STUDIES

Developing Students' Language Competence and Essential 21st Century Skills for Future Employability: The Case of Latvia and Lithuania

Ineta Luka – Irena Seniut[*]

Abstract:
Introduction: Nowadays, language and intercultural competences have become core employability skills in many fields, supporting the development of other skills which emphasizes the necessity for specific pedagogic approaches in developing online learning materials and courses that would develop learners' language competence and other relevant 21st century skills for future employability. The current comparative summative evaluation research conducted in two higher education institutions in Latvia and Lithuania analyses students' feedback, elicited from 200 students, on the efficiency of the methods and methodologies applied in the course development and their suitability to develop the above-mentioned skills and competences.
Methods: The research implies a mixed-model design comprising a students' questionnaire (a quantitative tool) and students' essays (a qualitative tool). Quantitative data analysis was done applying descriptive and inferential statistics tests by IBM SPSS 22 software, qualitative data analysis – applying discourse analysis.
Results: The findings indicate that students highly evaluate the learning platform and the courses created. They find them as useful, visually appealing, interesting, interactive, well-structured, and easy to understand. Students acknowledge that they have developed their knowledge of professional lexis, reading skills, grammar and gained useful knowledge in their field. Significant differences were found concerning students' group, specialization and the course completed – local students vs. international students as to the evaluation of the learning platform, students of IT field vs. business fields, Latvian students vs. Lithuanian students as to the intercultural B2/C1 English course completed. The research results

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strengthen the cognitions derived from theory on significant issues to be observed when creating blended-learning courses.

Discussion: The course designed is an alternative way of learning and may be useful for anyone who wishes to update their language and intercultural competence either through a formal or non-formal education course or on a lifelong learning basis.

Limitations: The research period covered one semester only. Although the study materials for 16 languages have been created, the current paper analyses only the results obtained in piloting English and Spanish courses, with the predominance of learners opting for English courses.

Conclusions: The research results show that the methods and methodologies applied in the given interactive blended-learning courses have developed the students' language competence and have fostered the development of their digital competence, team-working and collaboration skills, problem-solving skills and learning-to-learn thus motivating them to become autonomous learners. The pedagogy-based approach applied in the current research has been successful despite a few flaws in the design of the course materials.

Key words: language competence, 21st century skills, blended-learning.

Moral Reciprocity, Ethics of Appropriation of Indigenous Medicinal Plant Knowledge and Associated Biopiracy

Oscar Agbor Ambang – Sergio Alloggio – Roman Tandlich [*]

Abstract:
Introduction: Although this paper deals mostly with the positive effects of a posthumanist worldview on environmental sustainability, partnership, or moral accountability in science and scientific research, it also promotes a new understanding of our educational practice in higher education. The ideas espoused have the ability to inspire educators at all levels to show students, future researchers or other professions about the importance of a progressive, holistic approach to our environment. We claim that being sensitive and caring for our environment is not only part of our moral and ethical responsibility, it is an inseparable aspect of our environmental education, our environmental intelligence. This paper discusses posthumanist[1] reciprocity ethics in the context of traditional knowledge (TK) and the protection of indigenous traditional knowledge from commercial exploitation.
Methods: Instances of unethical bioprospecting and biopiracy were common throughout the turn of the 21st century and are discussed using cases in countries such as Cameroon, India, South Africa and Australia, where medicinal plant species were, are still a highly sought-after source of potent, pharmacologically active phytochemicals.
Results and discussion: The observed increase in regulations against bioprospecting on indigenous land in these countries as a result of intellectual property monopoly by big pharmaceutical companies is discussed in this paper along the lines of a 'humanist vs posthumanist' ontology. Patent exclusivity laws have historically marginalized the proprietary owners of indigenous traditional knowledge, creating a moral

