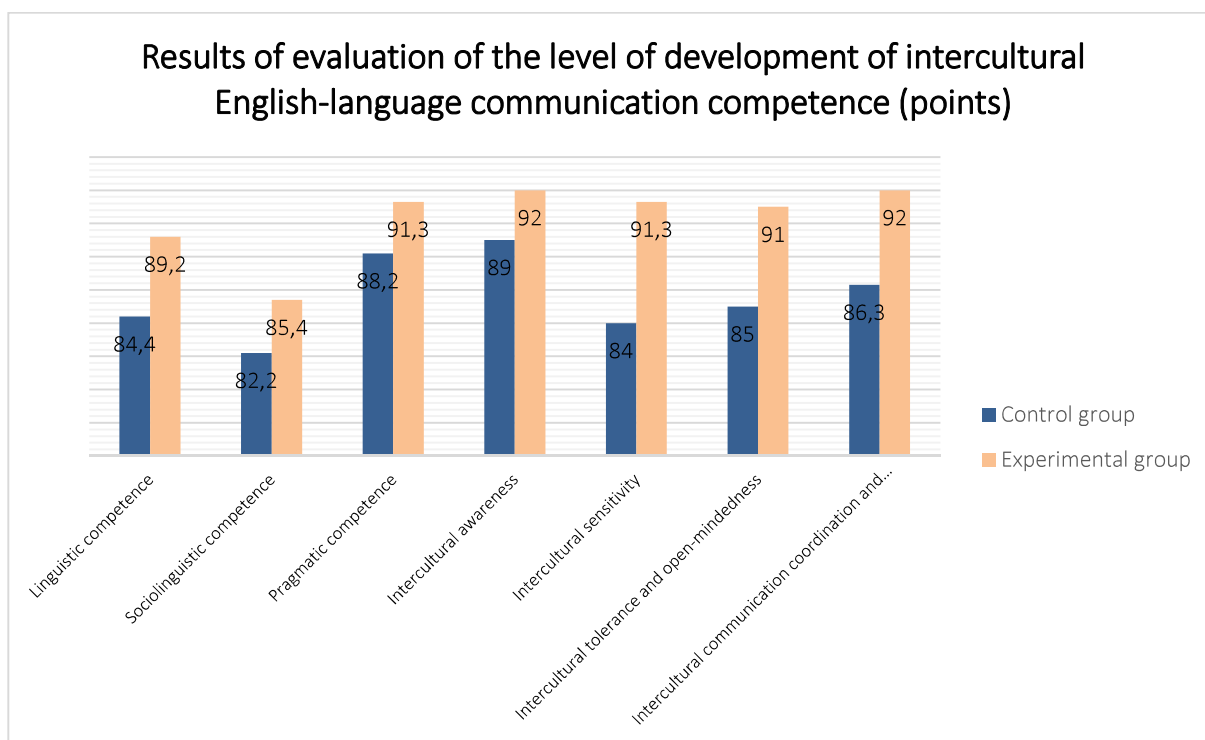
level of progress of the students of the control group (+13%). Students of the experimental group achieved progress in the development of phonetic and phonological competencies (+14%), which is 6% more compared to the

level of progress of the students of the control group (+8%). The progress in the development of the grammar competence of the students of the experimental group was 15%, 6% more compared to the progress of the students of the control group – 9%. Students of the experimental group achieved progress in discursive competence (+15%), which is 5% more compared to the level of progress of the students of the control group (+10%). The progress of the students of the experimental group in the development of stylistic competence was 18%, 7% more compared to the progress of the

students of the control group – 11%. Testing results demonstrate that education in international groups significantly accelerated the development of key linguistic skills in the English language. The creation of the educational environment, oriented on intercultural interaction, knowledge, and experience exchange, contributed to the achievement of higher results in studying.

Results of the evaluation of achievements of students in the development of intercultural English-language communication competencies are presented in Figure 2 and Annex B, Table B1.

Figure 2- Results of the evaluation of the level of the development of intercultural English-language communication competence



Source: Prepared by the authors (2024).

The results of the evaluation of the level of the development of intercultural English-language communicative competence show that the experimental group demonstrated higher achievements on most criteria compared to the control group. The average score of the students in the experimental group was 90 scores, which is 4 scores more than those of the students in the control group. By linguistic competence, students of the experimental group got 89,2 scores, which is 4,8 score more than students of the control group received. By the

sociolinguistic competence, the experimental group got 85,4 scores, which is 3,2 scores more than the control group got. By pragmatic competence, the experimental group got 91,3 scores, which is 3,2 scores more than the control group got. Regarding intercultural awareness, the experimental group got 92 scores, which is 3 scores more than the control group got. The most visible prevalence of the experimental group is observed in the category of intercultural sensitivity, where its result was 91,3 scores against 84 scores in the control group.

The experimental group also significantly exceeds the control group in intercultural tolerance and open-mindedness, getting 91 scores compared to 85 scores accordingly. Regarding intercultural communicative coordination and cooperation, the experimental group got 92 scores, which is 5.8 scores more than the control group got. Thus, students who studied in international groups demonstrated a higher level of readiness for intercultural communication in the English language compared to the students of the control group.

Results of students' self-evaluation of the level of development of their intercultural English-language communicative competence showed that students of the experimental group became more confident in their skills to effectively participate in intercultural English-language communication compared to the students of the control group (see. Annex B, Table B.1). The general level of the development of this competence, the students of the experimental group evaluated in 4,53 scores, which is by 1,22 scores more than in the control group, where the average score was 3,30 scores. According to students, participation in the online course significantly improved their skills to effectively use the English language in all aspects, in particular, grammar, vocabulary, phonetics and syntax, which contributed to correct and appropriate communication. While studying they mastered skills in usage of various communication forms with consideration of the age, sex, profession and social status of the interlocutor. With the course, they mastered the skill to correctly interpret the meaning of expressions and adequately react depending on the context and intentions of the interlocutor. They learned to detect and evaluate cultural differences and similarities between different communities. Students also noted that they became able to establish deeper communicative relations, and became open to dialogue and perception of new ideas and views. Additionally, they learned to arrange acts and effectively interact in international cooperation.

In general, study results indicate that participation in international academic groups

during English language studying can significantly enhance the quality of student preparation for successful interaction in an intercultural environment. The international academic environment contributes to the student's development of English-language communication competencies, necessary for life and work in the globalised world. Such a training format enables the development of skills necessary for participation in harmonious and productive international communication.

5 DISCUSSION

The results of our study demonstrated the advantages of education in international groups and proved the effectiveness of such education for the development of key intercultural English-language communication skills. Furthermore, students' participation in academic international events, directed at cooperation, led to better results in language studying in linguistics, grammar, phonetics, phonology, stylistics, and discursive aspects.

Our findings are consistent with the results of Ukrainian, Chinese, Vietnamese, Dutch, American, and Irish studies. Thus, the results of the study, in which Ukrainian students participated, showed that integration of the international experience and methodological tool of foreign language teaching in different modes (online, offline, mixed mode), can foster their academic success. The educational experiment demonstrated that intercultural activity as independent students work on cultural issues, interaction with native speakers within the organisation of cultural events, and participation in academic mobility programs foster both the academic success of students and internationalisation of the activity of the faculty (Korolova, Popova, 2021). Results of the study by Oberste-Berghaus (2024), showed that effective strategies and teaching approaches such as the inclusion of authentic materials, integration of cultural content, promoting student autonomy and enabling them to experiment contribute to enhancing the level of intercultural foreign-language communication competence.