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[1] Posthumanism is a new approach in contemporary philosophy that deconstructs some of the most fundamental assumptions of modern Western culture, its ontology, epistemology and ethics. It is a critical approach that aims at understanding the role of the human subject in relation to both the natural world and knowledge-production practice, and how that relationship plays out into socio-cultural and socio-political spheres of society.

and ethical rift between those that seek to exploit this knowledge commercially and those from whom the knowledge originally comes from. This disconnection from nature and natural resources due to a humanistic approach[2] to growth and development, often leads to environmental exploitation, exploitation of indigenous people and unsustainable commercial practices. Existing research and bioprospecting ethics that are practiced on indigenous lands must be questioned in their ability to provide mutually beneficial outcomes for all stakeholders.

Conclusions: The posthumanist approach to morality and research ethics is discussed in this paper as a possible and practical alternative to humanism along with the potential for posthumanist ethics to be a tool to shape legal frameworks and the policies that protect at-risk communities and their respective natural environments. Our current developmental trajectory as a collective species has us blurring the lines that separate the 'human' from the 'non-human' elements in our world as humanity grows towards a more technologically advanced but equally environmentally dependent people. Thus, the currently existing systems of ethics that govern the relationship between the 'human' and 'non-human' must be called into question. This paper aims to illustrate the positive effects of a posthumanist worldview on issues such as environmental sustainability, partnership, moral accountability and reciprocity ethics in the context of modern science and modern scientific research.

Key words: moral reciprocity, ethics, biopiracy.

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[2] Humanism is here understood as a philosophical school of thought that advocates progressive and critical thinking but tolerates no epistemic space for extrahuman beliefs: the human (cap)ability is the only candidate to lead an ethical life. However, humanistic approaches place human beings at the centre of every research practice, thus discriminating against non-human entities in nature like animals and natural resources.

Comparison of Teachers' Opinions on Inspections

Ján Bajtoš[*]

Abstract:
Introduction: The quality of school depends on a well-functioning school management, managed by the top school managers. It is very important to know the real conditions of the school to be able to provide any effective changes. Especially, it is necessary to know the educational process which can be efficiently determined by an inspection process. The inspection process is present in current pedagogical science and in pedagogical practice which deserves increased attention of all participants in the educational process.
Methods: The study is based on a theoretical analysis of the presented issues and on a research. The findings were analysed, compared, and conclusions were drawn for school practice. We used the following research methods:
  - content analysis of the existing literature;
  - the quantitative method of gathering data by the medium of a twelve-item questionnaire containing four closed and eight semi-open questions. The questionnaire contained data necessary to process and evaluate the questionnaire, these were inserted as the last question;
  - statistical data processing methods.
Results: New times bring a new style of management and a new understanding of the inspecting activity, which creates a partnership between the student and the teacher. It is to promote mutual understanding between them, based on the principles of democracy. Innovations in the educational practice also affect the realization of inspecting activities. The aim of managers, as well as inspectors, is to promote inspections not only as a tool for evaluating the teaching process but also as methodological help for teachers. The goal of our research was to map the state of the inspecting activity in selected high schools and to find out about the changes in teachers' opinions on inspecting activities over the twenty-year horizon. We cannot generalize our findings for schools of all kinds as only 88 respondents (44 respondents participated in the 1998 research and 44 respondents in the 2017 research) took part in our research.
Discussion: Managing the educational process and taking the responsibility for its quality are among the basic duties of the school