The educational experiment, in which Chinese students participated, showed that the model of integrated teaching to read and write with the use of electronic authentic news material enables improvement of understanding of current events at home and abroad, enhancing cultural literacy, improving general lingual skills of students and their mental abilities (FAN, 2024). The educational experiment, in which students from Vietnam participated, emphasised the importance of communication with peers in the process of foreign language learning. The findings of this study showed that daily communication practice with peers is an important approach to the improvement of speaking skills, moreover, interaction with peers fosters vocabulary development, which, in turn, enables more effective articulation of thoughts and feelings (Ha, 2024). The results of these studies are consistent with the results of our study, which showed that the use of integrated teaching approaches and active communication in international groups contributes to students' improvement of language competence and cultural literacy.

The results of the educational experiment, which involved the participation of students from the Netherlands, confirmed the effectiveness of joint communication in forming intercultural communication competence. Integration of educational instruments, the realisation of intercultural contacts (work in groups, multicultural class, cultural informants), and the use of motivational factors enabled students to acquire useful intercultural academic experiences rich in thematic reflections, abstract conceptualisation and experimentation (Vromans, Korzilius, Bücken, De Jong, 2023). This corresponds to the results of our study, which proved that joint education with an emphasis on intercultural interaction effectively fosters the development of complex communicative and cultural skills of students.

Undoubtedly, to achieve a sufficient level of intercultural communicative competence, students should expand their vocabulary. The possibilities of vocabulary learning with the use of digital games attract more attention from practitioners and researchers. Ameri-

can researchers Chowdhury *et al.* (2024) concluded that game contexts, presented in a digital environment, can effectively influence students' internal motivation to learn a foreign language. Playing digital games enables students to contextualise language studying, where vocabulary has double coding due to multimodal storytelling in the context of the game. Internal motivation and contextualised education lead students to better results in vocabulary learning. This corresponds to the findings of our study, which confirmed that the use of gamified interactive content in language studying not only fosters vocabulary expansion but also makes the educational process more attractive and effective due to enhancing internal motivation and educational material contextualization.

Regardless of the expanded integration of digital possibilities for teaching intercultural linguistic competence with the focus on immersive intercultural experience provision, giving students cultural studies and modelling intercultural situations, educational design in the digital environment is not always effective, unless it involves high-order design. Results of the study by Huang (2023) showed that teaching methods oriented on cultural metacognition such as explicit studying and discussion of metacognitive skills as well as reflexive questions and letters can contribute to goal-oriented knowledge acquiring by students, develop positive intercultural relations and contribute to such cognition use in practice.

6 CONCLUSION

The results of our study demonstrated the advantages of education in international groups, proving the effectiveness of such an approach for the development of key intercultural English-language communication skills. Students' participation in academic international events, aimed at cooperation, enhanced the results in language studying in linguistics, grammar, phonetics, phonology, stylistics, and discussion aspects.

The educational experiment, conducted with the participation of students from

Ukraine, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, France, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Romania, and Italy demonstrated better effectiveness of English language studying in international groups compared to mononational ones. The average score of the students of the international group was 90 scores, which is 4 scores more than those of the students of the mononational group. Regarding linguistic competence, students of the international group got 89,2 scores, which is 4,8 scores more than the students of the mononational group got. By the indicator of sociolinguistic competence, the difference was 3,2 scores in favour of the international group (85,4 scores versus 82,2 scores). By the pragmatic competence category, students of the international group got 91,3 scores, which is 3,2 scores more than students of the mononational group got. The difference in the indicator of intercultural awareness was 3 scores in favour of the international group (92 scores versus 89 scores). The most visible prevalence of students of the international group was observed in the category of intercultural sensitivity, where its result was 91,3 scores against 84 scores in the mononational group. Students of the international group also significantly exceeded students of the mononational in the indicator of intercultural tolerance and open-mindedness, getting 91 scores versus 85 scores accordingly. Regarding intercultural communicative coordination and cooperation, students of the international group got 92 scores, which is 5,8 scores more than students of the mononational group got (86,2 scores). The received results indicate that studying in an international environment facilitates the successful development of language communication skills. Thus, students of the international group were better prepared for intercultural English language communication compared to students of the mononational group.