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management and in the conditions of the Slovak Republic, as it follows from Act no. 596/2003 on state administration in education and school self-government as last amended. Supervising school leadership is one of the fundamental means of feedback that allows the study of the level of educational and training results, the fulfillment of the conceptual development of school, and the fulfillment of the tasks in the short-term school plan. The objective of the principal of the school is to obtain objective information about the level and the outcomes of the educational work of the school and, if deficiencies are identified, it is his/her duty to eliminate them. The most important task of the school is to implement the School Educational Program in line with the State Educational Program (SEP), which should take into account the needs of students, the interests of students and their parents, and contribute to improving the processes going on in the school, especially in the educational process. The research revealed that inspections conducted by school managers (the principal, deputies, administrators) are the most beneficial for the work of teachers. This fact was caused by the effort of the school managers to view inspections as a means of personal growth of teachers and not only as a controlling mechanism of teachers' work. This was also confirmed by the research showing that inspections by the members of school management are now clearly focused on emphasizing the positive aspect of teachers' work. This was caused by a shift in the inspectors' perception of the inspecting activities in the period of twenty years - they use them as a teacher-oriented tool.

Limitations: The number of participants in the research sample was one of the methodological limitations of this research. We cannot consider this number to be representative for the purpose of generalizing the results.

Conclusion: In this study, we realized a mutual comparison of attitudes and opinions of teachers regarding inspecting activities. This comparative study, taking into account the twenty-year time span, has shown that the inspectors (school managers) have acquired such methods of evaluating their teachers, which objectively refer of their actual performance, that the most beneficial inspections for teachers' own pedagogical work are the inspections conducted by the members of the school management, that the adherence to pedagogical ethics by the inspectors has an increasing tendency, and that formalism, as well as the subjective evaluation of teacher's work, have a downward tendency and have disappeared from the conclusions of inspections. Based on the research results, it can be concluded that, in the course of two decades, significant changes have taken place in the realization of inspections, both on the part of the inspectors and on the part of the teachers and their perception of inspections.

Key words: educational process, school management, inspection, quality of the educational process.

ARTICLES

Virtuality and Development

Philosophical, Aesthetic, Psychological and Pedagogical Aspects

*Imre Bús**

Abstract:
Introduction: Computers and the applications of today's high technology can simulate reality so realistically that virtuality has become part of both children's and adults' lifestyles (Nagy & Kölcsey, 2017; Szécsi, 2012). However, it did not emerge with the computer applications, but with human thinking and part of that, the virtual conception of the world. In addition to social changes this development can be observed on individuals as well.
Purpose: This study shows the development of virtuality through the examples of cultural, philosophical, aesthetic, then the psychological and pedagogical development of the individual with the help of some important studies.
Methods: This study presents the social and individual development of virtuality throughout theoretical analysis of the research results.
Conclusion: Virtuality has already an important role in the technological and economic sphere and its impact on social innovations, individual and social life can be felt as well. Virtuality-research, its application and improvement contribute to experience a more complete reality and to the improvement of human life quality.

Key words: virtuality, cognitive development, play, pedagogical 'as if'.

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The Role of Resilience in Coping with Negative Parental Behaviour

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Abstract:
Introduction: Negative parental behaviour is among the significant risk factors that can have a negative impact on an individual's development. In certain contexts, when appropriate protective factors are available, individuals deal with adversity better and it does not come to a decrease in their social performance nor their achievement in various spheres of life.
Purpose: The purpose of the presented paper is to provide a literature review on the role of resilience in dealing with harsh circumstances when negative parental behaviour occurs in a family.
Methods: In the study, the traditional desk research method was used to gather data.
Conclusions: Exposure to negative parental behaviour – including abuse and neglect, as well as domestic violence, can have detrimental consequences for children's health and welfare. Under such circumstances, protective factors available to children play a significant role. Exposure to negative parental behaviour, including abuse and neglect, as well as domestic violence, can have detrimental consequences for children's health and welfare. Under such circumstances, protective factors available to children play a significant role. If a family fails to protect a child or even represents a risk factor in the child's life, the importance of other social institutions, such as schools, church, peer groups, etc., increases, as both internal and external protective factors are important. They can provide children at risk with support, help them develop own coping strategies and foster their resilience in order to overcome significant adversity in their families without serious harm. An individual's resilience is a decisive factor in the process of dealing with threatening situations.

Key words: family, parenting style, parental behaviour, resilience.

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