6.1 STUDY LIMITATIONS

The main limitation of the study is the heterogeneity of the composition of international study groups. Most participants of in-

ternational groups were Ukrainian students, which could significantly affect the results in obtaining intercultural English-language communication competence. Furthermore, the study evaluated the academic achievements not only of students of the focus group, which involved only students of the Kharkiv State Academy of Design and Arts. These limitations prevent a complete evaluation of the potential of international educational cooperation in English language studying. Further quantitative and qualitative studies with larger and more balanced samples are needed.

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Table A.1. Participants of the educational experiment

Annex A

Group	Number of participants	Age	State (number of participants)
Inter 1	19	18-23	Ukraine (10), Belgium (1), Bulgaria (2), Croatia (1), Finland (2), France (1), Lithuania (1), Italy (1)
Inter 2	19		Ukraine (12), Bulgaria (1), Croatia (1), Latvia (1), Poland (1), Romania (2), Italy (1)
Inter 3	19		Ukraine (10), Belgium (1), Bulgaria (2), Croatia (2), Finland (1), France (1), Lithuania (1), Latvia (1)
Inter 4	19		Ukraine (12), Finland (2), France (1), Lithuania (1), Romania (2), Italy (1)
Inter 5	19		Ukraine (12), Belgium (1), Croatia (1), France (1), Lithuania (2), Latvia (1), Poland (1)
Local 6	19		Ukraine (19)
Local 7	19		Ukraine (19)
Local 8	19		Ukraine (19)
Total	190		

Table A.2. Questionnaire for self-evaluation of the level of the development of intercultural English-language communication competence

Components of intercultural English-language communication competence	Statement	Evaluation scale (1 - completely disagree, 2 - somewhat agree, 3 - largely agree, 4 - completely agree, 5 - definitely agree).				
		1	2	3	4	5
1. Linguistic competence	1. I can effectively use the language in all its aspects, including grammar, vocabulary, phonetics, and syntax for correct and appropriate communication.					
	2. I can build grammatically correct sentences.					
	3. While communicating, I use a wide range of words and expressions.					
	4. I easily perceive the other person's language, understand and interpret the meaning correctly.					
	5. I can correctly use intonation to express meaning, emotions and different semantic connotations.					

	6. I easily adapt my speech style to different communication situations and can achieve better understanding and influence on the interlocutor.					
	7. I easily participate in a discussion, maintain the topic of conversation, use communication tools. 8. I can logically build my communication, and maintain its flow to achieve the goal of communication.					
2. Sociolinguistic competence	9. I can use various communication forms with consideration of the age, sex, profession and social status of the interlocutor.					
	10. I can adapt my communication to different formality levels depending on the situation, audience, and communication goal.					
	11. I can use social communication norms, related to speech behaviour in different cultural and social groups					
	12. I can apply the rules of etiquette and politeness, with consideration of the cultural peculiarities of the interlocutor.					
	13. I consider the socio-cultural context in communication to avoid misunderstanding and conflicts.					
	14. I can adapt my communication depending on the social group to which the interlocutor belongs.					
	15. I can organise and maintain mutual understanding between people with different social and cultural peculiarities. 16. I easily adapt to different cooperation types in heterogeneous social groups.					
3. Pragmatic competence	17. I can correctly interpret the meaning of the said and react according to the context and intention of the interlocutor.					
	18. I can choose the most effective method of opinion expression depending on the situation and goal.					
	19. I can use relevant non-verbal information transmission means.					
	20. I can use different communication instruments to enhance communication efficiency.					
	21. I can correctly understand and interpret communication context.					
	22. I can make communication understandable and define communication forms.					
	23. I can evaluate information presented to me, structure it and make conclusions.					

	24. I easily get in touch and adapt to the format, norms, and rules of communication.					
4. Intercultural awareness	25. I possess knowledge of cultural differences and similarities between different communities.					
	26. I understand the influence cultural factors have on the behaviour and communication of the interlocutor.					
	27. I can detect and evaluate cultural differences and similarities between different communities. 28. I can correctly use knowledge of traditions, customs, beliefs and social norms of different cultures in the process of communication.					
5. Intercultural sensitivity	29. I can feel and empathically react to cultural differences in the process of communication.					
	30. I can adapt my communicative behaviour depending on the cultural context.					
	31. I can correctly perceive non-verbal communication signs such as gestures, facial expressions, and intonation, which can be different in different cultures. 32. I easily perceive and use new cultural practices and ideas.					
6. Intercultural tolerance and open-mindedness	33. I positively perceive cultural differences in the process of communication.					
	34. I am open to dialogue with representatives of other cultures, and easily perceive new ideas and views.					
	35. I can maintain effective and productive relations in multinational communication groups. 36. I can bypass and challenge stereotypes and prejudices, fostering deeper understanding and respect within the communication team.					
7. Intercultural communicative coordination and cooperation	37. I can coordinate events and interactions in international cooperation.					
	38. I can adapt my communication strategies, considering the cultural peculiarities of interlocutors.					
	39. I can establish mutual understanding and respect between interlocutors, to foster more effective interaction.					
	40. I can develop and participate in trustful relations with interlocutors from other cultures.					

Source: construed by the authors

Annex B

Competences	Control group (average score)	Experimental group (average score)	Differences in experimental/ control group (average score)
1. Linguistic competence	84,4	89,2	4,8
Grammar competence	81	87	6

Table B.1. Results of the evaluation of the level of the development of intercultural English-language communication competence

Lexical competence	85	93	8
Phonetic and phonological competence	81	89	8
Stylistic competence	96	91	-5
Discursive competence	79	86	7
2. Sociolinguistic competence	82,2	85,4	3,2
Competence in the use of social variations in the language	84	87	3
Competence in the use of cultural communication norms	85	82	-3
Competence in contextualization and interpretation of the meanings of communication	82	89	7
Adaptivity and flexibility in communication with different social groups	78	83	5
Competence in organisation of effective communication and mutual understanding in the group	82	86	4
3. Pragmatic competence	88,2	91,3	3,2
Verbal intercultural communication competence	86	93	7
Non-verbal intercultural communication competence	89	91	2
Competence in understanding speech context	86	89	3
Competence in presenting speech context	89	91	2
Evaluative and analytical communication competence	90	93	3
Creative communication competence	89	91	2
4. Intercultural awareness	89	92	3
Knowledge of cultural norms and values	90	93	3
Understanding cultural contexts	88	91	3
5. Intercultural sensitivity	84	91,3	7

Emotional communicative flexibility and adaptivity under conditions of cultural diversity	87	94	7
Empathy and sensory perception skills	81	87	6
Intercultural cooperation skills	84	93	9
6. Intercultural tolerance and open-mindedness	85	91	6
Ability to avoid stereotypes and prejudice	84	87	3
Communicative open-mindedness and initiative	86	95	9
7. Intercultural communicative coordination and cooperation	86,3	92	5,8
Skills in communication goals setting	87	91	4
Skills of use of different communication styles for communication goals achievement	84	93	9
Effective cooperation skills	88	94	6
Skills of mutual exchange of knowledge and skills in intercultural communication groups	86	90	4
Average score	86	90	4

Source: construed by the authors

Annex B

Table B.1. Results of self-evaluation of students

Intercultural English-language communication competencies of the participants of the educational experiment	Control group (average score)	Experimental group (average score)	Differences experimental/control group (average score)
Linguistic communication skills	3,45	4,67	1,22
Sociolinguistic communication skills	3,24	4,32	0,98
Pragmatic communication skills	3,41	4,57	1,16
Intercultural awareness	3,39	4,16	0,77
Intercultural communicative sensitivity	3,29	4,77	1,48
Intercultural tolerance and open-mindedness	3,23	4,86	1,63
Intercultural communicative coordination and cooperation skills	3,07	4,34	1,27
Average score	3,30	4,53	1,22

Source: construed by the authors